ABDUL RASUL SAYYAF: HIS PATH TO RADICAL ISLAM, RISE TO POWER, AND SIGNIFICANCE IN CURRENT AND FUTURE AFGHAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a name that few Westerners have heard, could potentially be one of the larger threats to a sustained peace in Afghanistan. Many consider the Afghan coalition government under President Hamid Karzai as a puppet state, with the US government pulling the strings after expelling the Taliban. However, the new Afghan government has increasingly come into conflict with US policies, and Karzai is progressively more vocal about his disapproval of the US role in the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It now appears that Karzai has gone from a puppet of the US government to a puppet of the most powerful Afghan warlords, including Sayyaf.

Sayyaf’s influence over Karzai and the Afghan government is alarming, particularly considering Sayyaf’s longtime involvement in extremist Islamist movements. While attending al-Azhar University, Cairo, he befriended many extremist Muslims, and together they formed the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood – a group known for extremist beliefs and actions. As a professor at Shariat University, Kabul, Sayyaf spread radical Islamic beliefs to his students. After a failed coup against then Afghan President Daoud Khan, Sayyaf fled to Pakistan. He returned to Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion and became one of the Peshawar Seven – the seven most powerful warlords in Afghanistan who led the seven main mujahidin groups against the Soviets. During this period, Sayyaf associated with men who would eventually become the most notorious terrorists in the world such as Osama bin Laden and Khalid Sheik Mohammad. He also established jihadist training camps, (which later became al-Qaeda training camps) in which Sayyaf trained many future Islamic terrorists. The training camps trained and indoctrinated terrorists who then formed their own terrorist groups that are responsible for some of the most heinous terrorist attacks in the past two decades.

The Afghan victory over the Soviets was followed by years of civil war in which most warlords coalesced behind the Taliban or the Northern Alliance. Ironically, Sayyaf sided with Ahmed Shah Massoud and the Northern Alliance despite the fact that the Northern Alliance was a secular movement, while the Taliban’s ideals were similar to Sayyaf’s extremist beliefs. The Afghan Civil War ended with Massoud’s assassination (days before 9/11) with Sayyaf being widely accused of planning the assassination.

Following 9/11 and the defeat of the Taliban, US forces set up a coalition government headed by Karzai. Sayyaf joined this coalition government, and as a powerful warlord he quickly rose to become one of the most powerful men in the government. While the United States pushes Karzai from one side, Sayyaf pushes Karzai from the other side. Meantime, Sayyaf has pressed through controversial laws, such as the pardoning of all war criminals from the Afghan Civil War, in which Sayyaf was accused as one of the most notorious. His
hard-line stance is a major threat to US attempts to set up a democratic, pro-US government. Sayyaf will continue to threaten the United States, and peace and unity in Afghanistan. The US promise to begin pulling out its troops from Afghanistan in the near future will put Sayyaf in a position to become even more powerful in carrying out his extremist Islamist agenda.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf ¹ (as seen in Figure 1) is one of the most important men in Afghanistan. His era of influence began during his participation in forming the Afghan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and continues today in Afghanistan’s Wolesi Jirga (the more powerful of the two houses of Afghanistan’s new parliament). This thesis chronicles Sayyaf’s life, beginning with his early years, through his education, and his path to extremism.

Sayyaf’s affiliation with the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood eventually led Sayyaf and other Afghan Muslim Brotherhood members to an assassination attempt on former Afghanistan president Mohammad Daoud Khan. After the failed coup, Sayyaf and his cohorts were subsequently exiled to Pakistan where they set up a base of operations to wage a guerilla war against the Soviet army during the Afghan-Soviet Union. Sayyaf established a network of extremist Islamic jihadist training camps in Pakistan, a virtual breeding ground for some of the worst Islamic terrorists the world has ever seen.

Beginning in 1989, a civil war was fought in Afghanistan following the departure of the Soviet Army. Ten years of war against the Soviets was followed by seven more years of internal strife, in which the Taliban emerged victorious. During that period, Sayyaf was resigned to fighting a guerilla war alongside Ahmed Shah Massoud, another Afghan Muslim Brotherhood member. However, after the United States invaded Afghanistan following the al-Qaida terrorist attacks, Sayyaf managed to parlay his immense power, which was growing ever since his years as a high-ranking member of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood.

