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### From a weak state to a "rogue" state: the emergence and phases of state decay in Afghanistan (1978-2001)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of illustrations	vi
Abstract	vii
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK.....	1
Realism, Neo-Realism: State Centrality but What State? .....	7
National Interest Trumps Domestic Politics .....	9
Realism’s Enduring Principles: State Survival and External Threats....	12
Means to Ensure Survival, Domestic Concerns Only Secondary.....	14
The Prevalence of Conflict and State Vigilance.....	16
State Behavior Central, but Domestically Viable? .....	18
The Afghan Imbroglia and State Centrality.....	20
-Identity and Legitimacy.....	21
-Societal Tension.....	23
Conclusion.....	24
Chapter 2. THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING VIABLE STATES IN FRAGMENTED SOCIETIES.....	26
Introduction.....	26
Mobilization and Social Control.....	27
State Capacity and Crises.....	30
State-Society Relations: Fragmentation of Authority.....	32
-Environments of Conflict and Authority to Make Rules.....	33
-Web-Like Societies and Social Structure.....	35
Fragmentation of Social Control.....	37
National Identity and State Formation.....	39
Inherent Constraints to State Building .....	42
-Cultural and Religious .....	42
-Ideological and Structural.....	44
-Transnational.....	46
Conclusion.....	47

Chapter 3. SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF STATE FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN.....50

Introduction .....50  
The Origins of the Nation-State Model in Afghanistan.....53

- Modernization Drive and Societal Backlash..... 53
- The Era of Relative Peace and Stability..... 55
- Gradual Reforms through Accommodation..... 56

Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1978-1992): Redefining State-Society Relations..... 58

- The State Asserts Itself ..... 59
- Consolidation of Power through “Revolutionary” Reforms.....63
- State Attempts to Dominate Falter.....65
- Regime Fights for Survival .....69
- Regime Weakness Intensifies Ethnic Fragmentation.....71

Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-1996): Factionalism and Infighting.....72

- Political Chaos and Ethnic Fragmentation.....73
- Localization of Power and Warlordism.....75

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001): Brutal Force and Religious Totalitarianism .....77

- Pashtun Chauvinism and Religion as Political Legitimator..... 77
- Brutal Force and Negligible Governance..... 79
- Politics of Ethnicity and Misrule..... 81

Conclusion.....83

Chapter 4. THE SEVERITY OF STATE FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE REALIST THEORY ..... 88

Introduction..... 88  
Implications of State Fragility for Global Security..... 90  
Unique Challenges and State Weakness..... 91  
Delivery of Political Goods and State Performance..... 92  
Key Indicators of State Failure..... 94  
From Failure to Collapse..... 97  
Collapsed State or Law of the Jungle..... 101

Human Agency and State Failure.....	105
Conclusion.....	106
Prospects for Building a Viable State in Afghanistan.....	113
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 118

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Table 1: Foreign Policy Magazine's Indicators for State Failure...103
2. Table 2: Rotberg's State Decay and Manifestation of State Failure in Afghanistan..... 104

## **ABSTRACT**

After a decade of significant military and financial assistance by the international community to create a viable state in Afghanistan, serious questions have been raised about the Afghan state's viability and whether it remains vulnerable to collapse after the withdrawal of foreign forces. State collapse, however, runs contrary to the Realist theory's conception of states as unitary actors in international relations. Despite the theory's primary focus on states and their security, it neglects to provide an explanation of the state type or acknowledge the presence of "failed" states and their impact on international relations. To explore this paradox, this thesis takes a historical look into the emergence of state decay in Afghanistan by using Rotberg's and Foreign Policy Magazine's indicators for state failure.

Realism's focus on the state's outward behavior largely ignores the state's origins and composition. While the theory's emphasis on state centrality may be sufficient in explaining state behavior in homogenous, stable, and developed nations, it's not adequate in delineating the behavior of fragile states. The formation of a legitimate state presupposes that citizens regard the state to serve as the ultimate political authority. The failure of the Afghan state, however, illustrates that upending a highly delicate balance of power between a weak state and a highly fragmented society can intensify the struggle for social control, lead to conflict and ultimately threaten the integrity of the state. This underscores the argument that not all states are deeply rooted in the social, cultural and political identity of the nation or enjoy the same level of legitimacy, a key ingredient for establishing a viable state. International efforts to mitigate security threats by helping

resurrect failed states are likely to face significant hurdles as long as core issues such as the struggle for social control remain unaddressed. Thus, the Afghan state is likely to remain fragile and embody a system of government that's based more on kinship and patronage befitting a tribal society rather than a rational-legal system based on the Weberian nation-state model.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of state building has become the means by which the international community has attempted to tackle state fragility in various corners of the globe. The ideal-type referred to when attempting to do this – both in theory and in practice – has been that of the traditional nation-state model put forward by Max Weber. The motivation behind the international community’s efforts to help bolster fragile states is in large part based on the belief that functioning states, among other benefits, won’t pose global security challenges to the rest of the world. This thinking seems to have formed the basis for the global community’s multifaceted effort to help bolster the Afghan state.<sup>1</sup> However, after more than a decade of international efforts aimed at creating a strong centralized state capable of protecting its territorial integrity and providing its citizens with basic services, the Afghan state is still regarded as fragile.<sup>2</sup> The planned departure of International forces from Afghanistan in 2014 has prompted many to question the durability of the current state and whether it remains vulnerable to collapse.

A historical review reveals that for much of its modern history, the Afghan state has suffered from ethnic fragmentation and varying degrees of conflict and instability due in large part to divisions between modernizers and traditionalists. These divisions became more evident in the summer of 1928, when the Afghan King Amanullah emulating Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, attempted to introduce modernizing reforms that included the establishment of a Western-style constitutional monarchy, strengthening the nation-state model, and the abolition of the veil. Most of King Amanullah’s proposed reforms were rejected by the clergy and the tribes,

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History* (London ; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 202-203

<sup>2</sup> Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*, 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 685.



plunging Afghanistan into a political crisis. An insurrection spearheaded by the Shinwari tribesmen followed, resulting in burning down the King's palace and forcing him into exile.<sup>3</sup>

The Afghan state during the subsequent four decades, however, remained largely peaceful as it pursued a policy of accommodation with its highly conservative and tribal society by maintaining a delicate balance of power. Nevertheless, the 1978 coup by the Soviet-backed Afghan modernizers upended this delicate balance of power and set off a chain of events that led to a fundamental shift in the nature of the Afghan state, transforming it from a historically weak state to one that's been described as failing, failed or even rogue. Rubin describes the 1978 to 2001 period as a time when Communism and Islamism had much in common, not because they were both extremisms but because both were radical responses by elites trained for a world they could not join. He adds, "The administrative structure of the Afghan state from 1879 to 1978 represented the balance of power within and around Afghanistan."<sup>4</sup> Saikal asserts that the Afghan communist rulers' inability to incorporate moderate Islam into a culturally relevant ideology of state building and modernization, helped raise sharp tensions between modernizers and religious traditionalists in the 1980s intensifying state fragility.<sup>5</sup> Ewans adds that Afghan elites found their most effective expression as a communist movement whose attacks on religion and attempts at imposition of secularism, prompted Afghan tribes to rebel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 17–19.

<sup>4</sup> Barnett R Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 3–4.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A New History*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 161–177.

Despite the emergence of state decay in 1978, the role of the state during Afghanistan's two decades of conflict varied in exercising political authority, maintaining a monopoly on the use of force, and providing basic public goods.<sup>7 8</sup> While the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1978-1992) provided certain political goods such as education and health care services, and maintained relative monopoly on the use of force in much of the urban areas, its successor, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-1996) suffered from a lack of functioning government institutions, police units, and judiciary.<sup>9</sup> The state's monopoly on the use of force was severely diminished by armed factions who descended the capital city into a state of lawlessness.<sup>10</sup> The subsequent Taliban regime, (1996-2001) while establishing its monopoly on the use of force, presided over a dilapidated government bureaucracy that possessed neither the means nor the capacity to provide much governance. Although, the Taliban government lacked professional governing mechanisms, it successfully utilized the state's security apparatus to enforce its puritanical interpretation of Islam and consolidate its rule through brutal force.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis's main hypothesis is that despite Realism's insistence on state centrality, Afghanistan illustrated rising levels of state decay as socio-political divisions deepened the rift

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<sup>7</sup> Wyler, Liana, "Weak and Failing State: Evolving Security Threats and U.S. Policy" *Congressional Research Service*, August 2008, p. 2-5

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond A. Milen, *Afghanistan: Reconstituting a Collapsed State*, Strategic Studies Institute, April 2005, p. 3-6 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub600.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> "Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001". Afghanistan Justice Project. 2005. <http://www.afghanistanjusticeproject.org/warcrimesandcrimesagainsthumanity19782001.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> "The Taliban's War on Women. A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan". Physicians for Human Rights. 1998. <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/documents/reports/talibans-war-on-women.pdf>

between state and society.<sup>12</sup> I will argue that while Realism provides perceptive analytical insights into the inner-workings of mostly Western state-system, the socio-political fragmentation of Afghanistan from 1978 through 2001 undermines the Realist conception of state centrality with respect to countries outside this model.<sup>13</sup> Realist tradition will serve as the paper's conceptual framework because of the school's emphasis on the centrality of state and its implicit conception that the state as an institution is distinct from society with large and purposive in character.

This thesis will argue that although Realist theory's treatment of the state may have been sufficient in explaining state behavior in homogenous, stable, and developed nations, it's not adequate in delineating the behavior of all states, especially failed states, given the enormous amount of differences among them. It is, therefore, recommended that by taking into account not only international constraints on the state but also domestic challenges, a more comprehensive and integrated approach to the analysis of state behavior will emerge. As Rosenau points out the state is complex and multifaceted in origin, function and in behavior. Like any multidimensional object, the state reveals different sides to different observers, suggesting the state's foreign policy behavior differs from the one implied by a Realist state that seeks "the national interest defined in terms of power."<sup>14</sup> While Realism focuses on the state's outward behavior, in large part it ignores its origins and composition because not all states are deeply rooted in the social,

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<sup>12</sup> Center for Middle East Public Policy (Rand Corporation), *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, And the Way Ahead: Findings from an International conference, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2007*, Conference Proceedings (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 24.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Neack, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in Its Second Generation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1995), 118–119.

cultural and political identity of the nation. This undermines the Realist conception that all states act in a similar manner.<sup>15</sup>

This thesis will focus on the role of domestic constraints such as social structure, social control, and national identity to examine the challenges of building a viable state. State decay in Afghanistan illustrates that political instability varies along a continuum from declining public support for state institutions, to popular uprisings and revolutionary upheaval, posing a direct threat to the integrity of the state as a unit. Domestic weakness and fragility would almost certainly derail state goals on the international arena. Internationally weak states are more constrained than powerful ones to reach their goals through international action.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the foreign policy objectives of fragile or failed states where institutions of the state have crumbled or collapsed differ significantly from powerful states. Failed states are too occupied with domestic challenges to pursue a coherent foreign policy strategy. Thus, their foreign policy objectives are limited in scope. Since such states lack effective institutions and political dominance is claimed by those who can control the symbols of the state irrespective of their ability to administer complex state institutions with complex roles that have effectively ceased to exist, they find it easier to establish their legitimacy in the sphere of foreign policy as much can be done with words alone. For example, Soffar notes that Iraq's foreign policy in the post-Saddam Hussein era was devised as a tool for the creation, rather than a manifestation of sovereignty.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>16</sup> Mastanduno et. al, Toward a Realist Theory of State Action, *International Studies Quarterly*, (1989), 33, 457-474

<sup>17</sup> Bahgat Korany and Alī al-Dīn Hilāl Dessouki, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Arab States* (American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 224.

Research into the Afghan state's history of dilapidation, resulting from social fragmentation and violent conflict will raise pertinent questions about classical and neo-Realism's assumptions regarding the unitary and rational nature of the state. This paper will contrast the fragmentation of the Afghan state to Realism's lack of lucidity on state type, and its failure to take stock of failed states and their impact on international politics. The emergence and effects of failed states on international relations runs counter to Realism's assumption that political differences within the state are ultimately resolved authoritatively, and that the government will speak for the state as a whole because the state is a unitary actor capable of making rational decisions based on preference ranking and value maximization.<sup>18</sup>

This thesis will be segmented into quartiles. The first chapter will expound on a theoretical debate regarding the centrality of state within Realist thought including both classical and neo-Realism. To illustrate some of the inherent constraints responsible for state weakness in Afghanistan, and the state's inability to assert its dominance over society, the second chapter will include a broader discussion of weak states and strong societies with particular focus on state building challenges in the Middle East. This discussion is especially pertinent given the region's social, cultural and religious commonalities with Afghanistan. The third chapter will offer a comparative analysis of state failure under three regimes, spanning from 1978 to 2001, by examining socio-political, security, economic and other relevant factors to assess the degree of governance under each government. This chapter will also provide the main arguments of the thesis. The fourth chapter will employ Robert Rotberg's and Foreign Policy Magazine's social, political, security, and economic indicators for state failure as a guide to assess the emergence and severity of state failure under the rule of the aforementioned three regimes. Lastly, this

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<sup>18</sup> Graham T Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999), 24–25.

chapter will link the paper's conceptual framework to the emergence and severity of state failure in Afghanistan, and assess the prospects for building a viable Afghan state.

### **Realism, Neo-Realism: State-Centrality, but what State?**

Historically, philosophers ranging from Machiavelli to Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Max Weber, and John Stuart Mill have held a variety of views about the state and its functions. However, the model that has emerged as the basis for today's world order is that of the "nation-state" model as championed by Max Weber during the 1918 revolution in Bavaria. Weber understood the state as a human community that claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory, and noted the intimate relationship between the state and violence.<sup>19</sup> A state, according to Max Weber is that agency within society, which possesses the power to regulate the monopoly of legitimate violence. The idea behind this is that in certain "well-ordered" societies, exercising private means of violence is illegitimate, and the central governing authority may be the only party to perpetrate violence.<sup>20</sup> According to Lockhart, Weber articulates a clear and functional view of the state, and describes its basic functions as the legislature, the police, the judiciary, and the various branches of civil and military administration.<sup>21</sup> In such a model state institutions are distinct from civil society, having their own interests, preferences and capacities.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society* (New York, N.Y: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 969.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*. (New York, N.Y: John Wiley and Sons; 2006) ,13.

<sup>21</sup> Ashraf Ghani, *Fixing Failed States: a Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 116–117.

<sup>22</sup> Achim Wennmann, Grasping the Strengths of Fragile States: Aid Effectiveness between 'Top-down' and 'Bottom-up' Statebuilding, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) at the Graduate Institute, Geneva, CCDP Working Paper No. 6, 2010, p. 16, available at: [http://graduateinstitute.ch/webdav/site/ccdp/shared/6305/Working%20paper\\_6\\_BD.pdf](http://graduateinstitute.ch/webdav/site/ccdp/shared/6305/Working%20paper_6_BD.pdf).

Realism as a rich and well-established theoretical perspective in International Relations (IR) dominates the field to a great extent and is often portrayed as the “rational” view of IR against which all other perspectives should be judged. To help us determine the viability and utility of Realism’s assumptions, it would be appropriate to closely examine some of its key assumptions, particularly its emphasis on the centrality of state in international relations.

The theory provides a guide to action based on the guiding principles of Realpolitik in the interests of the preservation of the nation-state. Thus, Realism focuses on states as actors and analyzes international politics in terms of “units” called states. In fact, the theory uses the terms unitary “actors” and “states” interchangeably. During the last several decades, particularly after the Second World War, Realism has emerged as accepted wisdom in IR because of the clear lessons that the conflict appeared to underline.<sup>23</sup> Realists argue the history of world politics has shown that writing treaties or establishing international organizations was less important than the struggle for power and security which was carried out under the motto of every nation-state for itself, underlining the assumption that the pursuit of power and national interest are the major forces driving international politics.<sup>24</sup>

Realists are impenitent about asserting that a state’s primary obligation is to its own citizens, not to a rather abstract international community. Realists do not entirely reject the viability organizations such of the United Nations or the European Union, just as they do not deny that limited forms of cooperation do take place and that international institutions may be of some utility. Nevertheless, international institutions are regarded valuable only to the extent that

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<sup>23</sup> Phillip J. Barrish, *The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*, Cambridge Introductions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), <http://www.aucegypt.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=807180>.

<sup>24</sup> Martin B. Travis, “In Defense of The National Interest. By Hans J. Morgenthau. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951. Pp. 283.),” *The Journal of Politics* 14, no. 01 (December 18, 2009): 147.

they allow states to pursue their own interests.<sup>25</sup> Morgenthau asserts, “The overwhelming majority of states would put the welfare of their own nation above everything else, the interests of a world state included.”<sup>26</sup> He adds that moral principles in the international sphere lack “any concrete meaning” unless given meaning by the concept of a nation-state.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the theory’s fixation with states as the only actors in international relations, Realist theory neglects to elaborate or provide an explanation of the state type. This is particularly pertinent given the growing number of state failures during the past two decades and how this phenomenon impinges on international relations. There have been over a dozen cases of full state collapse in 40 years and 243 partial state failures, conflicts, and crises between 1955 and 1994. Recent state failures have been exemplified by events of the early 1990s in Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia, and Liberia. In these instances the institutions of the central state were so weakened that they could no longer maintain authority or political order beyond parts of the capital city.<sup>28</sup>

### **National Interest Trumps Domestic Politics**

Like Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and Raymond Aron stress the centrality of state and its role as unitary actor. They assert that the state’s national interests supersede domestic politics and societies as well as decision-makers’ beliefs and values. Waltz claims that states are unitary actors who seek to at the least ensure their survival, “They are unitary actors who, at a minimum,

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<sup>25</sup> Barrish, *The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*.

<sup>26</sup> Hans J Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1967), 400.

<sup>27</sup> Hans J Morgenthau, *In the Defense of the National Interest* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 35.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2004), 20.



seek their preservation and, at a maximum drive for universal domination.”<sup>29</sup> He adds that states’ internal and external efforts to seek their aims consist of “increasing economic capability, military strength, and developing clever strategies” as well as “strengthening and enlarging one’s own alliance or weakening an opposing one.”<sup>30</sup> Aron points out that politics, insofar as it concerns relations among states, “seems to signify-in both ideal and objective terms-simply the survival of states confronting the potential threat created by the existence of other states.”<sup>31</sup> Aron also underscores the overarching role of the state by arguing that, “Relations among states, constitute international relations par excellence”<sup>32</sup> and that “the stakes of war are the existence, the creation or the elimination of states.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Keohane et al, there are three central arguments within the Realist tradition, for which the state forms the basis. First, the international system is dominated by sovereign nation-states, each of whom is beholden to no higher authority but itself, underscoring the anarchic nature of international relations. Second, inter-state relations are based on competition though the possibility of cooperation in pursuit of national interest is not excluded. Consequently, the construct of such a system allows for states to behave resolutely in the pursuit

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Series in Political Science (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 118.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, Books That Matter U-640 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.

of power and material-being, delineating classical Realism's primary focus with the sources and uses of national power in international relations.<sup>34</sup>

Realists regard the state to be a distinct entity, having been separated from the society writ large including those claiming to represent it, by a protective shell. Realists refer to "statesmen" as those who represent the nation-state, and who are predominately concerned with monitoring and responding to changes in international system. They consider the state to be distinct from the domestic society because it's regarded as not only being about the government responding to the demands and needs of the society. But rather, realists argue that statesmen or those who represent the state are considered to possess a realm of autonomous behavior.<sup>35</sup> As Morgenthau points out, "They speak for it, negotiate treaties in its name, define its objectives, choose the means of achieving them, and try to maintain, increase and demonstrate power".<sup>36</sup> Morgenthau adds, however, that the ability to project this power abroad hinges in important respects on the deftness of state officials in cultivating public opinion, bolstering government institutions and educating the citizens.<sup>37</sup>

Realists contend that domestic politics play a supplementary role for sustaining the state's goals on the international arena. It is argued that the acquisition of power and wealth would ensure both the state's survival and allow it to pursue other goals within a competitive and anarchic system. Realists are convinced that power can purchase security and other political goods. As Jacob Viner points out, wealth is a necessary means to power and the two are in long-

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<sup>34</sup> Mastanduno et. al, *Toward a Realist Theory of State Action*, *International Studies Quarterly*, (1989), 33 , 457-474

<sup>35</sup> John M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5-15.

<sup>36</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 118.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,

run harmony.<sup>38</sup> Waltz notes, however, that just as for profit firms are free to pursue other objectives to the detriment of profit maximization, states similarly have latitude to pursue other goals to the detriment of their chances for continued existence.<sup>39 40</sup>

Realism posits that the state's primary objective is to conduct foreign policy and it is this task that legitimizes and sets apart state representatives from the society writ large. In pursuit of foreign policy, the state depends on what it can extract from its domestic system, compelling it to pay much attention to strengthening, shaping and developing the country's armed forces and domestic economy. Since Realism assumes that the ultimate objective of the state is survival, more proximity between the international and domestic goals can be deduced. It can be argued that together they constitute the minimal goals of the state, namely, its survival since it must ensure its continued existence prior to pursuing any other objectives.<sup>41</sup>

### **Realism's Enduring Principles: State Survival and External Threats**

Realist assumption about state centrality is not limited to classical Realism but has manifested itself in newer strands of Realism such as neo-Realism. In *Man, the State and War*, Kenneth Waltz, the founder of neo-realism asserts that there is a timeless, competitive structure of anarchy, where "wars occur because there is nothing to prevent them,"<sup>42</sup> The notion of states existing in an anarchic state of nature, a central tenet of Realism, rose from an interpretation of thought experiments in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, which views states as if they were

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<sup>38</sup> Jacob Viner, *International Economics: Studies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951).