Sayyaf is currently a high-ranking member within the newly formed Afghan government headed by President Hamid Karzai. Despite the fact that this new government is

¹ Abd-i-Rab Rasoul Sayyaf in Arabic is spelled (ذباع رابر لوسورل فافيمس) which has led to various spellings of his name when translated into English (i.e. Abdul Rabb Rasoul Sayyaf, Abdul Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf, Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf, Abdool Rasool Sayyaf, Abdul Rabb Rasool Sayyaf …etc.) and is also known as Usted Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Usted meaning professor in Arabic. For the purpose of this paper, he will be referred to by the most common spelling of his name: Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.
officially an ally of the United States, it should be treated with suspicion as long as men such as Sayyaf continue to hold major positions within its ranks and have a great deal of influence over its leader, Hamid Karzai.

This thesis is a biography of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf that places him into the context of Afghanistan’s history and shows how Sayyaf was able to rise to power and maintain his
power through Afghanistan’s ever changing political climate. This thesis also provides a brief political history of Afghanistan. To resolve any of the numerous problems that are currently plaguing Afghanistan, such as the insurgency, it is necessary to understand the historical events that led to the country’s current situation. Unfortunately, most military and government officials that are involved in the war in Afghanistan are not familiar with the military and political history of that nation. Ignorance is one of the most consequential enemies in the current war in Afghanistan.
CHAPTER 2

CULTURE, RELIGION, AND ETHNOLINGUISTIC GROUPS OF AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is unlike any nation in the world. This is made true through a combination of many factors. Every facet of Afghanistan is characterized by diversity except one; religion. Even in this factor Afghanistan is not completely uniform. The vast majority of Afghans are Muslim, although there remains a small number of Hindus and Sikhs (who trace their lineage to traders from India).² Among Afghanistan’s Muslim majority, there exists much discord. The majority of Afghans belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, although there exists a large number of Ja’fari Shi’ites (also known as Twelver Shi’ites) as a result of Afghanistan’s shared border with Shi’a Iran. Afghanistan also includes a minority of Isma’ili Shi’ites along with a few thousands Sikhs and Hindus (as a result of its shared history with India) and also contains several hundred Jews.³ Even within the two sects of Islam, there are differences in opinion of Quranic and legal interpretations. Each community contains a mullah, a religious leader who is responsible for teaching and interpreting the Quran, as well as performing religious ceremonies, weddings…etc.⁴ Along with a diversity of religion, Afghanistan is also home to a diverse collection of ethnic, linguistic, and tribal groups. The geography of Afghanistan, which is marked with mountains and rivers, has allowed communities to remain isolated from one another. This isolation helps the communities retain their diversity.⁵ There are over forty major ethnicities who speak over fifty languages or dialects. This is a result of the many mass migrations and invasions that Afghanistan has experienced over its long history by cultures such as the Persians, Macedonians, Arabs,


⁵ Ehsan M. Entezar, Afghanistan 101 (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2010), 20.
Turks, Mongols, British, and Russians. Many of these areas are inter-dispersed with various other ethnic and linguistic groups. Anthropologist Robert Canfield gives an example of cultural inter-dispersion in the town of Barman.

Some Hazaras [who are thought to have "Mongolian" features], especially those from the chiefly families, do not have clearly defined Mongoloid features. Instead, some have heavy beards and lack the typical Mongolian eye folds and high cheek bones. Conversely, some persons calling themselves 'Tajik' have rather strong Mongoloid features. I consequently doubt that the relationship between phenotype and ethnic identity is very close.7

It is important to note that Afghanistan comprises many ethnicities that speak many different languages and hold many different religious and political beliefs. Afghanistan is a complex nation. There is strong loyalty to one’s ethnicity, tribe, and clan, and most importantly, family. However, there are many examples of shifting loyalties when it serves one’s interest.

Figure 2 defines a general outline of Afghanistan’s ethno-linguistic diversity.8

While Figure 2 helps to visually show the etholinguistic diversity of Afghanistan, an article by the Kabul-based news agency Sabawoon goes a step further in providing more detail of the various etholinguistic groups.