<sup>39</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 221, 160.

<sup>41</sup> Waltz, Kenneth, *Theory of International Politics* (McGraw-Hill, 1979), 92-95.

<sup>42</sup> Waltz, Kenneth, *Man, the State and War*, Columbia University Press, 1959, 233-235

individuals in a “mythical state of nature”,<sup>43</sup> in which human beings live in a “state of nature” – or a condition of war of “everyone against everyone.” In this condition of war, there was a “continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”<sup>44</sup> Since there is no international “sovereign,” or Leviathan, and because survival is paramount in this system, all states must conform and will ultimately behave in similar ways, that is, they all behave competitively, and deviation from this imperils the state.<sup>45</sup>

In 1979, Waltz created a new paradigm out of the traditional realist base, coined as Structural Realism or neo-Realism in his book, *Theory of International Politics*. Waltz in this new paradigm calls for a structural interpretation of IR theory. He notes that it’s the structure or the system that serves as the concept that enables it to determine the expected organizational consequences of how the units or states interact with each other within the system.<sup>46</sup> Waltz’s theory posits that the structure is dependent on the state for formation and, once it is formed, the system would indirectly influence the actors and vice-versa creating a self-sustaining structure, successfully delineating the individual functions and attributes of each.<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that agency, the interaction of the units with each other as well as with the system, is what defines the structure. Waltz, in constructing his international theory also evokes the analogy of market mechanisms. He states that the international system has a similar structure to the market in that both systems are created through the actions of self-regarding actors. Waltz regards this as the

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<sup>43</sup> Viotti, Paul R., and Mark V. Kauppi. 2010. *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, and Beyond*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. p. 48-50

<sup>44</sup> Hobbes Thomas. *Leviathan*. Ed. Michael Oakeshott. New York and London: Collier Macmillan. 1974

<sup>45</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-100.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–19.

unintended yet inevitable and spontaneously generated outcome of activities by nation-states concerned primarily with their own survival. States will be concerned; above all else, with securing their survival.<sup>48</sup>

### **Means to Ensure State Survival, Domestic Concerns Only Secondary**

While the survival of the state in the international arena requires the defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation state, domestically Realist theory demands that the state must meet emanating challenges and maintain the support of societal groups and alliances. Realists assume that state officials in their efforts to acquire control over resources co-opt and coerce challengers and reward supporters. They add that state officials seek to maintain their legitimacy which forms the basis for the state to exercise decision making authority because with more legitimacy they'll encounter fewer domestic challenges, and be able to exercise more control over the country's resources.<sup>49</sup>

It has been argued that when security pressures are high, a rational actor will significantly discount the future in order to guard against elimination by stronger rivals. The focus of classical Realism on the probability and not the possibility of conflict provides for a conception of the international system as often having lower security pressures than neo-realists assume. Consequently, classical Realism expects states to often discount the future to a lesser extent than is assumed by Waltzian neo-Realism, which has often been criticized as a theory that is too static.<sup>50</sup> According to Mearsheimer, the founder of offensive Realism, the focus of global security is the state. Mearsheimer underscores this point by suggesting that great powers do not

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen G. Brooks, "Dueling Realisms (Realism in International Relations)," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, no. 3, 1997

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.,

work together to promote world order for its own sake. Instead, each seeks to maximize its own share of power, which is likely to clash with the goal of creating and sustaining stable international order.<sup>51</sup>

Neo-Realism's static nature reflects its worst-case focus in which the global understanding of a rational state will have a very short-term focus.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, the neo-realist theory exhibits some of the same attributes as classic Realism regarding its views of the state. Waltz argues, "The ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security."<sup>53</sup> Waltz recognizes that the pursuit of security and power do not always coincide and makes his view explicit that a rational state will seek power only if the security objective has first been ensured. Mearsheimer, a neo-realist appears to contradict Waltz on this point by asserting that states ultimately "aim to maximize their relative power."<sup>54</sup> Mearsheimer's statement notwithstanding, his own analyses and hypotheses reflect the view that states ultimately pursue security, not power, as Waltz argues.

Mearsheimer focuses on the military basis of power, asserting that states aim "to acquire more military power at the expense of potential rivals."<sup>55</sup> Mearsheimer contends that states above all else seek to maximize their security but, while pursuing this objective, they sometimes will also enhance their power. The pursuit of power and security coincide only under certain conditions, particularly when capturing the economic resources of another state is both the

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<sup>51</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 63–65.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen G. Brooks, "Dueling Realisms (Realism in International Relations)," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, no. 3, 1997

<sup>53</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 12.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

preferred route to security as well as the least costly means of bolstering power.<sup>56</sup> It is imperative, however, to point out that in cases where the pursuit of power and security conflict, Mearsheimer probably would share Waltz's view that states first seek to ensure their military security before they pursue power. In the end, this prioritization of power and security by different strands of Realism may be less pertinent as the paper's focus on state centrality continues to form the common bond between both the classical Realism and the neo-realist schools of thought.

### **The Prevalence of Conflict and State Vigilance**

The aforementioned strands of Realism continue their focus on the state, primarily because they regard states to be self-centered actors that pursue their own interests. They view international relations as inherently competitive, stressing material factors rather than nonmaterial factors, such as institutions and ideas. Mearsheimer calls the international system as a "brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other. The field of international relations is not in a constant state of war, but is a state of relentless security competition."<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Waltz contends that "threats or seeming threats to ... security abound. Preoccupation with identifying dangers and counteracting them become a way of life. Relations remain tense; the actors are usually suspicious and often hostile."<sup>58</sup>

Neo-realists envision the system to be "one of high risk," although "this is meant not in the sense that there's constant war but in the sense that, with each state deciding for itself

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.,12-13.

<sup>57</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 43.

whether or not to use force, war may at any time break out."<sup>59</sup> Waltz adds that "in the absence of a supreme authority, there is then constant possibility that conflicts will be settled by force."<sup>60</sup> It's argued that ultimately what's important is not that conflict is always possible in anarchy, but rather the relative chance that it will occur. Because failing to fully balance the capabilities of potential military aggressors does not necessarily result in conflict but rather seem as a rational approach.

Specifically, within Neo-realism, a rational state shall never let its guards down. The state should instead adopt a worst case outlook and aim to balance the military capabilities of its potential aggressors.<sup>61</sup> For neo-realists, states are conditioned by the mere possibility and not the probability of conflict. Neo-realists' adoption of a worst-case outlook appears to be rooted in a number of reasons. They believe that the potential costs of conflict as causing actors to focus on the mere possibility of conflict. As Mearsheimer points out, "Political competition among states is a much more dangerous business than economic intercourse; it can lead to war, and war often means mass killing on the battlefield and even mass murder of civilians. In extreme cases, war can even lead to the total destruction of the state."<sup>62</sup> Neo-realists add that states will ultimately focus on other states' underlying potential for aggression as measured by material capabilities because "intentions are impossible to divine with one hundred percent certainty," and the possibility always exists that "a state's intentions can be benign one day and malign the next."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 111,102.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>61</sup> Keohane and Martin 1995, 43; and Wendt 1992, 404

<sup>62</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 11.



In the neorealist framework, rational states adopt a worst-case focus since the framework regards this approach to be the only way to make sure states remain alert and are not caught off guard. Neo-realists maintain that rational states will focus on the possibility of conflict because defensive precautions are considered the only true assurance against aggression and conflict and can be forestalled or even prevented by pursuing appropriate defensive preparations. States are thus seen as adopting a worst- case approach because it's presumed that they "do not enjoy even an imperfect guarantee of their own security unless they set out to provide it for themselves."<sup>64</sup> The neo-realist view is that rational states' adoption of a worst-case approach does not necessarily mean that war is always likely. As Waltz points out, "World politics, although not reliably peaceful, falls short of unrelieved chaos."<sup>65</sup> Although neo-realists don't maintain that international relations are in a constant state of war, they nonetheless, underline the central role of the state in both regulating domestic affairs and international relations.

### **State Behavior Central, but Domestically Viable?**

For Realism, the ontological givens in the international system are states, understood as unitary, rational actors that operate in an anarchic setting and strive to enhance their well-being and security. The theory contends that states are constrained only by the external environment, that is, by the power of other states. Despite its almost exclusive focus on state, Realism fails to elaborate or expand on state type. Particularly, it neglects to take into account the presence and impact of failed states on the international system.<sup>66</sup> As the case of Afghanistan illustrates, state failure is not only a domestic aspect but impinges very much on international relations. Realism,

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<sup>64</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 201.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur A. Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate: Circumstance and Choice in International Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1990), 87.

however, discounts domestic socio-political considerations and neglects to account for the presence of failed states and the security threats they pose when considering a state's national security priorities. Rather, the theory centers on the state's national politico-military response to the threats in confronts in an anarchic environment composed of other nation-states.<sup>67</sup>

Realism's treatment of national security as if it were unaffected by domestic constraints or as if it represented an optimal response to external military pressures in the international arena neglects to take stock of the serious security threats posed by failed states. The theory's insistence on ensuring national security through military and economic power alone, fails to appreciate the significance of international efforts aimed at addressing security threats that emanate from failed states. International cooperation aimed at resuscitating the Afghan state in late 2001 underscores the new organizing principle of the contemporary global system.<sup>68</sup> This requires that state-building, and particularly multilateral state-building, be placed at the centre of the global security agenda in the hope that reconstituted states would be less likely to pose security threats to the global system.

As Rubin points out, "The attacks of 11 September 2001 showed that the USA could now be attacked from even the weakest state and hence reignited US nationalists' strategic interest in the periphery. The regime of universal sovereignty, however, requires more powerful states and international organizations to work through the institutions of national states. Post-war operations attempt to transform states, rather than absorbing them into other, more powerful, units."<sup>69</sup> He adds that participant nations in peace building attempt to build acceptable states in

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>68</sup> Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate*, 222.

areas that pose a perceived threat to powerful regional and global actors. The failure of the Afghan state and its troubles were not limited to within Afghanistan's borders but had widespread ramifications for international relations. The failed state of Afghanistan became a point of consensus among international actors in large part because it united characteristics of a "rogue state", of concern to the United States, and a "failed state", of concern to globalist humanitarians.<sup>70</sup>

The Afghan state's failure and its transformation into a haven for international terrorism underline the spillover effect of failed states both regionally and globally. The process of extroverted state formation underlies many changes in the international system, including the shift from interstate to intrastate warfare and the crises of legitimacy and capacity of postcolonial states that have led to the collapse of many states. Afghanistan's rulers while facing many inherent constraints were able to build a weak state with coordinated flows of foreign aid. However, deepening socio-political fragmentation and an end to aid flows plunged the country into civil conflict, ultimately resulting in the collapse of the Afghan state and transforming Afghanistan from a weak state to an international pariah that threatened the global order with considerable impact on international relations.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Afghan Imbroglia and State Centrality**

The severity of state fragility in Afghanistan over two decades will illustrate that contrary to Realism's assumptions about states, not all states share such defining characteristics as the

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<sup>69</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, "Peace Building and State-building in Afghanistan: Constructing Sovereignty for Whose Security?," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 175–185.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

state being a distinct entity and separated from the society writ large by a protective shell.<sup>72</sup> More importantly, fragmented societies such as Afghanistan do not share the same reciprocal relationship with the state as is common in the mostly Western state-system. Although, inherent state weaknesses in Afghanistan illustrate the significance of domestic challenges such as tribal and ethnic identities and the state's legitimacy deficit, Realism discounts the presence of ethno-lingual identities and communities that are formed in fragmented societies. Identity and community in Realist thought are a given because the theory posits that people identify first and foremost with nation-states.

### ***Identity and Legitimacy***

As Chapter III will demonstrate, deepening socio-political fragmentation in Afghanistan made it increasingly difficult for the state to represent a single identity or community or maintain at least a minimal level of legitimacy, hastening its collapse. Realists, however, do not attempt to unpack the processes and practices involved in the building of identity groups and communities, but rather believe in the dominance of identity and community as a given in IR. Thus, for realists the only community of any significance in IR is that of a nation-state because they regard the state to be the best form of political community and beyond the boundaries of the nation-state lies in the realm of international anarchy where "might makes right".<sup>73</sup>

Although, Realists assume that most people see themselves as American, German or French, rather than as members of a greater community or sub-units, the disintegration of the Afghan state demonstrates that ethno-lingual identities such as Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek have played a more dominant role in defining a person's place within his or her community and

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<sup>72</sup> Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, 5–15.

<sup>73</sup> Peter J. Ahrens Dorf, "Thucydides' Realistic Critique of Realism," *Polity* 30, no. 2 (January 1, 1997): 231–265.

the society writ large. Hence, despite several attempts by the Afghan state to destroy local autonomous communities and form a stronger national identity, these communities have successfully resisted abandoning their ethnic or tribal identities in favor of a national identity or embracing the nation-state model. As Shahrani points out, “Emasculated, disarmed and weakened considerably, most of the communities, especially in rural areas, were nonetheless able to reconstitute themselves quickly in the face of deteriorating central government power.”<sup>74</sup>

Maintaining legitimacy is a persistent challenge for all states, especially those with ambiguous or fragmented identities such as Afghanistan that have come into existence with the blessing of external legitimators and not because of their capacity to represent a nation or control a territory.<sup>75</sup> The deepening socio-political fragmentation of Afghanistan led to an ever increasing deficit of state legitimacy, hastening state failure. As Moon asserts, legitimacy challenges vary in degree and kind, “the widely accepted legitimacy of the state in developed nations derives from a number of sources often not available to non-core states: a long tradition of democratic representation and resulting compliance, the material performance of the system, and a low incidence of social instability.”<sup>76</sup> In contrast to mostly Western nations, many developing countries are presented with a serious challenge when the state must play an active role in nation building. As the case of Afghanistan will demonstrate, it’s an intricate task to establish the legitimacy of weak state when the very nation it’s supposed to embody, is suspect itself.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn?: Afghanistan and the Taliban* (London: Hurst & Co, 1998), 232.

<sup>75</sup> Neack, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 193.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 118-119

## *Societal Tensions*

Although, the Realist theory regards domestic political concerns of secondary importance, the case of state failure in Afghanistan elucidates that in countries with an ambiguous identity where there's neither a strong tradition of public service nor a set of historical precedents to guide and limit claims to national interest, state-society tensions can lead to socio-political fragmentation and violence, threatening the integrity of the state. US anthropologist Louis Dupree, years before the emergence of armed conflict in 1979, identified rising tension within Afghan society. According to Dupree the conflict manifested itself between those Afghans that promoted the concept of nation-state and those that desired a more traditional society based on kinship and tribalism. Dupree defines the nation-state as “in the western sense, more a set of attitudes, a reciprocal, functioning set of rights and obligations between the government and the governed – with emphasis on the individual rather than the group”.<sup>78</sup> He writes that “tribalism” occurs “in non-literate societies ... when kinship replaces government and guarantees men and women born into a specific unit a functioning set of social, economic and political rights and obligations”.<sup>79</sup>

Shahrani notes that previous attempts at political reforms in Afghanistan during the twentieth century have not yielded much success in expanding loyalty from clan-based tribal networks into a concept of nationhood. Limited literacy and infrastructure as well as insufficient revenue also curtailed the Afghan state's attempts to broaden its power and control.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, contrary to Realism's assumptions about states as unitary, rational actors that

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<sup>78</sup> Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 659.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>80</sup> Shahrani, Nazif, *Afghanistan: State and Society in Retrospect* in Ewan W. Anderson and Nancy Hatch Dupree (eds), *The Cultural Basis of Afghan Nationalism*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1990, pp. 41–49.

share similar motivations, domestic considerations are likely to compel one state to pursue different goals from those of another state more deeply rooted in indigenous, cultural, political and social ideas.<sup>81</sup>

Deepening socio-political tensions in Afghanistan dispute Realism's emphasis that domestic political differences within the state are ultimately resolved authoritatively because the government can speak with one voice for the state as a whole given the state's unitary and rational nature and its ability to make rational decisions based on preference ranking and value maximization.<sup>82 83 84</sup> Though, Realism's assumptions on state centrality and domestic priorities may be sufficient in delineating state-society relations in mostly Western state-systems, they ignore the difficulties of transposing the Weberian model of nation-state on highly fragmented societies where the struggle for social control is not yet settled, and the state remains vulnerable to disintegration.

## **Conclusion**

Although questions abound, both classical and neo-Realism's treatment of the state have imparted a great deal of influence on international relations. However, the theory's lack of clarity on state type, and its disregard for the presence and impact of failed states such as Afghanistan on international relations risks sacrificing ease of continuity for eloquent capacity. Thus, Realism's delineation of recurring patterns of international behavior through inter-state

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<sup>81</sup> Neack, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 192.

<sup>82</sup> Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 24–25.

<sup>83</sup> Ashraf Ghani, "Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives . M. Nazif Shahrani, Robert L. Canfield," *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 3 (August 1, 1985): 577–578.

<sup>84</sup> Marcia L. Sprules, "The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil War, and the Future of the Region," *Library Journal* 126, no. 20 (December 1, 2001): 150.

relations should not discourage scholars from looking inside nation-states that remain prone to fragility given their impact on international relations. This contrasts with Realism's treatment of the internal characteristics of the state as a given. The case of state failure in Afghanistan and its impact on international relations is a clear repudiation of Waltz's claim that it is not possible to understand world politics by looking inside of states. The emergence of an increasingly interconnected world clearly demonstrates that heightened fragility or disintegration of one nation-state could pose significant security, economic and other threats to the global order.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 64.



## CHAPTER II

### THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING VIABLE STATES IN FRAGMENTED SOCIETIES

“Bazzars are a major social and commercial institution throughout the Mideast.

But it remains my conviction that their time is past...The bazaaris are a fanatic lot, highly resistant to change because their locations afford a lucrative monopoly.

I could not stop building supermarkets. I wanted a modern country. Moving against the bazaars was typical of the political and social risks I had to take in my drive for modernization.” M. Reza Pahlavi, Iran’s former Shah.<sup>86</sup>

#### Introduction

The former Shah of Iran’s words elucidate the difficulties many non-Western nations have faced in strengthening state institutions and modernizing their societies. To gain a better understanding of the challenges facing the state in countries such as Afghanistan, this chapter will focus on state-society relations and their impact on state building. The chapter’s emphasis will be placed on the distribution of social control and its significance for building a viable state in highly tribal, fragmented states. As Migdal points out, “The ineffectiveness of leaders who have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance has stemmed from the nature of the societies they have confronted.”<sup>87</sup>

This discussion will also include theories that provide social, cultural, and transnational explanations for the failure of many weak states to establish viable state institutions. Such states, while stronger, are only one among many organizations that competes for social control. This underscores the point that when society is fragmented, the state will face significant challenges in mobilizing it to support state goals or representing a single national interest. As Ibn Khaldun

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<sup>86</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein & Day, 1980), 156.

<sup>87</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 14.

points out, “A dynasty rarely established itself firmly in the hands with many different tribes and groups.”<sup>88</sup>

### **Mobilization and Social Control**

The backdrop for state aggressiveness has been the special character of the world system during the last half millennium. The state’s ability to survive has depended on a number of factors including its organizational capabilities, the size of its population, its potential material and human capital and its place in the larger international configuration. Understanding the differences in state capabilities requires more than a simple definition of the state as a political organization that forms the basis for government in a given territory.<sup>89</sup> Migdal argues that differences among states have related to variations in certain attributes of “stateness”, forming the driving force behind political leaders’ goals. This has included the state’s desire to maintain its monopoly on the use of force, ensure its own predominance in relation to other social actors in society, and aim for significant differentiation of its components through the use of numerous agencies that take on the specialized, complex tasks of governing the details of people’s lives.<sup>90</sup>

To assume that states in all times and places have had a similar ability or potential to achieve their goals is akin to taking the institution of the nation-state for granted and losing sight of the varying roles that states have played in different societies, a point largely neglected by Realism. As the role of the state was changing during the seventeenth century in Europe, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes made clear distinctions between the state and other components in

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<sup>88</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 14–15.