Pashtuns (or Pashtoons) are the most numerous etholinguistic group in Afghanistan. They mainly speak the Pashtun language, one of Afghanistan’s two official languages. In Afghanistan, the Pashtuns are mainly located in the southern and eastern parts of the country, although as shown in Figure 2, they are also dispersed in the west and north. Pashtuns maintain a large presence in Pakistan, which is explained later in this thesis. The Pashtun people are divided into a number of clans; some are sedentary, while others are nomadic.

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Figure 2. Afghanistan’s ethno-linguistic groups. Source: “Map of Afghanistan’s Ethnicities.” National Geographic. Accessed August 17, 2011. 
The two most politically powerful clans are the Durranis and the Ghilzays, with the Durranis forming the heart of Afghanistan’s social and political elite.\(^9\)

The Tajiks are another large etholinguistic group in Afghanistan and are historically known for their occupations as farmers and artisans. The bulk of the Tajik people are located in the Kabul, Badakhshan, and Herat provinces. The Tajiks that reside on the plains live a mainly sedentary lifestyle, while those in the higher valley are prone to a more nomadic-type lifestyle. The Tajiks are unique because they are not divided into clear-cut tribal groups as are most of the other etholinguistic groups.\(^10\)

The Nuristanis and Hazaras both speak Dari, the other official language of Afghanistan. The Nuristanis reside in the Laghman, Nangarhar, and Konar provinces, while the Hazaras are found mainly in the central mountainous region of Hazarajat.\(^11\) The Hazaras comprise the bulk of Afghanistan’s Shi’ite minority and comprise nine percent of the Afghan population.\(^12\) In a predominantly Sunni country, the Hazaras face much discrimination, especially under the Taliban regime. Along with having a different set of religious beliefs, the Hazaras have a unique appearance from the rest of the Afghan ethnolinguistic groups. Hazaras are characterized by their Mongoloid appearance, which includes high cheekbones and a sparse amount of facial hair.\(^13\) As the populations of groups have expanded, many have opted to migrate to various other provinces in search of land and opportunity.\(^14\) There is a large contingent of Hazaras in the suburbs of Kabul, for example, which would later suffer the wrath of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.\(^15\)

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\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Ibid.


\(^13\) Ibid.

\(^14\) “Ethno-linguistic Groups.” *Sabawoon Online*.

The Aimaks are also located in the central mountainous region of Afghanistan, to the west of the Hazaras. The Aimaks are believed to have Turkic and/or Mongolian ancestry as a result of their Mongoloid appearance.\textsuperscript{16}

The Turkmens, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz are all located in the far north of the country, adjacent to their country of origin. The Turkmens and Kyrgyz follow a semi-nomadic lifestyle of herding livestock. The Uzbeks are mainly sedentary farmers.\textsuperscript{17}

Smaller ethnolinguistic groups exist that are not represented on Figure 2. Some of these groups speak Dravidian languages, such as the Brahuis, while others speak various forms of Semetic dialects. There also exists a small population of Jews in Afghanistan. The Jews mainly speak Dari, reserving Hebrew for religious ceremonies only.\textsuperscript{18}

Along with understanding the history of Afghanistan, it is important to understand the current political situation. This is much easier said than done. The more one researches into this topic, the more blurred the lines become. What is true in one province, town, or village may not be true in the next. For example an unnamed intelligence source recently back from Kandahar (who arrived back in May 2011 after a year-long tour) supported this by explaining that it is common for the Taliban to have complete control of a village or town, while an adjacent village is under the control of Afghan government/US coalition forces. As stated earlier, the geography of Afghanistan allows for the isolation that most towns and villages experience. One of the problems that plague decision makers in regard to the political and military strategy in Afghanistan is their tendency to generalize the situation. In essence, many decision makers are simplifying the makeup of Afghanistan’s tribal society, or worse, comparing it to the last war (in Iraq). It is a common maxim that generals are always fighting the previous war. This holds true across the board. Analysts that are attempting to compare Afghanistan’s tribal society with Iraq’s tribal society are coming up short. Analysts that are attempting to generalize the interworking of the tribal system in Afghanistan as a whole are also falling short of their mark. Afghanistan is a puzzle that has to be pieced together one province, one town, and one village at a time. Major William S. “Mac”

\textsuperscript{16} “Ethno-linguistic Groups.” Sabawoon Online.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
McCallister (a retired US Army officer with experience in “numerous special operations assignments specializing in civil-military, psychological and information operations, with focuses in Europe, Asia and the Middle East”\textsuperscript{19}), has devoted much time to studying counterinsurgency in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He has published many articles regarding tribal society and insurgencies, including the recent “\textit{COIN and Irregular Warfare in a Tribal Society},” which takes an in-depth look at how to combat an insurgency within the backdrop of Iraq’s tribal society. McCallister recognizes the complexity of the tribal societies of both countries. In an interview with Steven Pressfield, he sums up his empirical method of analyzing the various tribes in Afghanistan and the relationships that they hold with each other:

I apply the imperial-confederacy model to describe the social system’s behavior as follows: the operational environment is a mosaic of territories, each of which lies under the immediate authority of a local qawm or tribe. The fluctuations in the fortunes of each qawm or tribe inevitably impacts upon other local territories, whose patronage relationships or allegiances at any given time are largely dictated by events in the area.\textsuperscript{20}

Each qawm, specifically those consisting of Pashtun ethnicity, is governed by a “jirga,” which McCallister describes as an assembly of elders whose responsibility are to “discuss and resolve local disputes and make decisions about collective decisions about important social issues.”\textsuperscript{21} The globalsecurity.org website (an open source intelligence website founded by John Pike that focuses on information pertinent to military operations and homeland security) has a more complicated description for the term “qawm.” It describes a qawm in simple terms as the ethnicity and identity of a group, but claims that it is “not only defined by a common cultural or genetic group, but also by tribes, families, and geographic regions, or even occupations.”\textsuperscript{22} This is translated into the fact that the ways in which Afghans associate themselves is very complicated. A Pashtun and a Tajik can belong

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Ibid.
\item[22] “Society.” \textit{GlobalSecurity.org}.
\end{footnotes}
to the same qawn because they are both farmers in the same small village, or their families are intermarried. The point of this paper is not to delve into the complicated tribal society of Afghanistan, but to illustrate the point that Afghanistan’s tribal society is more complicated than it is often portrayed. By understanding the complicity of Afghanistan’s tribal society, one can more easily comprehend the shifting alliances and unlikely truces between warlords of different ethnicities, tribes, religions, and political beliefs.
CHAPTER 3
EARLY LIFE AND EVOLUTION INTO ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s exact date of birth cannot be confirmed, but it is believed that Sayyaf was born in 1946 in the town of Paghman. Paghman is located in the Paghman Valley, which is in the hills west of the city of Kabul and in the western sector of Afghanistan’s Kabul province. Sayyaf is a Pashtun by ethnicity and belongs to the Kharruti tribe, the same tribe that both Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (a powerful Afghan warlord) and Hafizullah Amin\(^\text{23}\) (the last president of Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion on December 27, 1979) belong. Religiously, Sayyaf subscribes to the Wahhabist sect of Islam, an ultra-conservative branch of the Hanbali school of Fiqh (literally: Islamic jurisprudence), the most conservative of the four schools of Sunni Islam. Little is known about Sayyaf’s early life, specifically his religious upbringing. It is unknown if his radical Islamic beliefs were cultivated by his father or a local imam, or if this came later with his attendance at Kabul or al-Azhar Universities. Sayyaf’s subscription to the Wahhabist school of thought later damaged his recruitment efforts during the war against the Soviets, as most Afghans follow the Hanifi school of thought,\(^\text{24}\) which is the oldest and most liberal of the four schools of Fiqh in Sunni Islam.