<sup>89</sup> Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1988), 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

society.<sup>91 92</sup> Hence, political leaders have faced persistent and significant obstacles in their drive to achieve their goals while not many of them have overcome the formidable challenges they faced. The state's ability to neutralize or eliminate opposition against its predominance, encompassing the supply and authorization of the written and unwritten rules meant to dictate daily behavior in society and provide governance has varied markedly. As Migdal asserts, "Some states have gained much more mastery than others in governing, who may heal the sick and who may not; the duration, content, and quality of children's education; numerous specifications of how one may build for oneself, with whom one may or may not have sexual relations; and countless other details of human actions and relationships."<sup>93</sup>

The ability to mobilize the population is of high importance for states as it affords them the opportunity to channel the population into specialized organizational frameworks and strengthen state structures. This allows state leaders to build stronger armies, collect more taxes and pursue the state's other interests. However, state capabilities required for mobilizing the population to solicit support for state goals have varied greatly, particularly if they've faced challenges. As Migdal points out states' ability to mobilize their population has been crucial in marshaling strength for the state.<sup>94</sup> "The foundation of power in the global system is the relationship between state and society. Governments acquire tools of political influence through the mobilization of human and material resources or state action", Kugler and Domke add.<sup>95</sup> Mobilization of the population into disciplined standing armies or into other state institutions

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<sup>91</sup> Center for Middle East Public Policy (Rand Corporation), *Afghanistan*.

<sup>92</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

could grow out of social control, the new ability to have people follow state rules. Mobilizing the population to pay taxes has been of particular importance in creating viable nation-states.

Expanded taxation has been a major contributor to strengthening the capacity of state institutions, particularly the military and judiciary arms of the state.<sup>96</sup> Getting the population to obey the rules of the state rather than the rules of the local powerbrokers such as clan and tribe grew “much less from lofty visions of universal justice and what the society should be than from the need for political leaders to ensure their own survival.”<sup>97</sup> Establishing state social control within society is the key that could unlock the doors to increased capabilities in the international arena, underscoring the different experiences of mostly Western nations from countries such as Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup>

Despite several attempts, the Afghan state failed to compel the majority of its population to obey state rules or pay taxes as social control remained contested among many organizations in its highly fragmented society. The contested nature of social control in Afghanistan served as one of the main reasons for the state’s inability to establish its predominance. It therefore comes as no surprise that the growth of the very first modern nation-state in Europe included the composition of a triad of important state tentacles such as a standing army, a vastly improved tax-collecting mechanism, and an expanded set of judicial errors. In particular, the implementation of the state law in lieu of fragmented customary or feudal law through the extension of the court system was vital in persuading people to behave as state leaders wanted them to behave and not according to the orders of tribal chieftains and local powerbrokers,

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<sup>96</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 22.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 22., 23.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

common in Afghanistan. In European states, the courts and the security apparatus that included policing also played a crucial role in shifting social control to the state. Such mobilization provided the human and material capability to fight for survival among political entities that were competing for domination, leading to political entities of unimaginable strength.<sup>99 100</sup>

### **State Capacity and Crises**

To ensure continuity and survival, the state must be capable of confronting crises. Weak states such as Afghanistan are particularly vulnerable to crises. The challenges facing the state ought to be scattered so that they do not exceed its capabilities. As LaPalombara and Weiner point out, at any one point the government is capable of handling only a limited “load” of problems, demands, and conflicts if the state is to main itself at a particular level of institutionalization, stability and effectiveness.<sup>101</sup>

When challenges confronting the state exceed its capabilities, state’s legitimacy will be easily impaired, necessitating its use of force in order to maintain itself. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in weak states such as Afghanistan when state capabilities are severely limited without much structural support. As the fragmentation of the Afghan state will demonstrate, exceeding state capabilities will lead to increasingly severe negative sanctions, resulting in the use of excessive force and chipping away at state’s legitimacy. This will set the stage for heightened conflict between state and society.<sup>102 103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>100</sup> Rajni Kothari, “State Building in the Third World: Alternative Strategies,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 5/7 (February 1, 1972): 233–244.

<sup>101</sup> Eric Nordlinger, *Politics and Society: Studies in Comparative Political Sociology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 339.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 340.

In contrast to Afghanistan's rudimentary and frail state institutions, institutionalized or strong states can count on their well-established and venerable organizations to weather crises and successfully mobilize their populations to supporting state goals. As Huntington points out, with increasing longevity institutions become more adaptable to successfully face new challenges and display more flexibility in accommodating change. For example, calls for political competition and electoral participation may be met with less resistance if the state is institutionalized or as the case of Afghanistan illustrates, weak institutions are vulnerable to failure when faced with significant socio-political challenges. Nordlinger notes that state institutionalization before facing crises might provide "the political elite with sufficient sense of security for it to accommodate itself to these changes in a peaceful manner."<sup>104</sup>

In contrast, in Afghanistan where incumbents were insecure and state institutions were fragile, any claims for social or political reforms would be adamantly rejected, leading to state repression. The state's alienated posture would hinder future cooperation and result in heightened conflict between state and society.<sup>105</sup> The Afghan state's overly aggressive and repressive posture in the late 1970s and 1980s led to a worsening relationship between the state and society, resulting in a complete breakdown by the early 1990s.<sup>106</sup> This jeopardized any chance of future social or political cooperation among the warring sides and producing over two decades of conflict.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>106</sup> Ashraf Ghani, "Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives. M. Nazif Shahrani, Robert L. Canfield," *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 3 (August 1, 1985): 577–578.

## State-Society Relations: Fragmentation of Authority

As the case of Afghanistan during the communist era will elucidate, not all states that have adopted ambitious goals and sought predominance through the creation of massive state institutions, have yielded similar results.<sup>108</sup> The state in many developing nations has faced strong opposition in effecting intended changes, highlighting the need for a close review of the sources of resistance to the state efforts. The sources of resistance can be explained through Migdal's model that depicts society as a *mélange* of social organizations, rather the dichotomous structure that practically all past models of macro-level change have used, such as center-periphery, or modern traditional. "The image of a *mélange* conveys two facets of the model. First, the groups exercising social control in a society may be heterogeneous both in their form and in the rules they apply. Second, the distributions of social control in the society may be among numerous, fairly autonomous groups rather than concentrated largely in the state"<sup>109</sup>, Migdal asserts. In other words, he suggests that the overall sum of authority may be quite high in society; however, exercising of that authority may be fragmented. This *mélange* depicts the state as only one organization among many. These organizations including states, ethnic groups, the institutions of particular social classes, villages, and any others enforcing rules of the game, have offered individuals the components for survival strategies.<sup>110</sup>

Although in some instances, the state might make and enforce nearly all rules in society as it happens in totalitarian states; it can opt to delegate some of its authority to other

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<sup>107</sup> Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, "Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War / The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State," *The Middle East Journal* 50, no. 3 (January 1, 1996): 427.

<sup>108</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 24.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> Joel Migdal, "Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 40, no. 1 (October 1, 1991): 217.

mechanisms such as the church or the market, as is the case in liberal democratic states.<sup>111</sup> Rules and norms as well as dominant organizations have offered the cues to individuals on how to conduct themselves in order to either maintain or advance their status. In contrast, state and society in Afghanistan have been in conflict and proposed different sets of rules on fundamental questions as to what is proper human behavior and how the society should be constituted.<sup>112 113</sup>

<sup>114</sup> This is a clear indication that that the mélange of social organizations have been marked by environments of conflict, denoting an active struggle for social control among many organizations.

### ***Environments of Conflict and the Authority to Make Rules***

In environments of conflict, individuals must choose between competing components in making their strategies of survival, difficult choices for people who face the possibility of competing sanctions.<sup>115</sup> For example, the Afghan state in the 1980s and 1990s succumbed to becoming a part of an environment of conflict that was dominated by tribal chiefs, warlords and strongmen. This predicament has not been limited to Afghanistan but has also affected other developing nations. A Senegalese minister depicts the conflict among organizations with different rules of the game in the following manner: “The clan is a Sengales evil, which has been with us for long generations, constantly denounced by the party, but always increasing in strength.... in passionate confrontation, occasionally armed struggle, between clans that are not

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<sup>111</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 28–29.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>113</sup> Zahir Tanin and Fred Halliday, “The Communist Regime in Afghanistan 1978-1992: Institutions and Conflicts,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 8 (December 31, 1998): 1357–1380.

<sup>114</sup> Nazif Shahrani, “Afghanistan Can Learn From Its Past,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)* (October 14, 2001): WK13.

<sup>115</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 28–29.



sanctioned by the state and operate under rules that are different from those put forward by the state.<sup>116</sup> In many weak states such as Senegal and Afghanistan, political leaders have not achieved predominance for their states through the ability “to fashion rules and to have those rules broadly accepted, but these state leaders have accepted the foal that they should be predominant.”<sup>117</sup> In Afghanistan, the Soviet-backed state’s struggle with society, among other things, was with families over the rules of education and socialization, and with religious groups over who sanctifies sexual unions or with ethnic groups over questions of authority and territoriality.<sup>118 119</sup>

As Mustafa Kemal Attaturk’s confrontation with the religious establishment over banning of traditional Turkish hats suggests, the issue was not as inconsequential as it might first appear. The conflict was over who had the right and the ability to make rules in society. The model of society as a *mélange* places such issues in the context of an existing environment of conflict. More importantly, such examples suggest that perhaps because the state’s role in making and enforcing rules about public affairs and certain intimacies of private life is largely taken for granted in Western societies, many social scientists have lost sight of the conflict and struggles in societies with relatively new or conflicted states. Many experts including anthropologists haven’t paid sufficient attention to conflict among organizations offering different rules. The

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>118</sup> Tanin and Halliday, “The Communist Regime in Afghanistan 1978-1992.”

<sup>119</sup> Nazif M. Shahrani, “War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 715–722.

major struggles in conflicted states such as Afghanistan have been over who has the right and ability to make the countless rules that govern and guide people's social behavior.<sup>120</sup>

Non-compliance in such states, however, does not necessarily indicate personal deviance or criminal behavior but rather a more fundamental conflict over which organizations in society, the state or others, ought to make and implement the laws. In essence, these struggles reflect the disagreements over whether the state is able to displace or harness other organizations, families, clans, tribes and other entities that make rules contradicting the wishes and objective of state leaders. Migdal asserts, "In many societies, state officials have simply not gained the rights and ability to make many rules they would like. Families and clans may seek to marry off children at ages quite different from the minimum age of marriage set by state law. Landlords and shopkeepers may seek interest rates for loans at variance with those legislated by the state."<sup>121</sup>

### ***Web-Like Societies and Social Structure***

The struggle over the state's desire for predominance, the accommodations between the state and others, as well as the maneuvers to gain the best possible deal in such an arrangement constitutes the real politics of many weak states including Afghanistan. State leaders' drive for dominance and their quest for uncontested social control have stalled in many countries due to the tenacious and resilient nature of the organizations scattered throughout their societies.<sup>122</sup> Social control is regarded as the currency over which organizations in an environment of conflict battle one another. High levels of social control allows states to mobilize their populations, skimming surpluses effectively from their societies and adding to the strength of the state in

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<sup>120</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 29–31; Shahrani, "War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan."

<sup>121</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 31.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 32; Ji-Hyang Jang, "Weak State, Weak Civil Society: The Politics of State-Society Relations in the Arab World," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 16, no. 1 (June 30, 2009): 81.

facing external threats. Strength of state organizations in conflicted environments such as Afghanistan has been largely dependent on the ability of the state to exercise social control. The more currency the state possesses—that is, compliance, participation and legitimation—available to state leaders, the higher the level of social control to achieve state goals. State’s ability to exercise social control will also allow state personnel to gain autonomy from other social groups in determining their own preferences for what ought to be the rules of the society.<sup>123</sup>

The capacity of the state and in particular its ability to implement social policies and mobilize its public is directly related to the structure of its society as illustrated by Afghanistan. As Migdal points out, “The ineffectiveness of state leaders who have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance has stemmed from the nature of the societies they have confronted, from the resistance posed by chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants, clan leaders, and other strongmen through various social organizations,”<sup>124</sup>

More importantly, there can be no understanding of the capabilities of weak states without first understanding their social structure. In such countries the state has faced the greatest obstacles in its drive for predominance because there is a prevalence of a social environment in which many structures conflict with one another over how social life should be ordered. Nevertheless, while the state may still constitute the most prominent organization; its leaders have failed to establish its predominance, enabling it to govern the details of most of its citizens’ lives in the society.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 32; Shahrani, “Afghanistan Can Learn From Its Past.”; Shahrani, “War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan.”

<sup>124</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 33.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–34.

In fragmented societies such as Afghanistan, the strength of shared memories and beliefs within various subunits such as clans, tribes, linguistic and ethnic groups suggest an image for societies in some developing countries that is different from the centralized structures found in European countries.<sup>126</sup> As Migdal notes, “Numerous Third World societies have been as resilient as the intricate spiders’ web; one could snip a corner of the web away and the rest of the web would swing majestically between the branches, just as one could snip centre strands and have the web continue to exist.”

The difficulties state leaders have faced in some developing nations to achieve social control relates to the state’s place in the web-like societies as they host a mélange of fairly autonomous social organizations reflecting the fractionalization between less developed nations and elsewhere.<sup>127</sup> According to Salame, the concept of modern nation-state opposes other structures such as tribalism, adding to the difficult interplay between state and a tribal society during the different phases of state formation.<sup>128</sup>

### **Fragmentation of Social Control**

A key element of society’s strength is centered on the distribution and centralization of social control. Weak states have generally differed from other states not so much in the amount of social control in the society but its distribution and centralization.<sup>129</sup> Migdal regards the highly centralized and the more diffused as “strong” type of societies because the overall level of social control is high. He states, “They differ because in one the pyramidal structure of society

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<sup>126</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 37.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>128</sup> Phillip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). 331-335

<sup>129</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 34.

concentrates social control at the apex of the pyramid, in the state, while the other social control is spread through various fairly autonomous social organizations.” He argues that both types differ from “weak” societies where the overall level of social control is low as the latter have appeared “in the wake of cataclysmic events”. Since natural disasters and wars greatly decrease the overall level of social control in the society by taking away rewards and sanctions from the hands of social organizations’ leaders or by making irrelevant the strategies of survival they offer.<sup>130</sup> Lee adds, “The assumption of increasing roles and activities by the peripheral state makes it increasingly the prime target of expectations and demands by popular classes directed towards the state.”<sup>131</sup>

In Afghanistan where social control is highly fragmented, the society’s influence on the state is more visible. Afghan leaders have historically had a very limited reservoir of structural support because a significant level of social control remained with tribal and ethnic leaders; state leaders have found it difficult to check the centrifugal forces that grow as a select few agencies might flourish.<sup>132</sup> As Migdal points out, “In countries where a very few agencies have an oligopoly on mobilizational capabilities, the position of state leaders may be precarious indeed. Thus, as long as strongmen continue to offer viable strategies for survival to those of their villages, ethnic groups, urban neighborhoods, and so on, states can marshal only limited public support since there is little motivation for the population to lend such support.”<sup>133</sup> It is worth

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>131</sup> Su-hun Yi, *State-building in the Contemporary Third World*, IFES Third World Series no. 2 (Boulder : Seoul: Westview Press ; Kyungnam University Press, 1988), 165.

<sup>132</sup> Shahrani, “War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan.”; Barnett R. Rubin, “Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 1, 1997): 155–157. ; Mary Mueller, “Afghanistan: State of the Taliban,” *School Library Journal* 48, no. 4 (April 1, 2002): 80.

<sup>133</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 210.

noting that in addition to the presence of tribal leaders and strongmen, the Afghan state's main difficulty has been overcoming or displacing the pattern of fragmented social control that operates with different rules of the game.<sup>134</sup>

Migdal cautions, however, that strong societies such as those found in Afghanistan are “not putty to be modeled by states with sufficient technical resources, managerial abilities and committed personnel.” He adds, “Although the set of organizations ranging from small kinship groups to large tribes and ethnic groups are thought as anachronistic as the hand plow, it has often not simply disintegrated under the impact of state policies or even in the wake of increased urbanization and urbanization. The tenacity of these groups and their strongmen leaders can enrage determined state official.”<sup>135</sup>

### **National Identity and State Formation**

To maximize the probabilities of developing a political system in a non-violent, non-authoritarian form, strengthen the state and achieve stability in historically fragmented societies such as Afghanistan, a certain sense of national identity should precede the institutionalization of the state. As Nordlinger points out when a state is confronted with conflicts, the best way to ensure its survival and avoid violent conflict with societal groups is to have institutionalized a firmly structured, effective and powerful government.<sup>136</sup> Such a government, however, could find itself in a much stronger position to achieve state goals after questions surrounding national identity have been addressed. Nordlinger claims, “Without a subjective identification with the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 40.; Kothari, “State Building in the Third World.”; Gretchen Peters, “As Afghanistan’s Civil War Drags on, Few See End in Sight,” *Associated Press* (September 4, 1997).; Kathy Gannon, “Ethnic Strife Rips Fabric of Afghanistan -- Muslim Factions in the Civil War Pit Neighbor against Neighbor,” *Seattle Times* (October 28, 1998): A.17.

<sup>135</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 35.

<sup>136</sup> Nordlinger, *Politics and Society*, 334.

regime on the part of the political actors, not only will the government have difficulty in applying its decisions, and thus maintaining its authority, but all types of change will remain in abeyance until a national identity is formed.”<sup>137</sup>

This is particularly relevant to Afghanistan where the strength of communal loyalties and ethnic factionalism prevented the consolidation of a national identity before the formation of a central government. The lack of a strong national identity has prevented many Afghans to feel uneasy about being ruled by men of other tribes or ethnicities as their submission would not only signal their vulnerability to oppression but also degradation.<sup>138</sup> The dilapidation of the Afghan state illustrates that the absence of a strong national identity before institutionalization could severely weaken the state and exacerbate resentment toward incumbent groups, deepening the divide between state and society. As Nordlinger asserts, “The government acts by itself and for itself..., government becomes the highroad for personal advancement and the furtherance of narrowly conceived group interests and in this sense government may be characterized as parasitic and corrupting.”<sup>139</sup>

A rapidly created national identity in divided societies, however, will not act as an integrative force, and would at best serve as a “thin veneer” covering the cracks in “the cultural plaster.”<sup>140</sup> Feelings of oppression and degradation can only be compounded during the process of institutionalization since the process will underscore the presence and predominance of the

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., By Edward Girardet Special to The Christian Science Monitor, “Afghan Coalition Seems Remote,” *Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current File)* (April 19, 1988): 7.; David Hunter, “Afghan Reality,” *The Globe and Mail* (February 24, 1989): A.6.; Greg Myre, “Afghanistan Still Bleeds, but Now It’s a Civil War The Forgotten War,” *The Spectator* (January 6, 1995): A.9.; Rubin, “Afghanistan.”

<sup>139</sup> Nordlinger, *Politics and Society*, 333–334.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 337.

incumbents as perceived by rival communities. According to Nordlinger, the more common sequence is either the emergence of national identity after the central government has been institutionalized or the simultaneous development of both the central government and national identity. Given its significant importance, a national identity should be formed as soon as possible once a government has been created so that it could alleviate the strains and conflicts that hinder the peaceful development of a non-authoritarian and democratic government.<sup>141</sup>

Although in the 1960s national integration as related to nation-building strategies was considered to be the prevailing issue for many countries in the Middle East, including Afghanistan, recent events have prompted many scholars to reexamine the causes for the disintegration or inherent weaknesses of the existing nation-states in non-Western countries. Salame argues that urban elites in the Arab world have not been successful to cope with the developments of the post-Ottoman era, and have thereby unwittingly set the stage for the ascendance of tribal and rural groups to power: “While most parts of the urban body politic have lost ground...some rural groups, hitherto denied political participation, have been able to intrude into the modern state and to step up in the social hierarchy and also to enforce their political positions. Finally, they were able to capture the state.” He adds, “The armies have been the swords in the hand of the rural population ...Rural elements gradually became urban and reversely the state power became rural. The development of the modern state and its institutions were overladen with the henceforth emerging asabiyyas.”<sup>142 143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>142</sup> Phillip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 128–129.

<sup>143</sup> Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and The New World Disorder*, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 9 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 128.



The feature that characterizes the discourse in the Middle East, according to Salame, is that many countries' leaders are imprisoned in their ideology of the modern nation-state, compelling them to obscure their origin.<sup>144</sup>

## **Inherent Constraints to State-Building**

### *Cultural and Religious*

Afghanistan as a Muslim, culturally diverse, and tribal nation has to a certain extent faced similar challenges as many other Middle Eastern countries in building state capacities. It is therefore pertinent to examine some of the factors that have inhibited the building of viable states in much of the Middle East compared to mostly Western nations. According to Ayubi, there are several interconnected factors that drastically limit the Arab state's capacity for social control. The first pertains to vested interests against political or economic liberalization. The second consists of cultural dispositions favorable to authoritarianism. And the third involves inhibitions against reforms liable to fuel uncontrollable and self-augmenting demands for redistribution. It's noted that culture reflects much more than economics and is difficult to change by considering cultural barriers to economic liberalization in a state.<sup>145</sup>

The main hurdle to economic liberalization, Ayubi suggests, is the long-standing weakness of private property rights. In much of the Arab world, private property never developed the legitimacy that it acquired in the West, partly because successive rulers reallocated agricultural estates to prevent the emergence of hereditary landed class and partly because wealth and status were traditionally derived from closeness to political power rather than from economic productivity. Hence, one of the initial reforms proposed by the Soviet-backed regime in

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>145</sup> Nazih N. M. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 29.