Little is known about Sayyaf’s early education, although it is quite possible that he either received his initial schooling at home or in a small religious school in Paghman. What is known is that Sayyaf earned a degree in religion from Kabul University and a master’s degree from the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo.\(^\text{25}\) It is likely that Sayyaf first

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made the acquaintance of Burhanuddin Rabbani (an ethnic Tajik) at Kabul University. Rabbani was a student at Kabul University from 1959-1963 and then took up the role of a professor from 1963-1966. It is plausible that if Sayyaf did not already hold extremist Islamic beliefs, then it was Rabbani who planted the seeds. As a professor, Rabbani likely held considerable influence over his students. In 1966, Rabbani entered Al-Azhar University, possibly in an attempt to gain more prestige and build on his reputation. It was at this time that Rabbani first developed ties with the Egyptian-based Muslim brotherhood. Rabbani achieved a master’s degree in Islamic philosophy and then became the first person to translate the works of Sayyid Qutb (the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) into Dari (one of Afghanistan’s two official languages, the other being Pashto). Because Sayyaf attended Al-Azhar University at the same time as Rabbani, it is likely that Rabbani introduced Sayyaf to the Muslim Brotherhood and helped to impart on him some of the Muslim Brotherhood’s radical beliefs. Rumors also circulate that Sayyaf was first introduced to Osama bin Laden at this time, although no declassified documents exist to confirm this theory. In 1969, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar founded the Afghan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Sayyaf was possibly one of their first recruits. However, some sources indicate that Sayyaf was a co-founder, along with Rabbani and Hekmatyar, rather than a recruit. In his book, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*, Dr. Caesar A. Farah states that the initial leaders of the Afghan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood were first Gholam Niyahi, then Burhanuddin Rabbani, as leader (amir), Sayyaf as deputy, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as secretary, who personally supervised the militant wing of the group. The Afghan Muslim Brotherhood was known for their extremist Islamic beliefs and for the group’s radical actions to impose their beliefs on others. For example, a common practice of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood was to throw acid in the faces of unveiled women.

Sayyaf was a relatively young man (approximately twenty-three years old) when the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood was formed. He was most likely in a stage in life when one’s beliefs are molded and formulated. Sayyaf was exposed to radical Islamic beliefs during his

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27 Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*.
years at al-Azhar University. The indoctrination into the extremist philosophy of Islam that he received during these years helped mold him into the man that he is today. To gain an understanding into the beliefs that Sayyaf subscribed to at this time, one must look at the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood. Zeid al-Norman, an American-based supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood with the title of Masul of the Executive Office (although originally founded in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has since expanded and now has branches in most, if not all, predominately Muslim countries as well as many Western nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States) outlined the Muslim Brotherhood’s goals during a lecture to an unknown audience. The transcription of that lecture was later used as evidence in a court case, as well as by the non-profit Nine Eleven Finding Answers Foundation (NEFA).

In his lecture, Zeid al-Norman claims that the Muslim Brotherhood has six primary goals and eight secondary goals as follows:

Primary goals:

1. Reinstatement of the caliphate and reunite the "Dar al-Islam". (literally “house of Islam”, also called Dar as-Salam or “house of peace” which is commonly used to refer to Islamic Countries or Countries in which Islam is the main religion as opposed to Dar al-Harb which means “house of war” or Dar al-Garb, “house of the West”. These refer to those countries that do not institute Sharia or Islamic law)

Note: Countries that do not fall under the category of Dar al-Islam, but have non-aggression treaties with Islamic Countries are considered Dar al-Ahd “house of truce” or Dar al-Sulh “house of treaty”. The United States is not considered as fitting this category, even by many moderate Muslims, as a result of its military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as its support of Israel.

2. Strengthening the internal structure

3. Administrative discipline

4. Recruitment and settlement of the Dawa'a (unable to translate, but from the text, Dawa’a appears to mean the Muslim Brotherhood’s specific form of Islamic beliefs)

5. Energizing the organizations work

6. Energizing political work fronts (e.g. in civil political organizations)

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Secondary goals:
1. Finance and Investment
2. Foreign relations
3. Reviving Woman's activity
4. Political awareness to the members of the Group
5. Securing the group (To find out if they are being monitored, and if, how they can get rid of them)
6. Dawa'ah (the lecture/speech of religion)
7. Media (influencing of and infiltration in the media)
8. Taking advantage of human potentials (e.g. infiltration in education, civil organizations)

Hassan al-Bana, the founder of the original branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928 stated its goals more simply, “Allah is our objective; the Quran is our constitution, the Prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations.”