Afghanistan was the redistribution of land that was meant to weaken the landed elites and tribal structures. Additionally, the main obstacle to political liberalization is the dominant approach to liberty in traditional Islamic thought. Historically, Ayubi explains, liberty has carried mainly a “psychological and metaphysical” meaning in Islamic discourse, rather than a “political and social” one as is common in Western societies.<sup>146</sup> This point is probably epitomized by the puritanical rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan discussed in the following chapter. The consequence of such cultural legacies is the prevailing historical weakness of the demand for political and economic liberties in some Middle Eastern countries. Ayubi claims that in every known society, individuals cry foul when their own property is confiscated, and they resent state controls on their personal economic activities. However, such individuals are generally less inclined to vigorously demand a liberal order based on free enterprise, limited government, and the rule of law.<sup>147</sup>

Both Pan-Arab and Islamist movements have undervalued the issue of the state and have tended to regard matters of borders, populations, rights and other as rather artificial or superficial details, weakening the concept of nation-state predominantly non-Western societies.<sup>148</sup> As the Taliban rule in Afghanistan demonstrates, while the regime used the state’s security apparatus to enforce its own version of religious morals by creating a ministry for promotion of virtue and prevention of vice, it did not bother with other aspects of what constitutes a state such as governance.<sup>149</sup> As Ayubi points out, “Islamic thinkers were in no hurry to espouse this new

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 24–29.

<sup>147</sup> Archie Brown, “Weak Society, Weak State,” *The Review of Politics* 63, no. 3 (July 1, 2001): 583–585.; Jang, “Weak State, Weak Civil Society.”

<sup>148</sup> Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 21.

concept of the state and Afghani and Abduh were still speaking of the Islamic Ummah or nation, its tight bond and of the Islamic ruler and his good conduct.”<sup>150</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi suggests that an Islamic league can serve as a bond among Muslims. He uses the term Ummah not only as a religious connotation but also as an ethnic one, al-watan or homeland is used when discussing the bonds that unite the Muslim and non-Muslim populations of the Middle East. While states the Middle East have been concerned since the nineteenth century with the manifestations of power, they seem to have paid little attention to its social, economic and intellectual foundations within the state.<sup>151</sup>

### ***Ideological and Structural***

More importantly, though non-Western countries were quick to embrace and adopt the structural features of the state and bureaucracy, they were rather sluggish in internalizing the concept of the state itself. According to Ayubi, the Arab state has been slow to embrace “the ethics of the public service and the attitudes of collective action, nor were they impressed by the concept of freedom, a concept Western scholars link closely to the development of the modern nation-state.”<sup>152</sup> Al-Arawi contends that the state in the Middle East is all body and muscle but with little spirit and mind and with no theory of liberty while Laroui adds that the Arab state is “obsessed with power and strength” and though it may be strong in terms of its “body”, its violence is an indication of its fragility because as a whole the state lacks rationality and the necessary moral and ideological support.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Jason Straziuso, “New Taliban Rules Target Teachers,” *Orlando Sentinel* (December 10, 2006): A.14.

<sup>150</sup> Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 22.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

The root causes of this phenomenon can be mainly attributed to the fact that the Arab state has not been associated during its emergence and development with the notion of liberty in its Western sense. According to Laroui, “Liberty in Islamic thought has a psychological/methaphysical meaning whereas in Western thought it carries mainly a political and social meaning. Western liberal thought links the concept of liberty to the concept of law and therefore to the state, the signs and symbols of freedom in Islamic society are usually extra-statal or anti-statal, e.g. nomadism, tribalism, Sufism.”<sup>154</sup> He adds that there is “mutual exclusivity between the concept of liberty and the concept of the state in traditional Arabo-Islamic society; the more extended the concept of the state, the narrower the scope for freedom.”<sup>155</sup>

Ayubi goes on to argue that tribalism in the Middle East became “politically consolidated and consecrated and in some cases invented after the Islamic conquest of new lands, due to the way the troops were recruited, housed and remunerated via the donations register established by Umar ibn al-Khattab.”<sup>156</sup> He stresses, however, that for a long time the tribe has represented an alternative to the modern state and that it would be mistaken to define the tribe by only its opposition to the state since some tribes may be indeed “interested” in the state allowing for “political tribalism” to exist. This is illustrated by the delicate balance of power manifested through accommodation between the Afghan state and its tribes preceding the 1978 revolution.

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<sup>153</sup> Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 22-23.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Nevertheless, as the Afghan conflict from 1978 to 2001 has elucidated any such collaboration between the state and the tribes very much depends on the specific historical conjunctures.<sup>157</sup>

### ***Transnational***

Transnational political and economic forces have also affected state building efforts in many developing countries during the second half of the twentieth century. The state in capitalist societies is dependent upon private accumulation whereas in peripheral societies, the state is dependent additionally upon transnational political and economic forces such as geopolitical concerns.<sup>158</sup> The creation of the Afghan state to serve as a buffer by the British colonial power and the state's continued reliance upon the financial and material support of world powers to remain relatively functional is a clear example of this phenomenon. As Lee asserts, "The simple historical fact that nearly all peripheral societies today have a colonial past is most telling of the points made. As these areas were incorporated in to the expanding capitalist world economy, the colonial states were created as mechanisms that operated to impose capitalist relationships and imperial controls originating from the core of the world economy.

Certainly, individual peripheral states differed from one another in their experience with colonialism. At issue is the impact of world capitalism on the state in the periphery as this influence did not wither away during periods of decolonization.<sup>159</sup> The peripheral state could not disengage from prior transnational linkages in the post-colonial era since in countries such as Afghanistan where the state apparatus was implanted, geopolitical concerns played a critical role.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 51.; Jang, "Weak State, Weak Civil Society."; Ghani, "Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan."; Ahady, "Afghanistan."

<sup>158</sup> Yi, *State-building in the Contemporary Third World*, 20.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 21.

Lee's findings suggest that except in a few isolated instances, transnational factors pose significant determinants of the expansion of the relative power of the nation-state in relation to the society. He asserts, "The degree to which a peripheral economy is open to the capitalist world-economy through trade of commodities and the competitive linkage of a peripheral state to the inter-state system were each found to the principle of and significant determinant of both the peripheral state's extractive capacity and its military activities."<sup>160</sup>

Lee's findings also suggest that some peripheral states during recent decades have bolstered their relative power in relation to their societies mainly due to their structural relations with the outside world. He adds that the state as the gatekeeper of relations with the outside world has found its locus of power mainly in that role. He concedes, however, that the power of the peripheral state is limited when it concerns dealing with transnational corporations and core states because of the constraints imposed on it by international structures.<sup>161</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The discrepancy in states' ability to achieve social control demands an appreciation of the multitude of different social, cultural, historical and economic challenges that face the state. While there is nothing inexorable about the shift to state predominance in Western nations, as this chapter has demonstrated, the state in many fragmented societies functions as only one organization among many in a *mélange* within the boundaries in which it seeks to rule. As Migdal points out, "In many cases, web-like societies have survived with social control dispersed among various social organizations having their own rules rather than centralized in the state or

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<sup>160</sup> Yi, *State-building in the Contemporary Third World*, 159.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

organizations authorized by the state.”<sup>162</sup> In particular, as Afghanistan illustrates, a prolonged environment of conflict places the state at loggerheads with tribal, ethnic, and other groups in society with each one struggling to establish the currency of social control because leaders regard it to offer them the means for survival.

The continued weakness of many non-Western states despite the resources and agencies at their disposal appears to also lie around the dilemma of state leaders. In the wake of continued fragmentation of social control, leaders pursue politics of survival, preventing state institutions from bolstering their capabilities. These leaders hinder the development of multifaceted organizations within state institutions, mainly because they seek to balance powerful institutions against one another.<sup>163</sup> As the case of Afghanistan and other fragile states clearly elucidates the politics of survival at the apex of weak states has tremendously diminished the coherence of the state and undermined its relationship with society.<sup>164</sup>

It’s important to note, however, that a hard state does not equal a strong state. While one punishes and coerces, the other achieves its goals. Based on Ayubi’s definition, all Arab states as of recently were hard states, and a few, such as Syria and Iraq under Saddam Hussein, used to be ultra-hard or fierce, employing vast bureaucracies, large armies, and harsh prisons. However, these hard states were also weak states as evidenced by their demise in the wake of Arab Spring because they lacked the capacity to enforce laws, break traditional patterns, and adapt to changing conditions. They relied on violence insofar as they could not accomplish their objectives through persuasion and economic incentives.

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<sup>162</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 40.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

Social, cultural, religious and transnational factors have had an enormous influence on the formation and institutionalization of the state in non-Western nations such as Afghanistan. The disparity in the development and capacity of states lends credence to those who contend that while the introduction of the nation-state model has yielded success in some parts of the world; it has exacerbated tensions in fragmented societies like Afghanistan, where both state and society vie for social control. This underscores Ayubi's contention that the concept of "state" has mainly come to the Middle East as an "imported commodity, partly under colonial pressure and partly under the influence of imitation and mimicry."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 21.



**CHAPTER III**  
**SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF STATE**  
**FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN**  
**(1978-2001)**

**Introduction**

This chapter will provide a historical background of the state in Afghanistan to chronicle the struggle between modernizers and traditionalists, and to illustrate dilapidation of the state in the wake of deepening socio-political fragmentation. This chapter will provide a comparative analysis of state decay under different governments from 1978 to 2001 by assessing their ability to provide essential governance such as population security, healthcare and access to education.

Afghanistan's integration into the system of nation-states was in large part essential as it was expected to serve as a buffer state between the British and Russian empires. The state system's formation was accompanied by the creation of contending forces. The Afghan state during the colonial era was intended to block Russian advances toward British India, prompting the British to support the formation of a nation-state system in Afghanistan with a predominance of coercive resources. Although, isolated from the international capitalist market and relatively successful in resisting direct rule by the colonial powers, Afghanistan eventually joined the system of nation-states. The Mohammadzai dynastic centralized state was established during the last two decades of the nineteenth century by Amir Abdul Rahman Khan. The strong Amir initiated a state policy aimed at disarming and militarily overwhelming all existing forms of autonomous communities in order to establish the predominance of state.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn?*, 225.

The Amir was successful in this endeavor, in large part thanks to generous funding by the British. Although, the Amir managed to drastically change the balance of power between autonomous local communities and the state in favor of a more powerful, emergent modern state, attempts to sustain and consolidate this predominance have failed.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, establishing central government control over a tribal, independent-minded, and geographically isolated patchwork of peoples has remained an ongoing project through much of the twentieth century. As Chapter II demonstrated, the mixture of a diverse set of groups in many non-Western states and the contested nature of social control complicates state building efforts. Migdal asserts, “First, the groups exercising social control in a society may be heterogeneous both in their form and in the rules they apply....Second, the distribution of social control in society may be among numerous, fairly autonomous groups rather than concentrated largely in the state. In this *mélange*, the state has been one organization among many.”<sup>3</sup>

In Afghanistan’s tribal society where the population is fragmented and not integrated into a single national society, it’s been extremely difficult for the state to represent a common interest. Given these inherent disadvantages, the Afghan state remained weak and was able to secure its survival and maintain peace largely thanks to preserving a delicate balance of power with its fragmented society between 1931 and 1978. Control of the state apparatus remained largely in the hands of unrepresentative elite.<sup>4</sup> Although tension between a modernizing elite and a traditional rural majority had been, and would continue to be a critical cleavage in Afghan society, it did not lead to violent conflict and the country was continuing its slow trajectory of

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<sup>2</sup> William Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn?*, 227.

<sup>3</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Donini, Norah Niland, and Karin Wermester, *Nation-Building Unraveled?: Aid, Peace and Justice in Afghanistan* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2004), 42–43.

political and economic reforms until late 1970s. Nevertheless, the enormous gulf between Afghanistan's urban elite and its traditional majority led to political upheaval, a series of coups, and the 1979 Soviet intervention.<sup>5 6</sup>

The Soviet intervention and support to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, a new modernizing force in 1979, galvanized a rural resistance movement that morphed into a series of groups known as the Mujahedin or Islamic fighters. The Mujahedin waged a ten year war against the Soviet-backed regime eventually forcing its collapse. The collapse of the regime in 1992 left Afghanistan with an interim government consisting of Mujahedin parties and former government militias. Given Mujahedin groups' longstanding rivalries, exacerbated in large part by ethnic and tribal differences, and their thirst for power led to a deepening of socio-political fragmentation, ultimately paving the way for the disintegration of the state.<sup>7 8</sup>

Although, the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1978-1992) attempted to assert the state's dominance over society and provided some public goods, its successor, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-1996) was embroiled in violent conflict where state authority was severely undermined and challenged by a multitude of armed groups. The capabilities of an already weak state were further diminished as it suffered from a lack of functioning government institutions, police units, and judiciary. The state under the Mujahedin rule was characterized by conflict and a vacuum of authority.<sup>9</sup> The subsequent rise of the puritanical Taliban regime

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio Donini, Norah Niland, and Karin Wermester, *Nation-Building Unraveled?: Aid, Peace and Justice in Afghanistan* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Ghani, "Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan."

<sup>7</sup> William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 283.

<sup>8</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 486–488.

(1996-2001), marked the birth of traditional yet deeply religious state that ran counter to the nation-state model. The Taliban government while establishing its monopoly on the use of force presided over a dilapidated government bureaucracy that possessed little to no means or capacity to provide public goods. Although the state under the Taliban rule lacked professional governing mechanisms and security apparatus, the Taliban consolidated their rule by enforcing strict religious rule and imposing severe punishments on those who opposed them.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Origins of the Nation-State Model in Afghanistan**

### ***Modernization Drive and Societal Backlash***

The modernization of the Afghan state began with the decade-long reign of King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929). Amanullah Khan's long term vision for Afghanistan centered on transforming Afghanistan into a centralized, secular state, gradually reforming its conservative, atomized tribal society. During one of his early speeches in 1919, the king spoke of his intention to create a modern Afghanistan that would take "take its proper place among the civilized powers of the world." He envisioned a unitary state structure with a modern civil service that bypassed the leaders of local tribes. This central bureaucracy would also directly govern the countryside, administer security, justice, taxation, and social programs based on laws passed by a national Afghan parliament and approved by the King as a constitutional monarch. His reforms also included the equality of men and women before the law and removal of women from being subjected to veil restrictions, giving them the right to marry a man of their choice. It was during King Amanullah's reign that Afghanistan gained its independence from Britain in 1919. While

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<sup>9</sup> "Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001". Afghanistan Justice Project. 2005. <http://www.afghanistanjusticeproject.org/warcrimesandcrimesagainsthumanity19782001.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> "The Taliban's War on Women. A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan". Physicians for Human Rights. 1998. <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/documents/reports/talibans-war-on-women.pdf>. ; Sprules, "The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan."; Sara Powell, "The Taliban in Afghanistan," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* XX, no. 9 (December 31, 2001): 96.

brandishing a sword, the King announced during a public gathering: “I have declared myself and my country entirely free, autonomous and independent both internally and externally. My country will hereafter be as independent a state as the other states and powers of the world are. No foreign power will be allowed to have a hairs-breadth of right to interfere internally or externally with the affairs of the Afghanistan, and if any ever does I am ready and prepared to cut its throat with this sword.”<sup>11</sup>

King Amanullah’s reform program included the establishment of a European-style Council of Ministers, and with the help of French and Turkish advisors he prepared Afghanistan’s first constitution enshrining Afghans’ basic rights that included equal status for women. He expanded the national army and undercut the tribal chiefs’ sway over the center by using conscription. King Amanuallah also established a new Ministry of Education that presided over all government schools and opened more secular schools to train the state’s future generation of technocrats. By 1928, to the dismay of many mullahs, the Afghan state had enrolled over 40000 students in government-run schools, and many graduates were receiving scholarships to go abroad for higher education.<sup>12</sup>

While Amanullah’s reforms enjoyed domestic and external support, his reforms modeled upon Ataturk’s reforms in Turkey and aimed at westernization of the population including the removal of veil for women and beard for men, triggered a backlash by the clergy and conservative tribal chiefs across the country eventually leading to his downfall and exile to Rome.<sup>13</sup> This marked a significant backlash by traditional forces against state efforts for predominance in Afghanistan’s contemporary history.

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<sup>11</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

### *The Era of Relative Peace and Stability*

After a brief period of turmoil, Nadir Shah ascended to the throne. Nadir Shah's Musahiban Dynasty ushered in a half century of peace and nation building in Afghanistan. Many historians have termed Nadir Shah's reign as "Era of Tranquility" in contemporary Afghan history. This relative peace was made possible through an accommodation between state and society. The Afghan state and tribal religious power brokers reached an accommodation. While the Musahibans occupied the pinnacle of the triangle, they respected the domain of the tribal and religious leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Beginning in 1929 the dynasty embarked on a nation-building drive unprecedented in Afghan history, lasting forty nine years. Nadir Shah's authoritative character and his emphasis on co-opting rather than confronting the tribal and religious leaders set the tone for a stable Musahiban rule. Moreover, his reputation as a strong military commander and war hero during Afghanistan's War of Independence against the British helped him consolidate his grip on power. Nadir Shah set out with grants from the British to set up a new army and sought loans and technical advice from European nations and Japan to spur economic growth while promoting laissez-faire economics. Exports of Afghan fruits and textiles steadily rose during the 1930s. The regime with Germany's assistance built power-plants that significantly upgraded the supply of electricity to Kabul's homes, business, and government offices. Germany and Italy also provided consulting services to the Afghan state to develop an interlocking system of state-controlled banks, holding companies, and factories based on the Italian model. The central bank of the state invested public and private deposits in both private and state-controlled enterprises.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 81–82.

### ***Gradual Reforms through Accommodation***

More importantly, the Musahiban Dynasty abandoned Amanullah Khan's quest to transform Afghanistan's tribes with an "encapsulation" strategy and opted to engage them through co-opting, mutual respect and communication, essentially accepting the decentralized form of state authority. In return for financial assistance and development projects from the center, tribal leaders were expected to maintain stability. Nadir Shah's new army and air force made steady progress and grew both in size and capability. The regime did not tolerate any disturbances to public peace and warned that the government would not hesitate to suppress, "signs of unrest and rebellion, tending to the disturbance of public peace." The government also made sure the constitution was crafted in a way to make sure the cohabitation of secular civil law administered by civil officials; customary law based on local tribal codes and Pashtunwali, and religious law applied by qazis or judges. These three streams of law were later recognized in the constitution during the reign of Nadir Shah's son, King Zahir Shah, who became king in 1933 following Nadir's Shah's assassination.<sup>15</sup>

During the Musahiban Dynasty, educational initiatives were among the more successful programs sponsored by the US and the West. Over 2000 Afghan students and educators were awarded scholarships to study in the United States, and over one hundred foreign professors taught at Kabul University's campuses. The US Federal Aviation Administration funded a 49 percent stake in Afghanistan's national airline, training its pilots and staff and expanding its fleet. The United States also funded the \$50 million Helmand River project designed to resuscitate the once-fertile lower Helmand River Valley. Foreign aid mostly from the United State and the Soviet Union stimulated expansion of the state and produced new relations between the state and

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<sup>15</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 81.

the society. Zahir Shah, in response to the pressures of the newly educated class, promulgated a new constitution with an elected, consultative parliament in 1964 which produced nearly a decade of constitutional rule known as “New Democracy” under which the government held two elections.<sup>16</sup>

In 1973, however, Zahir Shah was overthrown in a bloodless coup by his cousin Daud Khan who declared Afghanistan a republic. This marked the first time the government of Afghanistan was overthrown by professional army officers as opposed to rural-based tribal uprisings.<sup>17</sup> During Daud Khan’s rule as president, the state benefited from an oil boom. Daud used these funds to continue his state building strategy, making the state more independent of the tribes. According to Rubin, “Between 1956 and 1978, an estimated 3800 Afghan military officers –concentrated in the elite air force and armored corps-had been trained in the Soviet Union, some for as long as six years, while Afghan officers had taken a total of 487 courses in the United States.”<sup>18</sup> The Afghan state’s fiscal position was strengthened by higher revenues from natural gas and from foreign exchange derived from remittances sent back by Afghans working in the Gulf. The Shah of Iran also opened negotiations for extensive economic development with Daud, as part of his grandiose scheme to reconstitute the Persian Empire. Most of this money was meant to build Afghanistan’s first railroad connecting its main cities to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. By 1977, the state’s expanding bureaucracy was funded largely with revenue from sale of natural gas, foreign aid and a smaller portion of tax revenues.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 73.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.



Thanks to gender reforms implemented during the rule of King Zahir Shah and President Daud Khan, by the early 1960s, Kabul University and secular primary schools had become coeducational and by 1978, women were all represented among Afghanistan's teachers. Women also worked side by side with men in government offices and hospitals. The cabinet included women ministers and four women were elected to the parliament. However, for Afghan leftists and modernizers, Afghanistan's gradual, yet steady trajectory toward social and economic progress was not adequate. They decided to stage a coup in 1978 that led to the killing of President Daud Khan and his entire family. The period that followed put an end to decades of relative peace and stability as the new rulers were bent on establishing the state's predominance over society.<sup>20</sup> As Tomsen points out, "The Afghan state had existed in relative peace for a half century before the communist coup."<sup>21</sup> Soviet Intervention in support of the regime lasted well over a decade and continued until 1991 paving the way for Mujahedin rebels to assume power. Mujahedin's rule from 1991 to 1996 was marked by factionalism and infighting giving rise to the Taliban movement that occupied the seat of government in 1996 and held on to power until its ouster in 2001.