Jihad is the Arabic word for struggle. The actual meaning of jihad is much different than the Western perspective that it is meant as a “holy war,” the Islamic version of the Crusades that the Christians waged during the Middle Ages. The Quran states that there are four ways to wage jihad: by the heart, the tongue, the hand, or the sword. Jihad of the heart, known as the greatest jihad, especially in Sufism, is an inner struggle to do good and abstain from evil. The Prophet Muhammad was asked by one of his followers, “What is the greatest jihad?” He replied, “It is the struggle against oneself.” Jihad of the tongue is a struggle to verbally defend the beliefs of Islam from the unbeliever. Jihad of the hand is similar to jihad of the tongue in its defense of Islam, the key being the use of non-violence.

30 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
Due to current events in the Middle East, specifically the various demonstrations/revolutions against the standing governments and the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood taking power (i.e., Egypt, Jordan, Libya, and Syria), Sayyaf’s connection with the Muslim Brotherhood is becoming increasingly important considering his powerful position within the Afghan government. In an interview conducted by the Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, Qazi Solaiman Hamid helps to grant insight into the history of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood and the direction in which it is moving today. Qazi Solaiman Hamid graduated from Kabul University after studying Islamic law. He then went on to serve in various high-ranking positions within the Afghan Supreme Court after the defeat of the Soviet Union. He also attempted to mediate between the various mujahidin (plural for mujahid, literally means “strugglers” or “people doing jihad” but has more commonly become known as “holy warriors”) groups in 1992 and 1995 in an attempt to achieve peace. Hamid is one of the most influential Islamic leaders in western Afghanistan. He is also a self-admitted member of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood. In the interview, Hamid explains the formation of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood. When it was first founded, the political center of Islam was Turkey, but Al-Azhar University in Cairo was still considered the “center of Islamic studies in the Muslim world.” In the 1960s, many Afghans went to study at Al-Azhar University, the religious center of Islam at the time. When they came back to Afghanistan, they brought with them many of the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood that they had learned in Egypt. Many of these former students then went on to become professors in Afghan universities. That allowed them to spread the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood

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36 Hassan al-Bana preached jihad of the sword: to wage war against all enemies of Islam. To die while waging jihad of the sword brings glory in the afterlife. The fact that Abdul Rasul Sayyaf subscribes to these extremist beliefs should be cause for great concern, especially considering the influence he has over Hamid Karzai and his “US friendly” government.


to a new generation of students. As previously stated, Sayyaf was one of these men. He took a position as a professor at Shariat University in Kabul upon his return to Afghanistan. By the time of the invasion of the Soviets, many of these men had established themselves in Afghanistan. When the reporter asked Hamid to clarify this point, he stated:

People like Musa Shafiq, Ustad Tavana, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Abdur Rab Rasul Sayyaf (alternate name for Abdul Rasul Sayyaf) are some of the main leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Afghanistan. Now back in Afghanistan, they started teaching in the university and established the Afghan branch of the movement – or, as they called it, The Afghanistan Muslim Youth Movement.\(^{38}\)

According to Afghan scholar Thomas Ruttig, the formation of many of the fundamentalist Islamist groups in Afghanistan began in 1957, as flocks of students attended lectures by Ghulam Muhammad Farhad, the dean of Sharia Faculty at Kabul University.\(^{39}\) Rutting claims that by 1969 a student movement called Jawanan-e Muslimin was founded by Abdul-Rahim Niazi, and that it was this movement that eventually transformed into Jamiat-e Islami (the Islamic Society).\(^{40}\) Ahmad Shayeq Qassem refutes this claim, and instead states that Jamiat-e Islami, along with its youth movement Nahzat-e Islami Jawanan-e Musulman-e Afghanistan (Afghan Muslim Youth Movement) were both founded in Kabul University as early as 1965.\(^{41}\) Regardless of the exact year in which the Jamiat-e Islami was formed, all sources agree that Sayyaf was either one of its founders or at least one of its first members.