### **Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1978-1992): Redefining State-Society Relations**

"In its domestic policy the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan has adopted a program of radical revolutionary socio-economic reforms to the benefit of the working class; these reforms will help abolish any remains of feudalism and semi-feudal social relations; they will provide for the building up of a society free from exploitation, based upon the progressive ideology of the working class and

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<sup>20</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 75.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

scientifically-grounded socialism” Afghan President Taraki after assuming power in 1978.<sup>22</sup>

### ***The State Asserts Itself***

The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was one of the main groups among the intelligentsia that succeeded in assuming political power through a coup against President Daud in 1978. The party enjoyed public support among those who regarded themselves as modernizers. These modernizers advocated an overhaul of the country’s political and social systems and enjoyed significant support within the military where the Soviet model of modernization enjoyed most influence.<sup>23</sup> With PDPA firmly in power, the modernizers set out to assert state dominance over society by abandoning previous governments’ policy of accommodation with Afghanistan’s tribal society. In its efforts aimed at social transformation, the government heavily relied on the former Soviet Union’s financial and military support. The Soviets significantly increased their financial and military aid and sent military advisors to help strengthen the new leadership in Afghanistan. In addition to open-ended economic and military assistance, the Afghan government also received over one hundred thousand Soviet troops to support it in its fight against armed Mujahedin groups representing in large part the traditional and rural elements of Afghan society. It’s estimated that the intervention in Afghanistan cost the Soviet Union about five billion dollars per year.<sup>24</sup>

Since the PDPA “revolutionaries” took power through a relatively bloodless coup in Kabul, rather than having to endure a nationwide upheaval, they were able to inherit the state

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<sup>22</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 132.

<sup>23</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 104.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 104–109.; Ghani, “Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan.”

institutions of the old regime largely intact. The coup initially had little to no immediate impact on local and provincial administration, the collection of taxes or other day-to-day activities of the state. However, to facilitate social transformation and establish the predominance of state over society, PDPA decided to construct new state institutions and reform older government organs with Soviet aid. Afghanistan became a close ally of the Soviet Union, both politically and economically. Afghanistan's exports to countries of the Commission for Mutual Assistance increased 20 percent by 1980 and the Soviet share of foreign aid rose to almost 80 percent with other members of the Warsaw Pact countries accounting for the remainder. The number of Soviet advisors to Afghanistan jumped from 350 to over 3000 by 1980.<sup>25</sup>

The state also relied on the sale of natural gas to pay for its increasing proportions of expenditure. The sale of natural gas had financed 40 percent of government expenditure before the Soviet-backed coup and accounted for 60 percent of total expenditure after the deployment of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. For example in northern Afghanistan, the Soviet aid paid for the extension of a railroad, repair of roads, and expansion of the Kabul airport. Soviets also delivered 1500 trucks to the state's transport organization, and worked with other Eastern bloc countries to build hydroelectric power stations, to build capacity in trade and telecommunication sectors. The Soviets invested heavily in state industries and developed the country's copper mines and minerals. Rubin adds, "Government employment in factories, the bureaucracy, and the army, as well as membership in state-sanctioned organization, also provided Afghans access to free or subsidized distribution of commodities supplied by the USSR."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 112.; Shahrani, "War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan."; Ahady, "Afghanistan."

<sup>26</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 130–139.

The state's educational policy transformed Afghanistan's educational system into a mechanism of political indoctrination and recruitment from primary school to university level education. All textbooks contained a preface lauding the regime and stressing the regime's educational system was to "help train the new man."<sup>27</sup> The Russian language became the only foreign language taught at all levels, replacing English, French and German. Religious education was downgraded and a new course in political science was introduced where students learned about Marxism-Leninism, Afghan-Soviet friendship and the history of the Communist movement. Kabul University filled 60 percent of its vacancies with faculty from socialist countries and numerous exchange programs were set up to send students to the Soviet Union to study for elementary, secondary, vocational, and higher education. According to an analyst at the US State Department, about two thousand "military trainees" and thousands of younger Afghans were being sent to the USSR every year. While some of the children spent the summers in the Soviet Union, others were sent for lengthy programs of doctoral study. The regime also sent the children of those who'd been killed fighting as soldiers to for long-term study to the Soviet Union. According to a former director general of the Cultural Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "An Afghan-Soviet agreement provided for ten thousand children a year to be sent on this program."<sup>28</sup>

The state possessed a robust intelligence agency and military. Its powerful intelligence agency known as KHAD employed more than 15000 to 30000 professional spies as well as over 100000 paid informers.<sup>29</sup> The Afghan army consisted of 14 divisions, of these 11 were infantry

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>28</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 141.

and another three were armored, and were part of three military corps. The Afghan army had several elite units under its command such as the 26th Airborne Battalion, 444th, 37th and 38th Commando Brigades. The army used its Commando Brigades as mobile strike forces and later transformed them into battalions.<sup>30</sup> The government was the beneficiary of substantial deliveries of tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers and other weapons such as SCUD-B missiles, with a range of up to 175 miles. As Ewans notes, “The Afghan army probably had more armaments than it could profitably use. The army had also to some extent been rebuilt, and numbered some 55000 men, plus a Presidential Guard of some 10000 and other paramilitary units, security police and assorted party and other militias.”<sup>31</sup>

Given the presence of a formidable insurgency, particularly in the countryside, the army faced difficulties in enlisting new recruits. This prompted the state to adopt a carrot-and-stick approach that incentivized military service to help attract more recruits in its fight against the insurgency. Each year the government was able to induce 10,000 to 18,000 recruits into the army general amnesty was announced in 1980 for those who had deserted and in 1982 students who served in the army, and graduated 10th grade in high school, would pass 11th and 12th grade and be given a scholarship. People who were conscripted after the 12th grade, could, after their military service, attend any institution of higher learning they desired. Moreover, to encourage longer military service, soldiers were quickly promoted to higher ranks.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords: Including a New Foreword Following the Terrorist Attacks of 11 September 2001* (London: Pan, 2001), 106.

<sup>30</sup> J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, D.C: NDU Press, 1986), 188.

<sup>31</sup> Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Amstutz, *Afghanistan*, 181–188.

### ***Consolidation of Power through “Revolutionary” Reforms***

As one of the initial orders of business, Afghanistan’s new Soviet-backed leaders began implementing reforms aimed at asserting state dominance and supplanting the traditional leadership as rulers and arbiters of rural society. The government introduced its reforms by decree of the Revolutionary Council without any attempt to consult the public. The decrees were regarded as expansive and revolutionary, seeking to change Afghanistan socially, economically and politically. The boldest decrees dealt with thorny issues and attempted to overhaul Afghanistan’s social structure by introducing land reforms, setting a minimum age for marriage and eliminating other traditional practices such as bride-price.<sup>33</sup>

In light of the state’s previous failed attempts to modernize and restructure the balance of power in its relations with society, the regime’s proposed reforms were bound to trigger a strong backlash from traditionalists. As Rubin asserts, “If implemented, these decrees would have transformed Afghan rural society; the symmetrical reciprocity dominated by khans or jirgas (tribal councils) would be replaced by a system of economically comparable nuclear families linked through market relations and tied directly to the state.”<sup>34</sup> He adds that these decrees were intended to destroy the economic and social basis of exchanges such as marriage, loans, mortgages, tenancy, and hospitality that enabled tribal leaders to “tie the knot of the tribe.” The various networks of clientalism that held extended families together and ensured their belonging to sub-tribes would have been replaced by direct dependence of nuclear families on the PDPA and the state bureaucracy. For instance, decree number six provided relief for a broad category of debts as sharecroppers and laborers were freed from all debt and decree number seven

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<sup>33</sup> Tanin and Halliday, “The Communist Regime in Afghanistan 1978-1992.”; Bill Gertz, “Afghan Regime Well-Armed,” *Washington Times* (January 3, 1992): A1.

<sup>34</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 116.

established a minimum age for marriage and prohibited the exchange of money involving marriage, a century old tradition.<sup>35</sup>

Despite its knowledge about the failure of previous governments to implement similar reforms, especially those involving thorny issues such as marriage practices, the Soviet-backed regime presented the decrees as revolutionary, and promised to put an end to “oppressive patriarchal and feudal conditions.” The implementation of the marriage decree would have resulted in the transformation of marriage from a social and economic transaction between two extended families to a private decision taken by two consenting adults.<sup>36</sup> The reforms, however, while rejected by the majority of Afghans, especially those in rural areas, were welcomed by a minority of urban Afghans who long wished to modernize their society.<sup>37</sup> As Rasanayagam writes, “The decree was welcomed in more advanced urban circles where young people were able to marry the partners of their choice for the first time in Afghan history. But it was perceived as a frontal attack on tradition by the backward and unlettered people of rural Afghanistan.”<sup>38</sup>

Notwithstanding some flaws in the government’s land distribution system, the government in 1986 announced that as a result of its land-reform policies, almost 3300000 peasant families had received land. Decree number eight aimed to eliminate “feudal and pre-feudal conditions” by creating a land ceiling of approximately fifteen acres for first quality land for each family. Ignoring Afghanistan’s traditionally large family structures, the state defined a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>37</sup> Tanin and Halliday, “The Communist Regime in Afghanistan 1978-1992.”

<sup>38</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 77.

family as a husband, wife, and unmarried children less than eighteen years of age as forming the basic unit of land ownership. This definition was consistent with the proposal to reform marriage practices and was intended to eliminate larger families and other kinship units as economic units. Land reform policies were also meant to redistribute wealth and power from the rural rich to the rural poor so that the state could have replaced local and tribal leaders as the main source of authority in Afghanistan's highly fragmented, rural communities.<sup>39</sup>

The DRA also distributed a number of other goods through a system of subsidized consumption for state employees and those who supported the regime. The government established special stores similar to those in other socialist countries, offering essential food items and other products imported from the Eastern bloc.<sup>40</sup> These measures moved Afghanistan closer toward the "developed socialist" model of social control. Rubin contends, "The degree of social control attained by the state was sufficient to enable the Soviet-Karmal regime to pursue its other major strategic goal: ideological formation of the new generation and recruitment to the party-state through the school, Young Pioneers and other organizations." For example the government established Soviet-style tractor stations to provide farmers with affordable machinery and President Karmal claimed that these stations were to become the "rally point of peasants".<sup>41</sup>

### ***State Attempts to Dominate Falter***

State attempts at social transformation and predominance, however, faced several obstacles; chief among them was a strong backlash from rural and highly tribal communities that

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<sup>39</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 117–118.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.



constituted the majority of the population. Traditionalists saw these reforms as a serious threat to their power in relation to the state as well as their way of life. As Goodson notes, “The bases of authority in rural society were the family and the tribe or a clan. Implementation of these reforms eroded the underpinnings of these bases of authority; consequently, it is hardly surprising that they were so fiercely resisted.”<sup>42</sup> In addition to the highly tribal and fragmented nature of Afghan society, the state’s less than adequate capacity to implement its reforms, and the use of violence as the determining factor in state-society relations were key hindrances to the implementation and success of such reforms. In rural areas of the country, local traditions rather than state law played the primary role in defining property relations.

The state’s policy of redistribution disregarded local needs such as adequate irrigation in certain areas where water, not land was the major constraint on agriculture. Landholdings were not as significant as previously thought and there wasn’t enough surplus of land to distribute to all peasants who qualified for state programs. The state’s policy of abolishing peasants’ debts to landlords and moneylenders without providing them with alternative sources of credit deprived small farmers of their ability to obtain the loans they needed because landlords fearing non-payment refused to make any new loans to farmers.<sup>43</sup>

Nancy Newell writes: “Any one of these programs, tactlessly introduced, would almost certainly have aroused a bitter reaction among most segments of the population. When they were introduced together as a package under the red banner of communism, the effect was catastrophic...Taken together, these

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<sup>42</sup> Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle ; London: University of Washington Press, 2001), 56.

<sup>43</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 119.

reforms virtually guaranteed opposition. Their enforcement...was brought home by government servants who saw no virtue in using tact or diplomacy. Incidents of protest quickly mushroomed into local armed revolts.”<sup>44</sup>

More importantly, the choice given to peasants by the state was not between exploitation and domination on the one hand, and freedom and equality on the other. Their choice was essentially between leaders they knew and with whom they shared tribal linkages and leaders they did not know and who represented an alien ideology imported from the Soviet Union that ran counter to the peasants’ traditional way of life. As Rubin asserts, “Long experience had taught the peasants that, pernicious as some khans or tribal leaders could be, other were useful in protecting the village from the state administration, even if the state administration was Muslim.”<sup>45</sup> In addition to the state’s poor formulation of the reforms, its attempts to compensate for its lack of capacity through brutal means further swayed the rural communities to believe that proposed reforms would undermine their long-held conservative and tribal traditions. The traditional society was also incensed about the way the reforms were carried out, especially land reforms. Groups of PDPA activists including school teachers, and army officers with no links to the community, would be dispatched to villages to carry out land reforms. Land reforms in particular were intended to bolster the state’s position in winning the battle that was raging between the state and strong tribal leaders over social control.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 119-120.

<sup>46</sup> Rubin, “Afghanistan.”; Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 119–121.

Given Afghanistan's low level of state capacities, the ability to determine ownership of land or to extend credit at the local level was beyond the ability of the state.<sup>47</sup> Regime pronouncements about its plans to eliminate "the unjust patriarchal and feudalistic relations which exists between husband and wife" caused a great degree of consternation among most Afghans, especially those in rural areas.<sup>48</sup> As Saikal points out government census takers, led by inexperienced and dogmatic PDPA functionaries poured into villages asking questions about women's status, names and ages and otherwise infringing upon family matters of the utmost intimacy for rural Afghans. He adds, "Country people ended up believing that the communists were plotting to turn women into communal property."<sup>49</sup> The regime's introduction of radical social and political reforms broke the four-decade equilibrium between state and society.<sup>50</sup>

Afghanistan's role in the international security system also enhanced the role of violence with regards to state-society relations. The Afghan state, having been developed in large part through funding by great powers to serve as a buffer state, suffered from a lack of meaningful institutions that interacted with society. The state also lacked the necessary legal framework to operate society's collective networks, especially its tribal elements. As Saikal points out, the new rulers of Kabul had to "resort to the patronage of a single foreign power in order to subordinate the recalcitrant micro-societies."<sup>51</sup> Police presence was limited to large cities and towns. Except for the official PDPA party-state, the country lacked political parties and civil

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<sup>47</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 119.

<sup>48</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 189.

<sup>50</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 132.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

society. In short, there was no civil or political society mediating between the state and its citizens.

Since state capacities and resources were limited, state autonomy meant that the only resource available to it to implement its programs was violence.<sup>52</sup> For the first time in almost a century, violence emerged as the determining factor in relations between the society and the state as the state policies triggered civil and armed resistance against “Godless communists”. As Goodson points out most of Afghanistan by 1979 was “in open revolt” against the government when at least twenty-four of the twenty-eight provinces had suffered from outbreaks of violence.<sup>53</sup> The regime responded to mounting opposition to its reform agenda with more repression. A year after the new government had assumed power; tens of thousands of regime opponents had been executed.<sup>54</sup> Maley contends, “The new regime was not in a position to exploit the traditional legitimacy that had helped sustain its predecessors, and in the context of its grossly overambitious program of social transformation...it was obliged increasingly to resort to coercion to maintain its position.”<sup>55</sup>

### ***Regime Fights for Survival***

Despite the Soviet leadership’s decision to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan in 1989, the former Soviet Union continued its provision of critical economic and military assistance to the Afghan government. The Soviet-backed government of Dr. Najibullah survived for three years after the Soviet troops had withdrawn. The Soviets continued to provide

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<sup>52</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 120.

<sup>53</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 187.

extensive support ranging from \$250 to \$300 million per month and they had left behind thousands of Soviet military technicians and advisors to support the regime. Afghan Mujahidin parties mostly based in neighboring Pakistan were fragmented along tribal and ethnic lines and unable to form a cohesive opposition or effectively challenge the government. According to Goodson, “The Mujahidin, masters of guerrilla warfare, lacked the cohesiveness essential to successful conventional warfare.”<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the loss of over one hundred thousand Soviet troops and a reduction in Soviet assistance, forced Najibullah’s government to adopt a more conciliatory approach with its conservative and traditional opponents by moving away from leftist ideals.<sup>57</sup> The government’s new strategy was centered on ensuring its own survival in light of dwindling Soviet funding and the ever increasing defense budget.

As part of the government’s strategy to ensure its survival after the withdrawal of Soviet forces, President Najibullah offered the tribal rural-based communities of Afghanistan what they had always desired, namely, strong local autonomy with generous subsidies of funds and arms. Building local forces was a two pronged strategy meant to win over disaffected communities while standing locally autonomous regions intended to combat Mujahedin groups, independent of the Ministry of Defense in Kabul. The regime bought the loyalties of tribal and local armed groups with cash, arms and equipment. Rasanayagan writes that a typical Mujahidin commander that defected was made general, given a house in Kabul and provided the freedom “to enrich themselves by smuggling, drug-trafficking, and the imposition of road tolls.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>58</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 129.

The difficulty of securing major supply routes after the departure of Soviet troops prompted Najibullah's government to use local militia groups such as General Dostum's forces that numbered about 40000 men by 1991. According to Rasanyagan, "Their main task was to replace the Soviet troops protecting the gas fields and the supply routes from the Soviet border and southwards...They were all well-equipped mobile force capable of conducting combat operations outside these areas."<sup>59</sup> Many local commanders, freed from the constraints of the Soviet presence were also able to achieve financial autonomy by levying tolls on the road transport by traders, smugglers and government suppliers. Moreover, opium trade also became an increasingly lucrative source of revenue for local commanders who were beginning to turn into local strongmen with fickle loyalties to the regime. Poor peasants increasingly turned to poppy production in regions where cultivation of food crops, particularly in areas where irrigation systems had been damaged, hardly offered them the means to make a living.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Regime Weakness Intensifies Ethnic Fragmentation***

The regime as part of its strategy to ensure its survival also attempted rebrand itself and the PDPA as nationalist and Islamic entities with limited success, as its military position continued to decline and it became fraught with ethnic rivalries. Tomsen asserts that Najibullah's stocks of arms and food were dwindling, while the Mujahidin were well supplied and had reached within 90 miles of Kabul.<sup>61</sup> The regime's commander of 70<sup>th</sup> Division from the Tajik ethnic minority in northern Afghanistan defied Najibullah's order to transfer his command to a Pashtun general from appointed by the president. The Tajik commander received the support of

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<sup>59</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 130.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 462.

two members of other ethnic communities, the Uzbek commander of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division as well as the Ismaili commander of 80<sup>th</sup> Division stationed in the northern Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup> At last, the Russian coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev in August of 1991 marked the beginning of the end for both the Soviet Union and the Afghan government. Goodson notes, “In September 1991 the two superpowers agreed to cut off military assistance to their respective clients ... The Soviet Union also limited economic aid and tightened restrictions on such aid in late 1991.”<sup>63</sup>

Developments in the Soviet Union, and the apparent lack of success to achieve meaningful results with its new policies, the regime’s demise was inching closer.<sup>64</sup> As Saikal points out, “The recycled PDPA and army were disintegrating, provincial governors, various warlords, and field commanders were busy carving up autonomous principalities, striking alliances of convenience with a healthy disregard for ideological differences.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, with the breakup of the Soviet Union on 25 December, 1991, the fate of the Soviet-backed government was sealed.<sup>66</sup>

### **Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-1996): Factionalism and Infighting**

“It was as if, at this very moment, on this very spot, a power vacuum replaced what little central authority still existed in Afghanistan; and that is why, I am convinced, this even must be given due significance in any history of the

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<sup>62</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 462–479.

<sup>63</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 72.

<sup>64</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 141.

<sup>65</sup> Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 206.

<sup>66</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 73.

period.”<sup>67</sup> A UN official describing the moment President Najibullah’s UN plane was prevented from leaving Afghanistan, and implying that the early morning hours of April 16, 1992 marked the beginning of Afghanistan’s spiral into chaos and political vacuum.

### ***Political Chaos and Ethnic Fragmentation***

The fall of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan was followed by brutal violence among rival Mujahedin factions vying for power. Almost from the beginning of the post-Najibullah government era, power struggles among ethnic and political contenders degenerated into violence. Rival factions representing various ethnic groups and political leanings launched brutal rocket attacks on government and residential areas of Kabul. According to Ewans, “Mujahedin rule was characterized by a total inability to agree between themselves on any lasting political settlement and a readiness to fight each other at the slightest provocation, or indeed with any apparent provocation at all.”<sup>68</sup>

The rocket attacks targeting the capital city began in April of 1992 and continued until the Taliban advance on the city in early 1995. Mujahedin leaders’ persistent divisions were not only based on personal ambition alone but also included ethnic, tribal and sectarian antipathies. The fall of Kabul to better organized minority Tajik and Uzbek Mujahedin groups determined much of the ensuing civil war. This dealt a psychological blow to the Pashtun majority who after almost three hundred years had lost control of the capital city. One of the most radical Pashtun Mujahedin leaders, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar laid siege to Kabul and mercilessly shelled it for days

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<sup>67</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 182.



on end, killing and maiming thousands of civilians and turning the capital into rubble.<sup>69</sup> Continued bombardments of the capital and persistent blockade of supply routes to Kabul mostly by rival factions, left the city's residents in a dire state of affairs, forcing tens of thousands to leave the city for internal or external exile.<sup>70</sup> According to Ewans, "It was unacceptable to the majority Pushtuns in general as it was to Hekmatyar in particular that Rabbani, Massoud, and Dostum, two Tajiks and an Uzbek, should play a leading role in guiding the country's destiny."<sup>71</sup>

Although government institutions and the city of Kabul had survived earlier conflicts unscathed, they were turned into a major battleground by warring parties. According to Goodson, "Perhaps as many as 50000 people have been killed and 150000 were wounded there, and hundreds of thousands fled the city, large areas of which have been reduced to rubble since 1992."<sup>72</sup> Kabul's control fell to competing groups. While ethnic minorities such as the Tajiks and Uzbek militias controlled the city center where government buildings were located, their Pashtun rivals occupied the high ground and suburbs south of the city. The Beirutization of Kabul made the city into battlefield, and the standard of living fell dramatically, with power and water supplies erratic and food stocks running low.

The battle for control of Kabul was a microcosm of what happened throughout Afghanistan during the Mujahedin government, namely, the country's descent into ethnic violence and political fragmentation. Competing Mujahidin groups were holding provincial centers and large cities in almost all corners of the country. Commanders and strongmen did not

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<sup>69</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 183–184.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, 75.

wish to obey the government in Kabul but rather entrench their influence and develop regional authorities. Although much of the fighting centered on Kabul and several other strategic cities, the state of the entire country was “characterized by fragmentation and warlordism.”<sup>73</sup>

### ***Localization of Power and Warlordism***

The central government control was largely limited to certain parts of the capital city and its environs while the rest of Afghanistan had been divided into various zones of local and regional zones of control along ethno-lingual lines, leaving the population and non-governmental organizations vulnerable to the rule of local chieftains and strongmen. While one government affiliated warlord controlled western Afghanistan, another warlord who opposed to the government controlled the northern Afghanistan. The eastern part of the country was being governed by a number of independent councils, and a small region to the south and east of the capital was under the control of Hekmatyar’s forces. As Rashid writes, “In central Afghanistan the Hazaras, another minority ethnic group controlled the province of Bamyan. Southern Afghanistan and Kandahar were divided up amongst dozens of petty ex-Mujahidin warlords and bandits who plundered the population at will, with the tribal structure and the economy in tatters...”<sup>74</sup> He adds, “International aid agencies of fearful of even working in Kandahar, one of Afghanistan’s largest cities, as the city itself was divided by warring groups. Their leaders sold off everything to Pakistani traders to make money, stripping down telephone wires and poles, cutting trees, selling off factories, machinery and even road rollers to scrap merchants. The warlords seized homes and farms, threw out their occupants and handed them over to their supporters. The commanders abused the population at will, kidnapping young girls and boys for

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.; Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 183.

<sup>74</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 21.

their sexual pleasure, robbing merchants in the bazaars and fighting and brawling in the streets.”<sup>75</sup> The author notes that during a short 130 miles trip from the Pakistani border town of Quetta to Kandahar, the vehicle he was travelling in was stopped by at least 20 different groups who had put chains across the road and demanded money for safe passage. These developments also resulted in a fresh wave of Afghan refugees to neighboring countries.<sup>76</sup>

Despite repeated UN mediation efforts to bring to broker peace among the warring Mujahidin factions, no political arrangement could be reached that’d satisfy all the claimants to power. By 1994, the fragmentation of Afghanistan had deepened because no single Mujahedin party was powerful enough or enjoyed sufficient legitimacy to militarily defeat other groups. This stalemate eventually gave rise to the Taliban, a puritanical religious student group. Although, the Taliban’s arrival on the political scene marked the end of the period of intra-Mujahedin civil conflict, it probably exacerbated divisions along tribal, ethnic, political and sectarian lines.<sup>77</sup> In short the Islamic State of Afghanistan was in a state of virtual disintegration before the Taliban’s emergence on the political scene.

Rubin sums up the Afghan state during Mujahidin rule in the following way: “Perhaps this entity was Islamic, but it was hardly a state, and it certainly did not rule Afghanistan. The government had virtually no income. All major customs’ posts, the government’s principle sources of revenue in the absence of foreign aid or natural gas exports, were under the control of regional shuras or councils that kept custom revenues for themselves. Tens of thousands of armed men, belonging to a number of forces or to none, roamed the streets of the capital looting,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>77</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 76.

fighting, and sometimes raping. With neither tax revenue nor foreign aid, the government paid the disparate groups that constituted its armed forces by distributing freshly printed banknotes that continued to arrive by plane from Russia.<sup>78</sup>

### **Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001): Brutal Force and Religious Totalitarianism**

#### ***Pashtun Chauvinism and Religion as Political Legitimater***

The leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar on 4 April, 1996, on the roof of a building in the center of the city wrapped himself in the Cloak of the Prophet Muhammad, which had been taken out of its shrine after 60 years, and declared himself the Amir-ul Momineen, or the leader of the faithful in front of a throng of mullahs or religious clerics who jubilantly embraced him. The title gave Omar the legitimacy that he badly needed among the majority Pashtun ethnic group and to contest the leadership of Afghanistan. The Taliban movement's religious fervor and Pashtun ethnocentrism appealed to most Pashtuns while traditionalists from other ethnic groups were willing to give them a try after the chaotic rule of the Mujahedin. After months of bloody battles, the Taliban's refusal to compromise with the warring Mujahedin factions or allow the United Nations to mediate finally paid off. After only about four years of the minority Tajik government, the Afghan capital was back in the hands of the majority Pashtuns. Taliban's ethnocentric policies aimed at entrenching Pashtun domination only deepened existing ethnic divisions.<sup>79 80</sup>

Taliban movement's plans for Afghanistan's social and economic development remained ambiguous as the regime was preoccupied with spreading its own brand of Islam and

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<sup>78</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 272.

<sup>79</sup> Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 536.

<sup>80</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 54.

consolidating its military domination. Mullah Wakil, an aide to the Taliban leader proclaimed, “The Sharia does not allow politics or political parties. That is why we give no salaries to officials or soldiers, just food, clothes, shoes and weapons. We want to live a life like the Prophet lived 1400 years ago and jihad is our right. We want to recreate the time of the Prophet and are only carrying out what the Afghan people have wanted for the past 14 years.”<sup>81</sup> Taliban’s model of government was probably similar to that of other hardline Islamic currents that call for dependence on a single charismatic leader to lead the nation as opposed to relying on a more democratically constituted organization.

This model did not advocate the building of institutions, but rather insisted on the character and purity of the leader, his virtues and qualifications and whether his personality can emulate that of the Prophet Muhammad. Mullah Wakil, the Taliban leader’s aide described the Taliban government’s decision making process in the following manner: “Decisions are based on the advice of the Amir-ul Momineen. For us consultation is not necessary. We abide by the Amir’s view even if he alone takes the view. There will not be a head of state. Instead there will be an Amir ul-Momineen. Mullah Omar will be the highest authority and the government will not be able to implement any decisions to which he does not agree. General elections are incompatible with Sharia and therefore we reject them.”<sup>82</sup>

The state under the Taliban lacked a regular or professional army, relying instead largely on volunteer students of religious schools to fill its ranks. Regular Taliban fighters numbered 25000 to 30000 but they were able to call up volunteers before new offensives. The Taliban government took a hap-hazard approach toward enlistment, making it almost impossible to

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<sup>81</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 43.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

create a regular, disciplined army. Taliban fighters consisted of many students who would join the frontlines for a short or long period of time. For example, students from Pakistani religious schools made up about 30 percent of Taliban manpower that served for short periods before returning to their religious schools and sending back fresh recruits. Rashid claims, “Taliban fighters resemble a lashkar or traditional tribal militia force...The majority of fighters are not paid salaries and it’s up to the commander to pay his men an adequate sum of money when they go on home leave.”<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the Taliban state did pay regular salaries to military officers who were professionally trained by and fought for the former army under the communist regime. These professionals included tank drivers, gunners, pilots, and mechanics who had essentially become mercenaries.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Brutal Force and Negligible Governance***

As part of its overall strategy to consolidate its dominance over Afghanistan, the Taliban government did not shy away from using brutal force to suppress its opponents while at the same time providing little to no governance to the population. Gohari asserts, “The Taliban militiamen and their allies including militant Muslims from neighboring Pakistan systematically executed between 2000 and 5000 civilians in of the deadliest mass killings...They also searched house to house for males of fighting age who belonged to the Hazara ethnic minority, gunned them down in front of their families or had their throats cut.”<sup>85</sup> For many ethnic minorities the Taliban rule represented a return of Pashtun chauvinism and religious totalitarianism. In their quest to defeat last remnants of opposition to their rule, the Taliban sought to frighten the population into

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.; Powell, “The Taliban in Afghanistan.”

<sup>85</sup> M. J. Gohari, *The Taliban: Ascent to Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 102.

submission. In the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, the last stronghold of Taliban opposition, after seizing the city, “Taliban shock troops arriving in trucks and cars fired automatic weapons at everyone in sight, regardless of ethnicity” asserts Gohari.<sup>86</sup>

Governance under Taliban rule was chaotic, ineffective and minimal at best. They lacked the capabilities and the willingness to formulate a coherent governance strategy. Taliban leaders, who were mostly clergymen, were asked to serve in both military and civilian capacities. The Taliban military council included several ministers and governors such as the health minister. “The health minister was pulled out and sent to Herat province to organize another offensive and finally returned to his job six months later, leaving UN aid agencies who he was dealing with in consternation”, asserts Rashid. Assigning a minister both civilian and military responsibilities had an enormously negative impact on the government’s performance. This system made sure that a ministry’s work would be idled when the minister was away on the frontlines and that no Taliban minister became “proficient in his job or created a local power base through patronage. The Taliban leader would send any minister back to the front line at a moment’s notice if he was becoming politically too powerful, ensuring that the country remained without clearly defined leadership roles. Rashid who visited a number of ministries during Taliban rule, recounts “Ministers’ desks are empty of files and government offices are empty of the public...with nobody available to answer queries in the ministries...The public ceased to expect anything of the ministries while the lack of local representation made the Taliban appear as an occupying force, rather than administrators trying to win hearts and minds.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gohari. *The Taliban*, 102

<sup>87</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 101–102.

### *Politics of Ethnicity and Misrule*

Governance was further weakened when the Taliban decided to purge Kabul's bureaucracy of almost all bureaucrats that were considered a threat to the regime. Although high-ranking officials had left Kabul, lower level bureaucrats had remained in place since the fall of the Soviet-backed government in 1992. In particular, Taliban replaced all government employees that belonged to minority ethnic groups with fellow Pashtuns. This probably marked the first time in Afghanistan's modern history that government ministries were purged of employees belonging to minority ethnic groups, turning members of ethnic minorities against Taliban rule. Despite Afghanistan's facing severe economic and social challenges, Taliban government offices worked only four hours per day. According to Rashid, the government's official revenue was derived from drug's income, and aid mostly from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. He adds, "Mullah Omar runs the war from his tin trunks stuffed full of money, which he keeps under his bed, making a national budget next to impossible."<sup>88</sup>

Another debilitating factor for governance during the Taliban rule was that almost all Taliban ministers were mullahs or clergymen with little to no formal education. For instance, the Ministry of Finance had no qualified economist or banker and it had set the 1997 budget for the entire country at US\$100000, an amount that barely covered the government employees' salaries.<sup>89</sup> A senior United Nations official in Afghanistan noted, "Although the Taliban technically control most of Afghanistan, they do not have the means to administer and run public services in a centralized fashion: each region is administered by local Taliban authorities who

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 124.; Nasreen Akhtar, "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban," *International Journal on World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 49–73.

<sup>89</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 125.



appear to act quite autonomously.”<sup>90</sup> The Taliban seemed unconcerned with the day-to-day issues of governing, Rashid points out, stressing that they seemed to have no concept of economic policy beyond “Allah will provide.”<sup>91</sup> Although, the Taliban seemed to lack any interest in assuming the responsibilities of a government, they were quite effective in reclaiming the state’s monopoly on the use of force, an essential attribute of a state, because they refused to engage in any power-sharing agreements with their opponents and were bent on confronting the last pockets of resistance militarily.<sup>92</sup>

Taliban government while controlling 90 percent of the country and claiming to be the government could assume only minimal governmental functions because it lacked administrative capacity and abdicated its responsibility for the welfare of ordinary Afghans. The United Nations estimated that some 3.8 million people were close to famine conditions with the World Food Program feeding 3 million Afghans a day in cities as well as large camps set up for internally displaced people.<sup>93</sup> In Kabul alone, over fifty percent of its 1.2 million people received some form of aid from Western donor agencies.<sup>94</sup>

Taliban also neglected to provide public goods even in the most critical areas such as healthcare and education. The healthcare system, despite showing much promise before the beginning of conflicts, was neglected and dilapidated under the Taliban. Afghanistan had the highest infant mortality rates in the world, namely 163 deaths per 1000 births or about 18

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<sup>90</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 197.

<sup>91</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 122.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

percent. A staggering 1700 mothers out of 100000 died while giving birth. During the Taliban regime, only 29 percent of the population had access to health care services and 12 percent had access to safe water compared to 80 percent and 70 percent respectively in other developing countries. Rashid asserts, “Children die of simple preventable diseases like measles and diarrhea because there are no health facilities and clean water.”<sup>95</sup>

Taliban’s education policies in general and their gender policies in particular severely restricted access to education for both female and male students. They allowed only religious schools to become the main source of primary and secondary education. Within three months of capturing the capital, Taliban closed 63 schools in Kabul, affecting about 103000 girls, 148000 boys and 11200 teachers, 7800 of them were women. They also shut down the country’s premier university, Kabul University, and sent home over 10000 students. A UNICEF report in December 1998 described the education system under the Taliban as “in a state of total collapse with nine in ten girls and two in three boys not enrolled in school.”<sup>96</sup> During the Taliban rule, there were only about 1.2 million students enrolled in schools, with less than 50,000 of them girls although there were over four million school-aged children in Afghanistan, leaving almost three million school-aged children without access to education.<sup>97</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The 1978 coup and the emergence of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan upended the delicate balance of power between the state and society and put an end to a state of relative

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<sup>95</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 107.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>97</sup> British Medical Association, *The medical profession and human rights : handbook for a changing agenda : report of a Working Party* (New York: Zed Books, 2000), 15–23.; Juan R I Cole, “The Taliban, Women, and the Hegelian Private Sphere,” *Social Research* 70, no. 3 (October 1, 2003): 770–777.

peace and stability that had existed since the 1930s.<sup>98</sup> The communist government's bold attempts to assert its dominance over society ran counter to previous governments' practice of securing the compliance of semi-autonomous tribes through non-coercive means. As Saikal points out, "The non-coercive component of the mechanism of state domination was particularly significant in Afghanistan: even with a modern army and police force at its disposal, the central government preferred to secure the compliance of autonomous social units by channeling rentier-income, mostly in the form of foreign aid."<sup>99</sup>

State attempts to redefine its relationship with society sharpened resistance to the state. To compensate for its lack of capacity and crush the rebellion from traditionalists, the state increasingly relied on coercive means that intensified the backlash from Afghanistan's conservative society. Although, generous Soviet assistance helped the state assert itself to a certain extent and cling onto power for over a decade, this support was not inadequate to help the state sustain or expand its dominance, heightening the tension in state-society relations. The resulting conflict between the state and society ultimately gave way to dramatic shifts in the make-up of Afghan society and the disintegration of Afghanistan as governable sovereign state for at least another decade.<sup>100</sup>

As the political, social and economic data under the past three regimes indicate, the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1979-1992), was relatively stable and could deliver some public goods such as access to education and health care services to the majority of the population. The state also managed to maintain relative monopoly on the use of force in

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<sup>98</sup> Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn?*, 224.

<sup>99</sup> Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 169.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

much of the urban centers by utilizing its powerful security and intelligence apparatus. Its successor, the Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-1996), however, was characterized by political chaos and deepening ethnic fragmentation. The state lacked capacity in the form of functioning government departments, police units, and judiciary. Its monopoly on the use of force was severely limited and its authority was diminished by armed factions, and the emergence of warlords in all corners of the country.

Politico-ethnic violence in and around the capital as well as in urban centers plunged Afghanistan into a state of lawlessness and stalemate with neither Mujahedin group powerful enough to assert itself as the dominant player.<sup>101</sup> The subsequent Taliban regime (1996-2001) ousted the warring Mujahedin factions by force and quickly put an end to the state of lawlessness and warlordism. However, the Taliban regime while reclaiming its monopoly on the use of force used its own interpretation of Islam as means for domination. Aside from their monopoly on the use of force the Taliban regime presided over a dilapidated government bureaucracy that possessed neither the means nor the capacity to provide any meaningful form of governance, particularly to women, who were denied access to health care and education. Ethnic and gender discrimination was used by the Taliban regime to entrench its rule, further exacerbating socio-political fragmentation. The state's lack of financial resources, professional governing mechanisms, and its isolation from the international community essentially rendered it futile in providing much needed governance apart from security.<sup>102</sup>

The experience of the Afghan communists and Islamists during the past two decades indicates that both suffered from similar weaknesses and limitations. Both, as an all inclusive

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<sup>101</sup> "Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001". Afghanistan Justice Project. 2005, <http://www.afghanistanjusticeproject.org/warcimesandcrimesagainsthumanity19782001.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Cole, "The Taliban, Women, and the Hegelian Private Sphere," 770-777.

ideologies rejected instead of integrating the vastly different social, ethnic and sectarian identities that constituted the Afghan society. Both trends attempted to impose radical change on a traditional social structure by a revolution from the top. By taking control of the state, these movements sought to do away with tribalism and traditional religious values long embraced by mainstream Afghans. In essence, both Afghan leftists and the Taliban refused to accept the complex realities of the Afghan society, lending credence to Roy's assertion that Muslim societies in the twentieth century have been divided between two structures, namely, the clan, tribe and ethnic groups on the one side, and the state and religion on the other.<sup>103</sup>

Both the communist and the Taliban state sought to augment or supplant the role of leaders who were regarded as traditional bearers of authority. These leaders included village and tribal leaders who were responsible for implementing functions of political exchange based on well-established canons of group solidarity. The Mujahedin era, on the other hand, was marked by lawlessness, a vacuum of authority, and deepening socio-political fragmentation.<sup>104</sup>

Afghanistan's tumultuous history during these two decades can be summed up as a conflict that began between the modernizers and the traditionalists, deepening socio-political fragmentation and ultimately culminating in the collapse of the state. While the elite, particularly disaffected youth and the officer corps, thanks to the influence of the Soviet Union in the 1970s, found their most effective expression as a leftist movement, the state's attacks on religion and its imposition of secular values prompted Afghan tribes to rebel. After a chaotic and conflict-plagued Mujahedin government, Taliban's rise exemplified the triumph of religious

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<sup>103</sup> Olivier Roy, *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War* (Princeton, N.J., USA: Darwin Press, 1995), 5–17.

<sup>104</sup> Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 208.

totalitarianism at the expense of those wishing to build a functional and viable state.<sup>105</sup> <sup>106</sup> During this tumultuous period in Afghanistan, it's been minority ethnic groups against the majority or small group versus the larger faith or the tribe versus the Ummah that has served as the main focus of loyalty and commitment rather than the state.” <sup>107</sup> Forces seeking to build a viable Afghan state are likely to face significant hurdles as fundamental questions about the concept of a nation-state remain unresolved.

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<sup>105</sup> Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 161–177.

<sup>106</sup> Raymond A. Milen, *Afghanistan: Reconstituting a Collapsed State*, Strategic Studies Institute, April 2005, p. 3-6 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub600.pdf>

<sup>107</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 87.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**THE SEVERTITY OF STATE FAILURE IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE REALIST**  
**THEORY**

**Introduction**

Max Weber defines a modern state as “a compulsory association with a territorial basis where the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it. The claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous organization.”<sup>1</sup> While the central and unitary character of the state remains an important principle of Realism, questions about state type, the emergence of state decay and its impact on international relations have been left ambiguous.

Conversely, given the increasing number of security threats emanating from failed states, efforts to prop up such states have become a major area of interest for the international community, in particular the policy-making and donor communities. This marks a clear shift from the 1980s when the market through structural adjustment mechanisms was expected to deal with issues concerning the dilapidation of nation-states. The international community’s interventions in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Haiti, aimed at helping rebuild the state appears to serve as the preferred course of action in countries where the state is failing. The threat of state “failure” focuses attention on the soon-to-crumble countries. For such a classification to be useful, however, it must be more objective, more precise, and more discriminating than the popular conception of what may or may not constitute a “failed” state. According to Rotberg, rather than lumping countries together qualitatively, the title of “failed

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<sup>1</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 6.

state” should distinguish countries at risk and tell us whether the countries in question demonstrate certain characteristics that illustrate the extent of failure, rather than merely evoking a nebulous sense of dysfunction.<sup>2</sup>

Rotberg establishes a set of clear criteria in order to distinguish state failure from generic weakness or apparent distress, or even state collapse. He analyzes the nature of state weakness and advances motives as to why some weak states succumb to failure, or collapse, while others remain weak and don’t fail. Characterizing failed states thus becomes an important and relevant endeavor; particularly as state failure is likely to pose significant security, economic and other threats to the global political order.

This chapter will use Robert Rotberg’s and Foreign Policy Magazine’s (FP) indicators for failure to identify the emergence and severity of state failure in Afghanistan. I will also link the paper’s conceptual framework, Realism’s emphasis on the unitary nature of the state, to a host of indicators for collapsed, weak, and failed states as put forward by Rotberg and FP.<sup>3 4</sup> While no single indicator provides certain evidence that a strong state is becoming weak or a weak state is headed toward failure, a judicious assessment of these indicators taken together and discussed below should provide a qualitative assessment about the strength of the Afghan state from 1978 to 2001. This chapter will conclude by discussing the prospects of building a viable state in a strong and deeply fragmented society such as Afghanistan.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Rotberg, Disorder in the Ranks, Foreign Policy Magazine, 2009 Failed States Index; Robert Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Cambridge, Mass. : Washington, D.C: World Peace Foundation ; Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 2–4.; Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden and American University in Cairo, *Fragile Peace: State Failure, Violence, and Development in Crisis Regions* (London ; New York : New York: Zed Books in association with Development and Peace Foundation ; Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave, 2002), 6–10.

<sup>3</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 1–5.

<sup>4</sup> Foreign Policy Magazine, Failed States, Foreign Policy; Jul/Aug2010, Issue 180, p74-79, 6p, 12 Color Photographs, 2 Charts



## Implications of State Fragility for Global Security

Although the rise and fall of nation-states is not a new phenomenon, in an era when nation-states constitute the building blocks of the global order, the disintegration or fragility of some states could pose serious threats to this order. As nations perilously waver between weakness and failure, with some failing, or even collapsing, desirable international norms such as stability and predictability become conditions difficult to achieve. This is particularly relevant in a time when the international community is grappling with an ever increasing number of security threats such as those posed by state failure in Afghanistan. Thus, understanding the nature of and responding to the dynamics of nation-states facing failure has become a central component of policy debates in the hope of bolstering weak states and preventing failure.<sup>5</sup>

Boege et al's findings suggest the focus of the security and development environment remains on the "lack of willingness or capacity of state institutions to perform core state functions in the fields of security, representation and welfare." Rotberg adds, "Nation-states fail because they are convulsed by internal violence and can no longer deliver positive political goods to their inhabitants. Their governments lose legitimacy, and the very nature of the particular nation-state itself becomes illegitimate in the eyes and in the hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens."<sup>6</sup> Boege et al's findings also suggest that there is consensus among international actors that different degrees of state fragility or state failure can be identified, that the phenomenon is increasing, and that the solution generally recommended is state-building. This includes strengthening of state institutions in addition to enhancing the capacities of state

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<sup>5</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

actors for control, regulation and implementation, particularly in the core fields of state-hood such as internal security, basic social services, rule of law and government legitimacy.<sup>7 8 9</sup>

### **Unique Challenges and State Weakness**

Rotberg's characterization of weak states includes a broad continuum of states that are regarded to be inherently weak because of the geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints that they are confronting. A weak state's ability to provide adequate measures of public goods is diminished or diminishing. In a weak state, infrastructure has deteriorated and schools and hospitals show signs of neglect, particularly outside the main cities while Gross Domestic Product per capita and other critical economic indicators have fallen or are falling with corruption being rampant. Weak states usually honor rule of law guidelines in the breach, harass civil society and are often ruled by despots regardless of whether they hold elections or not.<sup>10</sup>

Rotberg contends that while weak states characteristically harbor ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other inter-communal tensions that have not yet become openly violent, failed states are deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions. He adds that in most failed states, government troops battle civil unrest in the form of insurgencies and other battles waged by rivals that could be the result of communal discontent, and a plethora of dissent directed at the state or the ruling class.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Volker Boege, "Peacebuilding and State Formation in Post-Conflict Bougainville," *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 29–37.

<sup>8</sup> Volker Boege, "How to Maintain Peace and Security in a Post-conflict Hybrid Political Order – the Case of Bougainville," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 330–352.

<sup>9</sup> M. Anne Brown, Kevin P. Clements, and Volker Boege, "Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States," *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 2–5.

<sup>10</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 1–4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–8.; Robert Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2–7.

FP touches on the qualitative dimensions of state decay, claiming that each weak state is beset by a unique set of troubles. It concurs with Rotberg's assessments that state failure cannot be traced to one issue only but rather to a diverse set of factors reflecting each country's unique set of challenges. More importantly FP points out that given every country's unique set of circumstances, factors that contribute to state failure are not universal. It goes on to argue that one country's chief woe may be staggering economic decline while another country's is the rapid brain drain that jeopardizes its economic growth. It goes on to identify a number of indicators that lead to state failure. These include: Pervasive infectious diseases, refugees, illegitimate governments, brain drain, lack of public services, group grievances caused by a range of issues, from government neglect to active persecution, economic decline that points to regimes rigging their economies to funnel profits into regime hands — even with their national markets in complete collapse, security forces, factionalized elites where clan organizations vie for control throughout the country, internal shake-ups that have made the government blatantly unstable, and external intervention to judge whether the state alone has the capacity to direct the country's future.<sup>12</sup>

### **Delivery of Political Goods and State Performance**

Nation-states' foremost purpose in existing is to provide a decentralized method of delivering political goods to persons living within its borders. Rotberg defines political goods as those intangible and hard to quantify claims that citizens are making on nation-states and the states seek to answer citizens' demands. States organize and channel the interests of their people, often but not solely in advancing of national goals and values. States are also expected to buffer or manipulate external forces and influences, champion the local or particular concerns of their

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<sup>12</sup> Foreign Policy Magazine, Failed States, Foreign Policy; Jul/Aug2010, Issue 180, p74-79, 6p, 12 Color Photographs, 2 Charts; Anonymous, "The Failed States Index," *Foreign Policy*, no. 173 (July 1, 2009): 80.

supporters, mediate between the constraints and challenges of the international arena as well as the dynamism of their own internal economic, political, and social realities.<sup>13</sup>

Rotberg stresses, however, that nation-states succeed or fail across all or some of these dimensions and their performance is judged by whether they are effective in delivering most crucial political goods. The delivery of political goods essentially distinguishes strong states from weak ones, and weak states from failed or collapsed ones. Nation-states encompass expectations, conceivably obligations, inform the local political culture, and together give content to the social contract that exists between the ruler and the ruled and one that forms the basis for interactions between the government and citizenry.

While the delivery of political goods is the single most crucial factor in determining state strength, not all political goods are weighed equally. Among them, none is as critical as the supply of security, especially population security. Although, individuals in particular circumstances can attempt to secure themselves or band together to organize and purchase goods or services that ensures their security, private security initiatives cannot substitute the full range of state-sanctioned public security. Thus, the state's prime function is to provide that political good of security—to thwart cross-border invasions and infiltrations, address domestic threats against the national order, provide population security; and a safe environment peaceful resolution of disputes without resorting to violence, according to Rotberg. Once a reasonable measure of security has been sustained, the delivery of other political goods becomes possible.<sup>14</sup>

Nation-states also provide their citizens with predictable and systematized methods of adjudicating disputes. The essence of this political good typically implies codes and procedures

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<sup>13</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 4–6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10.

that constitute an enforceable rule of law, security of property and inviolable contracts, a judicial system, and a set of values that legitimize and validate the national version of fair play.<sup>15</sup>

Another key political good involves the creation of necessary conditions for political participation that is free of fear and intimidation. FP posits that this good encompasses other important freedoms such as the right to compete for office, respect and support for national and regional political institutions, human and civil rights and political dissent. Other political goods typically supplied by states and expected by the citizenry include medical care and educational opportunities as well physical infrastructure such as roads, communications infrastructure, and the promotion of civil society etc.<sup>16</sup> This collection of political goods establishes a set of criteria according to which modern nation-states may be judged strong, weak, or failing. Clearly, strong states perform well across these categories whereas weak states show a mixed profile, fulfilling expectations in some areas and performing poorly in others.

Weak states that perform more poorly across a spectrum of fields become weaker, edging toward failure, hence the subcategory of weakness that is termed as failing. Many failed states fall short of passing each of the tests outlined above. However, they need not flunk all of them to fail overall, particularly since satisfying the security good weighs very heavily, and high levels of internal violence are associated directly with failure and the predisposition to fail.<sup>17</sup>

### **Key Indicators of State Failure**

Even in nation-states with inherent weaknesses, failure is not predetermined. Countries suffering from poverty and a colonial past while predisposed to failure do not necessarily have to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2–4.; Ghani, *Fixing Failed States.*; Hannes Lacher, “Putting the State in Its Place: Critique of State-centrism and Its Limits,” *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 521.

<sup>16</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 2–5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3-7

fail. Rotberg cites Botswana as an example of an extremely poor country at independence, a “dejected excuse” for a nation state, but one that was successfully transformed into a strong enough state to take full advantage of a subsequent, and much unexpected resource boom. He contends that it is not a state’s geographical location that serves as the main flaw, but rather what has been made of the challenges and opportunities of a given outline that determines whether the state remains weak, becomes stronger, or slides toward failure and collapse.<sup>18</sup>

Esty et al.’s findings suggest that ethnic wars are key contributors to state collapse. The findings describe state failure and collapse as the new labels for a type of severe political crisis exemplified by events of the early 1990s in Afghanistan where the institutions of the state were so weakened that they could no longer maintain authority or political order beyond the certain parts of the capital city.<sup>19</sup> Under the Mujahedin rule the Afghan capital witnessed heavy fighting among various groups over control of different neighborhoods. Intense fighting in Kabul also resulted in the displacement of the city’s population to internal and external exile.<sup>20</sup>

Esty et al.’s study also suggests that among other barometers, high infant mortality rates and whether government is based on a democratic system serve as important indicators of state failure. This assertion is based on the assumption that democratic states respond to popular discontent. Consequently, democratic states try to accommodate political dissent and maintain institutional and normative inhibitions against gross human rights violations, indicating that the state has not failed. The findings conclude that states that are failing or have failed do not

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 11–15.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 20–22.

<sup>20</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 21–22.

respond or accommodate effectively, which essentially sets them apart from strong states.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the Afghan state's policy of accommodating the society ceased with the coup of the Soviet-backed regime in 1978, setting the state for a contentious relationship between the state and society for over the next two decades.

Crossing from weakness into failure takes will as well as neglect, claims Rotberg. Thus, weak nation-states need not tilt toward failure. In the case of Columbia, it is argued that an otherwise well-endowed, prosperous, and a seemingly stable state controlled only two-thirds of its territory, while private armies controlled large zones carved out of the very body of the state. Colombia was tense and disturbed, boasting the second highest annual per capita murder rate in the world where politicians and businessmen traveled with armed guards, a clear indicator of the state's inability to ensure personal security.<sup>22</sup>

Even so, Kline argues that the Columbian state was still able to deliver schooling and medical care, set-up the country's physical and communications infrastructure, and provide economic opportunity. These public goods made sure the Columbian state sustained its legitimacy. While the state remained weak because of the multiple insurgencies it was confronting, it was comparatively strong and performed well in areas under its control. The government of Colombia can certainly re-insert itself into the disputed zones and further reduce the power of drug traffickers, thereby extending its reach. In short, it is possible for a weak and endangered state to move farther away from potential failure and gain strength, adds Rotberg. He cautions, however, that if states achieve security through harsh punishment and the use of the security apparatus, their legitimacy is likely to wane before vanishing whenever the curtain of

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<sup>21</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 20–22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–16.

control lifts.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly relevant to the rule of the Taliban. Although, their emergence in the wake of lawlessness and chaos was initially welcomed by many Afghans, their harsh punishment methods such as public executions and amputations cost them their legitimacy.

### **From Failure to Collapse**

Failed states are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions. In most failed states, government forces battle armed revolts led by one or more rivals because the state faces civil unrest, different degrees of communal discontent, and a surplus of dissent directed at it from groups within it, according to Rotberg. These conflicts are usually rooted in ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other inter-communal antagonism and the fear of the other drives much of the ethnic conflict and fuels hostilities between regimes and other rival groups. Robert asserts, “There is no failed state without disharmonies between communities.”<sup>24</sup> Rotberg’s characterization of the root causes of intra-state conflict is consistent with the main triggers of the Afghan conflict in 1990s. Rashid adds, “Afghanistan’s divisions are multiple: ethnic, sectarian, rural and urban, educated and uneducated, those with guns and those who have been disarmed. The economy is a black hole that is sucking in its neighbors with illicit trade and the smuggling of drugs and weapons, undermining them in the process.”<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, failed states, unlike strong states, cannot control their borders; lose authority over parts of their territory, and often their official expression of power is limited to the capital city and one or more ethnically specific zones. A failed state will neither be able to establish an atmosphere of security nationally, nor project power and official authority. Given a general lack of security and the culture of impunity, officials often victimize their own citizens or

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<sup>23</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 11-14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,5.

<sup>25</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 208.



a particular group that is regarded as hostile due to ethnic or other inter-communal hostility. This compels citizens to turn to warlords and other strongmen who claim ethnic affiliation and solidarity with them and offering them a relative measure of security when the state itself is crumbling.<sup>26</sup>

States that have failed also exhibit flawed institutions. Generally only the institution of the executive functions since the legislative branch is rubber-stamping machine, if it exists at all. The bureaucracy has lost much of its luster and is heavily involved in corrupt activities. For example, during the Taliban regime, state bureaucracy had come to a standstill because it was gutted of all bureaucrats that belonged to rival ethnic groups.<sup>27</sup> Government offices worked only four hours per day despite the country facing severe political and economic crises where millions suffered from extreme poverty and thousands died of malnutrition.<sup>28</sup> The armed forces of failed states, while maintaining some integrity, are often politicized. A failed state also lacks effective educational and health systems. Teachers, physicians, nurses are paid late or not at all, while absenteeism increases. Textbooks and medicines become scarce. Citizens, especially rural parents, students, and patients slowly realize that the state has abandoned them to their own devices and to the forces of nature. Literacy rates fall, infant mortality rises, and an already poor citizenry has been further impoverished, according to Rotberg.<sup>29</sup>

Afghanistan during the Taliban regime displayed most of the indicators for failed states put forward by Rotberg and FP. For example, the Taliban regime severely restricted access to

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<sup>26</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 6–10.; Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden and American University in Cairo, *Fragile Peace*, 6–10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-9.

<sup>28</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 7–9.

education by allowing only religious schools to become the main source of education. By closing down hundreds of schools, about three million school-aged children were denied education. A UNICEF report from December 1998 described the education system as “in a state of total collapse with nine in ten girls and two in three boys not enrolled in school.”<sup>30</sup> The Taliban government possessed neither the capacity nor the willingness to provide any governance even to the neediest citizens. The government’s “official” revenue was derived mostly from drug’s income with the Taliban leader running the war against his domestic opponents from his tin trunk stuffed full of money, which he kept under his bed.<sup>31</sup> According to UN estimates some 3.8 million Afghans were living under close to famine conditions.<sup>32</sup> Over 50 percent of its 1.2 million people in Kabul alone received some form of aid from Western donor agencies.<sup>33</sup>

The healthcare system was neglected and dilapidated under the Taliban and Afghanistan boasted the highest infant mortality rates in the world. Only 29 percent of the population had access to health care services and 12 percent had access to safe water compared to 80 percent and 70 percent respectively in other developing countries.<sup>34</sup> Rashid writes, “Children die of simple preventable diseases like measles and diarrhea because there are no health facilities and clean water.”<sup>35</sup> While the Taliban had succeeded to consolidate their rule over most of

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<sup>30</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 108.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>32</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 198.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Rashid, *Taliban*, 127

<sup>34</sup> Tan Ee Lyn “Afghan Medical College Struggles to Rise from the Ashes,” *Reuters*, May 6, 2008. <http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSISL1059520080506>.

<sup>35</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 107.

Afghanistan, the public essentially ceased to expect any other public goods from the Taliban government.<sup>36</sup> Taliban government's disposition toward the provision of public goods was consistent with Rotberg's assertion that, "A failed state is a polity that is no longer able or willing to perform the fundamental jobs of a nation-state in the modern world."<sup>37</sup>

A nation-state also fails when it loses legitimacy, groups within its borders seek autonomy and its rulers are perceived to be working for themselves and their kin and not for the state undermining the overall legitimacy of the state.<sup>38</sup> Taliban's purge of state bureaucracy by replacing all government employees that belonged to ethnic minorities with fellow Pashtuns gave non-Pashtuns, forming over half the population, the perception that the state had been taken over by one ethnic group. This indicator is also consistent with other failed states when the population increasingly conceives the state to be owned by an exclusive class or group, and when other groups are pushed aside. Lack of political goods, local representation and brutal force made the Taliban government appear as an occupying force, rather than administrators trying to win hearts and minds.<sup>39</sup> The Taliban government's posture was consistent with another indicator for a failed state in which the social contract that binds inhabitants to an overarching polity becomes breached and the majority of citizens stop trusting the state. Citizens of a failed state tend to rely on community loyalties as their main recourse in times of insecurity and monopolization of the state. Although, given the fragmented nature of Afghan society, clan and tribal loyalties always featured prominently, they were intensified further by the ever deepening

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 125, 101–102.

<sup>37</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>39</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 101–102.

socio-political fragmentation over the two decades. Afghan citizens transferred their allegiances to clan and group leaders, some of whom became strongmen and warlords.<sup>40</sup> This underscores the increasing prevalence and influence of strongmen and warlords during the past two decades in Afghanistan.

### **Collapsed State or Law of the Jungle**

A collapsed state is a rare and extreme version of a failed state where political goods are obtained through private or ad hoc means. While security is equated with the rule of the strong, there is a vacuum of authority in a collapsed state. As Rotberg asserts, “There is dark energy, but the forces of entropy have overwhelmed the radiance that hitherto provided some semblance of order and other vital political goods to the inhabitants (no longer the citizens) embraced by language or ethnic affinities or borders.” Rotberg’s indicators of a collapsed state are consistent with the breakdown of authority under the Mujahedin rule, giving rise to sub-state actors.<sup>41</sup>

Competing Mujahidin groups were holding provincial centers and large cities throughout Afghanistan where strongmen did not obey the central government and consolidated their own influence.<sup>42 43</sup> These warlords or sub-state actors<sup>42</sup> gained control over regions and sub-regions within what was a nation-state. Afghan strongmen built up their own local security apparatuses and mechanisms, sanctioned markets and other trading arrangements, and even established an attenuated form of international relations. As Rotberg and FP point out a collapsed state by

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<sup>40</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

<sup>42</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 183.

definition is illegitimate and unrecognized, warlords can assume the trappings of a new quasi state.<sup>44</sup>

Consistent with the indicators of a collapsed state, during the Mujahedin rule, General Rashid Dostum, a strongman in the north, had created his own fiefdom in northern Afghanistan. He engaged in trade and commerce with the country's northern neighbors, particularly Uzbekistan. Ismail Khan, another strongman controlled four provinces in western Afghanistan and enjoyed close political, military and trade relations with Iran. Warlords in southern Afghanistan seized homes and farms, forcing their occupants out and handing them over to their ethnic and political affiliates. Local strongmen also traumatized the population by kidnapping young girls and boys for their sexual pleasure and robbing merchants in the bazaars and set up numerous road blocks extort money for safe passage.<sup>45</sup>

The Afghan state during the Mujahedin rule was hardly a state because it had virtually no income and thousands of armed men roamed the streets of the capital looting, fighting, and sometimes raping, asserts Rubin. Without tax revenue or foreign aid, the government had no funds to provide any political goods to its population. The Mujahedin government paid the disparate groups that constituted its armed forces by distributing freshly printed banknotes that were fast losing their value due to hyper-inflation.<sup>46</sup> According to Goodson Afghanistan under the Mujahedin government was “characterized by fragmentation and warlordism.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 9–10.; Anonymous, Foreign Policy “The Failed States Index.”

<sup>45</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 21–22.

<sup>46</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 272.

<sup>47</sup> Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, 75.

**Table 1: Foreign Policy Magazine’s Indicators of State Failure**

The index's ranking is based on economic, social and political indicators that assess a state’s vulnerability to collapse and conflict.<sup>48</sup>

<b>Economic</b>	Sharp and/or severe economic decline: measured by a progressive economic decline of the society as a whole (using: per capita income, GNP, debt, child mortality rates, poverty levels, business failures.) A sudden drop in commodity prices, trade revenue, foreign investment or debt payments. Collapse or devaluation of the national currency and a growth of hidden economies, including the drug trade, smuggling, and capital flight. Failure of the state to pay salaries of government employees and armed forces or to meet other financial obligations to its citizens, such as pension payments. Emergence of rival militias, guerilla forces or private armies in an armed struggle or protracted violent campaigns against state security forces. Intervention of other states or external factors: military or Paramilitary engagement in the internal affairs of the state at risk by outside armies, states, identity groups or entities that affect the internal balance of power or resolution of the conflict. Intervention by donors, especially if there is a tendency towards over-dependence on foreign aid or peacekeeping missions. <sup>49</sup>
<b>Political</b>	Progressive deterioration of public services: a disappearance of basic state functions that serve the people, including failure to protect citizens from terrorism and violence and to provide essential services, such as health, education, sanitation, public transportation. Use of state apparatus for agencies that serve the ruling elites, such as the security forces, presidential staff, central bank, diplomatic service, customs and collection agencies. <sup>50</sup>
<b>Social</b>	Massive movement of refugees and internally displaced peoples: forced uprooting of large communities as a result of random or targeted violence and/or repression, causing food shortages, disease, lack of clean water, land competition, and turmoil that can spiral into larger humanitarian and security problems, both within and between countries. <sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “The Failed States Index,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 149 (July 1, 2005): 56–65.

<sup>49</sup> “The Failed States Index,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 161 (July 1, 2007): 54–63.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

**Table 2: Rotberg’s Phases of State Decay and Manifestation of State Failure in Afghanistan**

<p><b>Afghanistan</b> Monarchy, followed by Republic of Afghanistan 1919-1978</p>	<p><b>Weak State</b></p>	<p>The state presents a mixed profile, fulfilling expectations in some areas and performing poorly in others. The state harbors ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other inter-communal tensions that have not yet become overtly violent. The state’s ability to provide adequate measures of other political goods is diminished or diminishing. Physical infrastructural networks have deteriorated. GDP per capita and other critical economic indicators have fallen or are falling, sometimes dramatically; levels of venal corruption are high and escalating.<sup>52</sup></p>
<p><b>Afghanistan</b> Democratic Republic of Afghanistan 1978-1992</p> <p>Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan 1996-2001</p>	<p><b>Failed State</b></p>	<p>Much of the violence is directed against the existing government or regime. There are civil wars that usually stem from or have roots in ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other inter-communal enmity. The state cannot control its borders or lose authority over sections of territory where the official power is often limited to a capital city and one or more ethnically specific zones. The state is unable to establish an atmosphere of security nationwide and often struggles to project power and official authority. Limited quantities of essential political goods are provided where citizens would turn to warlords and other non-state actors their role as the preferred suppliers of political goods.<sup>53</sup></p>
<p><b>Afghanistan</b> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 1992-1996</p>	<p><b>Collapsed State</b></p>	<p>A rare and extreme version of a failed state. Political goods are obtained through private or ad hoc means. Security is equated with the rule of the strong and a vacuum of authority exists. It is a mere geographical expression, a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen. Sub-state actors take over when the prime polity disappears.<sup>54</sup></p>

<sup>52</sup> Robert Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 1–4.; Ibid, 4–9

<sup>53</sup> Afghanistan has ranked in the top ten on the Failed States Index since 2006; one year after the Index was published for the first time. In 2005, Afghanistan was ranked eleventh on the Failed States Index. While a lower score indicates good performance, Afghanistan’s cumulative score for social, political and economic indicators was 106 in 2012 compared to Finland’s score of 20 and Egypt’s score of 90.4. Afghanistan’s best performance was in 2005 with a score of 99 while its worst performance was in 2009 with a total score of 109.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 9-12

## Human Agency and State Failure

Designations of state failure are rather dynamic than static. Lebanon, Nigeria, and Tajikistan are countries that have recovered from being a collapsed state and are now weak, underlining the fluidity of state failure. A state's movement forward to weakness and backward into collapse remains always possible. As this chapter demonstrates, while there are a number of factors that contribute to state failure, the role of human agency cannot be ignored. This is also illustrated in the example of some African nations. Some despotic African leaders extracted all their countries' resources only to enrich themselves and their kin, forcing their weak states to move toward failure. For example, Zaire under Mobuto and Zimbabwe under Mugabe are good examples of this phenomenon. Mobuto used the wealth of Zaire to stash hundreds of millions of dollars in his personal bank accounts and hardly devoted any resources toward uplifting his people, improving their welfare, building infrastructures, or even providing more than rudimentary amounts of human security. President Mugabe, on the other hand, personally led Zimbabwe from strength to the verge of failure. His dictatorial and corrupt rule bled the resources of the state into his own pockets, squandering foreign exchange, discouraging domestic and international investment and driving his country to the very brink of starvation.<sup>55</sup>

In the case of Afghanistan, the role of human agency in fueling the conflict was particularly paramount during the civil war in the mid-1990s. Hekmatyar, Rabbani and other warlords tried to prevent Afghans other than their own ethnic group from sharing the perquisites of governance.<sup>56</sup> Their narrowly focused, self-enriching decisions moved the state from failure to collapse and gave rise to the puritanical and brutal Taliban regime. Taliban's policy of harboring

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<sup>55</sup>Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 21–22.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.



international terrorists on Afghan soil completed Afghanistan's transformation from a collapsed state to a "rogue" state. The country was condemned and isolated as a pariah state by the international community for brutalizing its own population, especially ethnic minorities and women, and harboring international terrorist networks such as al-Qaida.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The experience of the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan clearly demonstrates that unless there is a close connection between the state and deep sources of individual and collective identities such as kin, tribe, and community; swift modernization reforms despite external support, will face insurmountable difficulties in garnering adequate support and legitimacy from society. Indeed, confrontation between the state and society is likely to deepen socio-political fragmentation and result in violent conflict. The failure of the Afghan state over the past two decades can be traced to the victory of Soviet-supported Afghan leftist coup in 1978. Though, the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan provided an array of political goods including relative monopoly on the use of force, a certain level of security, education and healthcare to a large segment of the population, it had to fight an ever growing insurgency.

The insurgency against the state was in large part a backlash from traditionalists over state attempts to assert its predominance through rapid social and political reforms. The state, in its attempt to crush armed opposition resorted to violence and suppression. It nearly destroyed the socio-economic fabric of Afghanistan by killing a large number of its citizens and forcing an even greater number into exile. Although, the state appeared relatively strong from the outside, it gradually lost much of its legitimacy with the population, becoming vulnerable to more

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<sup>57</sup> Powell, "The Taliban in Afghanistan."; William Maley and Wolfgang Dans Peckgruber, "Taliban Toxin," *The World Today* 65, no. 6 (June 1, 2009): 7.; Mueller, "Afghanistan."

rebellions and teetering on the edge of failure. After clinging onto power for over a decade, the cutoff in Soviet aid, finally forced the regime to succumb to economic and military pressures, and transfer power to the Mujahedin groups.

According to Rotberg's and FP's indicators, while the Afghan state under the Soviet-backed regime appeared to be failing, the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan under the Mujahedin led to state collapse. Lack of socio-political cohesion and persistent fighting among the warring Mujahedin groups left the central government too weak to assert its authority outside the capital. Constant shelling of the capital city by rival factions, lack of revenue, and the increasing dominance of local and regional strongmen made it impossible for the state to provide any political goods or establish its monopoly on the use of force.<sup>58</sup>

Under Mujahedin rule, warlord militia groups enjoyed a free reign to perpetuate violence and did not discriminate between combatants and noncombatants. From 1992 through 1994, they killed between 40,000 to 50,000 civilians in the course of fighting in an around Kabul alone. The state practically ceased to function and citizens were left to fend for themselves. Lawlessness, chaos, and warlordism prevailed until the emergence of the Taliban in 1996. The former UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi described the situation in Afghanistan under Mujahedin rule as "a failed state which looks like an infected wound. You don't even know where to start cleaning it."<sup>59</sup>

Socio-political fragmentation was deepened as complex and delicate relationships of power and authority built up over centuries had completely broken down and there was no one single leader with enough legitimacy to reunite the warring factions. The dilapidation of state

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<sup>58</sup> Shahrani, "War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan."

<sup>59</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 207.

gave way to kinship-tribal based and territorial identities, diminishing an already weak national identity. Moreover, Afghanistan's tribal hierarchy that once mediated conflicts was weakened by war and the migration of educated elites resulted in the lack of a political class that could help reach consensus. Consistent with FP's social indicators of a failed state, a massive number of Afghans had become refugees due to violence and repression.<sup>60</sup> <sup>61</sup> Moreover, consistent with conditions in a collapsed state, all warring factions during the Mujahedin rule enjoyed relatively equal strength and waged bloody battles against one another in order to advance their ethnic and political interests, plunging Afghanistan into political chaos and disorder.

These bleak conditions gave rise to the puritanical Taliban that reclaimed the state's monopoly on the use of force in most of Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the only semblance of state under the Taliban would continue to remain their monopoly on the use of brutal force until their ouster in 2001. Taliban leaders as former refugees in Pakistani religious schools engendered their own narrow interpretation of Islam with little regard for Afghanistan's culture or history. The Taliban after assuming power refused to establish a state structure and discriminated against ethnic minorities by removing them from positions of authority. As Ghani points out, "Historically, despite the seeming dominance of the Pashtuns, the actual process of state-building entailed the participation of the elite of all ethnic groups and a prominent role played by non-Pashtuns in both the bureaucracy and the military."<sup>62</sup> He adds that the Taliban were bucking the entire trend of Afghan history because they didn't understand it.

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<sup>60</sup> Altaf Hussain Rathore, "Injuries during Afghanistan Civil War," *The Professional Medical Journal* 1, no. 1 (October 10, 1994): 38–41.

<sup>61</sup> Mueller, "Afghanistan."

<sup>62</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 212.

Nevertheless, Taliban's embodiment of a harsh religious state and their Pashtun tribal ethos enabled the group to prevail not only against the secular and modernizing currents in Afghan society but also against adherents of mainstream Islam who called for the restructuring of government and society in the context of the contemporary world.<sup>63</sup> Many Afghans found it difficult to accept the Taliban rule because the state was characterized by its brutality and heavy-handed approach toward society in general and non-Pashtuns in particular. In line with Rotberg's and FP's indicators, the government's provision of security to residents living in almost all of Afghanistan, however, shifted the country from a collapsed state under Mujahedin rule to a failed state under Taliban regime. Despite its monopoly on the use of force and control of 90 percent of the Afghan territory, the Taliban government lacked organizations, and other mechanisms that reflected a certain level of popular participation.<sup>64</sup> The absence of almost all attributes of a functioning state also inhibited the Taliban to pursue a coherent foreign policy. Hence, the only objective of the Taliban government's haphazard foreign policy was to gain international recognition in order to establish its legitimacy among the Afghan public.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to Realism's claim that the state's primary objective is to conduct foreign policy and that domestic politics play a supplementary role for sustaining the state's goals on the international arena, failed states are too occupied by domestic woes to pursue a coherent foreign policy. This is best illustrated by the foreign policies of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the interim Iraqi authority after the ouster of the Saddam Hussein government.

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<sup>63</sup> Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 195.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 212–213.

<sup>65</sup> William Maley, *The Foreign Policy of the Taliban*, Muslim Politics Project (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), 7–8.

In light of the dilapidated nature of the Afghan state under the Taliban regime, the Afghan state lacked almost all resources and capacities required for the formulation and implementation of a coherent foreign policy. Thus, the government's foreign policy was limited to gaining international recognition in order to compensate for its deficiencies and dwindling legitimacy in Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban government's best efforts, however, international recognition eluded them until their ouster in 2001. They were recognized only by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Pakistan as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.<sup>66</sup> As Maley asserts, "The Taliban have not produced any comprehensive foreign policy manifesto; and foreign policy attitudes and initiatives are often to be detected only from radio broadcasts, or from letters sent to international agencies such as the UN. To speak of a Taliban 'foreign policy establishment' would imply an absurdly greater degree of organizational coherence than the movement manifests."<sup>67</sup>

The case of Iraq is similar to Afghanistan and other failed states in that it illustrates the constraints failed states face in pursuing a coherent foreign policy. In the wake of Saddam Hussein government's ouster from power and the occupation of Iraq by a multinational force, the Iraqi government faced a multitude of challenges including the loss of its sovereignty, a dilapidated infrastructure, sectarian tensions and a formidable insurgency. In short, Iraq was a failed state with the survival of the state hanging in the balance, severely limiting its ability to formulate a coherent foreign policy. The sudden collapse of the Iraqi state under Saddam Hussein had created a situation where forces of all stripes, political, sectarian and tribal were

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Krautheimer, "Taliban," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (January 5, 2002): 09.A.; Anwar Faruqi, "Harsh Taliban Rule Settles on Afghanistan Capital," *Austin American Statesman* (October 5, 1996): A.9.

<sup>67</sup> Maley, *The Foreign Policy of the Taliban*, 8.

determined to exploit it for their own agendas. Soffar asserts that since Iraq was still reeling from the collapse of its state institutions, especially its security apparatus, it had no choice but to rely on the occupying multinational force to ensure the state's survival against mainly domestic threats. In light of these challenges, Iraq's foreign policy objectives were quite limited in scope and centered on two goals only, namely sovereignty and economic construction. In the absence of real power and sovereignty, the government of Iraq was seeking to use international diplomacy to gradually reclaim its sovereignty and bolster its legitimacy among those citizens who considered the state to be a creation of the invading foreign forces. Soffar notes, "That foreign policy is devised as a tool for the creation, rather than a manifestation of sovereignty can be understood from the foreign minister's instrumentalization of the concepts of international legitimacy and internal legitimacy."<sup>68</sup>

The interim government of Iraq through international legitimacy hoped to create internal legitimacy for the interim government in the minds of the Iraqi public, particularly those Iraqis who had decided to fight the government under the pretext of resisting the occupation of their country and a puppet Iraqi government. Soffar contends that it was in this fashion that diplomacy became vital in bestowing sovereignty and legitimacy on the new government of Iraq. The Iraqi government's second foreign policy objective, economic reconstruction, sought to build the government's real legitimacy after its symbolic projection through international recognition. Based on the Iraqi government's calculation, the provision of basic services and social welfare could raise public confidence in the government and bolster its legitimacy, something it desperately needed to consolidate its position and establish its predominance among other forces competing for social control. Despite its wealth, long years of economic sanctions

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<sup>68</sup> Korany and Dessouki, *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, 224.

and mismanagement had devastated Iraq's economy and infrastructure. Iraq lagged behind even in vital sectors such as gas and oil and suffered from brain drain of its technical experts.<sup>69</sup>

The examples of Afghanistan and Iraq elucidate that failed states are generally too inundated by domestic challenges to pursue or even formulate coherent foreign policy objectives. In the absence of real power, failed states often use foreign policy only as a tool for gaining domestic legitimacy. As Saffar asserts, "With no sword of its own, the government in Iraq is left only with the word to build the cosmion; hence the indispensability of foreign policy for the survival of the Iraqi state."<sup>70</sup>

In summary, Afghanistan's recent history demonstrates that while weak states can avoid failure by pursuing policies of non-confrontation with their highly fragmented societies, state attempts to establish its predominance through swift reforms will trigger a strong backlash from traditionalists.<sup>71</sup> The traditional society, wishing to maintain its dominance, fiercely resisted any encroachment from the state. The Soviet-backed government's failure to modernize the Afghan society, however, was not unprecedented as previous state efforts had met a similar fate, failing to broaden loyalty from clan-based or tribal networks to a concept of statehood.<sup>72</sup> This underscores the inherent domestic constraints to building viable states in fragmented societies and their vulnerability to failure as socio-political fragmentation deepens.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 225–226.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>71</sup> Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 655–671.

<sup>72</sup> Shahrani, "Afghanistan Can Learn From Its Past."

## Prospects for Building a Viable State in Afghanistan

The failure of the Afghan state elucidates that upending a highly delicate balance of power between a weak state and a highly fragmented, web-like society can intensify the struggle for social control, lead to conflict and ultimately threaten the integrity of the state. State strength in an environment of conflict is largely dependent on its ability to exercise social control. The more currency the state possesses, that is compliance, participation and legitimation, the higher its level of social control to achieve state goals. Higher levels of social control allow the state to gain autonomy from other social groups by setting rules of the society, and carrying on with state goals.<sup>73</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter II, state capacity and particularly its ability to pursue state goals is directly related to the structure of its society. Migdal asserts, “The ineffectiveness of state leaders who have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance has stemmed from the nature of the societies they have confronted, from the resistance posed by chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants, clan leaders, and other strongmen through various social organizations.”<sup>74</sup>

The struggle for social control is even more pronounced in non-Western societies where the capabilities of the state cannot be understood without first gaining a good understanding of the state’s social structure. Fragile countries such as Afghanistan have faced significant challenges in establishing the predominance of the state because many structures conflict with one another over how social life should be ordered. In countries where social control is highly fragmented, the society’s influence on the state is more apparent. Given the Afghan state’s limited capacity and structural support, a significant level of social control has remained with regional strongmen and tribal leaders. Thus, as long as these strongmen continue to offer viable

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<sup>73</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



strategies for survival to members of their ethnic and tribal groups, the Afghan is likely to garner minimal support since there is little motivation for the population to support the state.<sup>75</sup>

Boege et al findings suggest that while the process of state formation in Western societies were undertaken over a period of centuries, this model was delivered relatively swiftly to many parts of the non-Western world since decolonization era. Consequently, the Weberian model of nation-state lacks roots in recipient societies such as Afghanistan. These findings also indicate that the delivery of the Weberian model was not accompanied by the development of the economic, political, social and cultural structures and capacities that had provided the basis and framework for creating an efficient and functional political order during European states' evolution. In conflicted societies such as Afghanistan, concepts such as "citizen" and "state" do not generate cultural resonance, as most people are relatively disconnected from the state, neither expecting much from state institutions nor willing to fulfill obligations toward them. Understanding what constitutes true political order in fragile regions, therefore, becomes even more relevant as attempts to transpose a Weberian nation-state model have faced significant challenges in many non-Western societies.<sup>76</sup>

British funding for the creation of a nation-state model in Afghanistan in the 1800s, followed by sizeable American and Soviet assistance in the 1950s and 1960s, and the subsequent Soviet patronage of the Afghan regime in the 1970s and 1980s, suggest that building of a relatively functional, albeit weak state in Afghanistan remains heavily dependent on rentier income in the form of foreign assistance. The absence of such support coupled with deepening

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 33–34, 210.

<sup>76</sup> Boege, "Peacebuilding and State Formation in Post-Conflict Bougainville."; Boege, "How to Maintain Peace and Security in a Post-conflict Hybrid Political Order – the Case of Bougainville.;" Brown, Clements, and Boege, "Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States."

social and political fragmentation, as illustrated during the two decades of the Afghan conflict, leaves the state vulnerable to failure and even collapse.

Nevertheless, as the Soviet patronage in the 1980s illustrates, funding by foreign benefactors alone will not be enough to help support the creation of a viable state. Any such foreign assistance ought to be coupled with state efforts to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the emergent and existing local and regional self-governing communities, and pay particular attention to their legitimate fears and concerns regarding their ties to the national governance structures. As Migdal and Salame point out, strong societies such as Afghanistan are “not putty to be modeled by states with sufficient technical resources, managerial abilities and committed personnel”.<sup>77</sup> The strength of shared memories and beliefs within various subunits such as the clans, tribes, linguistic groups, and ethnic groups puts forward an image for societies in many developing countries that are quite different from the centralized structures found in advanced countries.<sup>78</sup>

Further complicating the prospects of building a relatively viable state in Afghanistan is what Nordlinger calls the necessity of rapidly forming a national identity before the central government has come into existence as it may alleviate the strains and conflicts that dwarf the development of a viable state. As a deeply tribal and fragmented society, it remains highly unlikely that a strong Afghan national identity can be rapidly formed. This process would involve a fundamental alteration in the loyalties of the people whose only attachment was previously given to sub-national groups. In the absence of national identity, feelings of ethnic oppression and degradation can only be compounded during the process of institutionalization as

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<sup>77</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 35–37.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

seen during King Amanullah Khan's reign and the Soviet-backed government's efforts to modernize the society. The institutionalization process signaled the presence and predominance of the incumbents as perceived by traditional communities, prompting them to resist.<sup>79</sup>

The evidence presented in this paper strongly suggests that the Afghan state, despite assistance from foreign benefactors, will probably continue to remain weak and embody a system of government that is based more on kinship and patronage befitting a tribal society rather than a rational-legal system based on the Weberian nation-state model. A weak Afghan state is likely to compete for social control within its web-like society that hosts a mélange of fairly autonomous social organizations, underlying the fractionalization between developing nations and elsewhere.<sup>80</sup> Realism's focus on the state's outward behavior largely ignores the state's origins and composition. The formation of a legitimate state presupposes that citizens regard the state to serve as the ultimate political authority. However, as the failure of the Afghan state has demonstrated, the state for more than two decades was characterized by socio-political fragmentation and had lost its overarching authority and legitimacy. This underlines the point that not all states are deeply rooted in the social, cultural and political identity of the nation or enjoy the same level of legitimacy, a key ingredient for establishing a viable state.<sup>81</sup>

The Afghan state will continue to face significant hurdles in asserting its dominance when the very model it represents is viewed with suspicion.<sup>82</sup> As the failure of the Afghan state illustrates, while the Realist theory's emphasis on the centrality of state may be sufficient in

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<sup>79</sup> Nordlinger, *Politics and Society*, 337.

<sup>80</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 39.

<sup>81</sup> Neack, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 192.

<sup>82</sup> Shahrani, "War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan."

explaining state behavior in homogenous, stable, and developed nations, it's not adequate in delineating the behavior of non-Western, weak states that remain vulnerable to failure with considerable impact on international relations.

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