Hamid then proceeds to explain the differences between the Afghan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian branch. The Afghan Muslim Brotherhood started out in the universities where many students joined its ranks. At this time, the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood was one of many groups trying to assert itself in the politically turbulent times of Mohammad Dauod Khan’s totalitarian regime that ruled Afghanistan from July 1973 to April 1978. The Afghan Muslim Brotherhood had to complete with other Islamist groups, as

\(^{38}\) Ibid.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{41}\) Ahmad Shayeq Qassem, Afghanistan’s Political Stability: A Dream Unrealized (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009), 63.
well as democratic, Marxist, and communist groups. These were tumultuous times during the birth of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood. President Khan greatly feared and mistrusted the Islamist groups in Afghanistan. According to Hamid, the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood did not only need to fear the government, but also other “powerful forces inside the country.”\footnote{Hamid, “The Muslim Brotherhood.”} However, Hamid does not specify who these forces were. He then goes on to claim that many members of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood, along with other Islamist groups, faced persecution. Leaders such as Eng. Habiburrahman, Musa Shafiq, and Ustad Niazi were put under surveillance. Others were prosecuted and some even executed. Many fled to Pakistan, such as Sayyaf, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Ahmed Shah Massoud, who fled after a failed coup against President Khan.\footnote{“Ustad Abdul Rasul Sayyaf,” GlobalSecurity.org.}
CHAPTER 4

REIGN OF MOHAMMAD DAOUD KHAN

The reign of Mohammad Daoud Khan was influential in shaping Abdul Rasul Sayyaf from a man of words into a man of action. If it was not for the tyrannical reign of Khan, Sayyaf may have remained a slightly obscure man known only for his extremist Islamist rhetoric. Instead, Sayyaf became known as a man of action who was willing to actively engage in jihad against anyone he saw as a threat to the survival and spread of his extremist version of Islam. Mohammad Daoud Khan was born into an illustrious and powerful family. His father, HRH Prince Mohammed Aziz Khan, served as a diplomat and Afghanistan’s ambassador to Germany. HRH Prince Mohammed Aziz Khan (not to be confused with Lt. Gen. Mohammed Aziz Khan, the former Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff of the Pakistani Army as well as an ardent supporter of some of Pakistan’s radical Islamic groups)\textsuperscript{44} was the older half-brother of King Mohammed Nadir Shah, who ruled as the king of Afghanistan from 1929 until he was assassinated in Berlin on November 3, 1933, in a revenge killing by a Kabul student.\textsuperscript{45} The assassination of his father, along with Afghanistan’s history of political assassinations, was likely to cause a degree of paranoia in Mohammed Daoud Khan, although this is pure speculation. Afghanistan has experienced numerous political assassinations in the twentieth century. Therefore, if this paranoia did exist within Khan, it would not be unwarranted. After the assassination of King Mohammad Nadir Shah, his nineteen year-old son, Mohammad Zahir Shah, took power and upheld the practice of nepotism.\textsuperscript{46} In 1934, Khan was given his first major position within the Afghan government when he was appointed the Governor of the Eastern Provinces. In 1935, Khan was then appointed as Governor of Kandahar. He served in this position until 1938 and then returned


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
to his previous post as Governor of the Eastern Provinces until 1939. Khan held a number of other important positions during his rise to Prime Minister in September 1953, which included promotion to the rank of Lieutenant General and Commander of the Kabul Army Corps (1939-1946), Minister of Defense (1946-1948), Ambassador to France (1948), and Minister of the Interior (1949-1951). In 1951, Khan was promoted to the rank of General and served as Commander of the Central Forces in Kabul until his appointment as Prime Minister.

During Khan’s reign as Prime Minister of Afghanistan from 1953 to 1963, the country saw the deterioration of relations between the Afghan and US governments and the strengthening of relations between Afghanistan and USSR. According to Dr. Walid Majid of the Institute for Afghan Studies, the policies of Khan could be summarized to support three main goals:

1. Economic modernization and development of Afghanistan.
2. Aggressive pursuit of the Pushtunistan (also spelled Pashtunistan) policy.
3. Strengthening and modernization of the Afghan armed forces.

These three goals put Afghanistan into conflict with America’s interests in the region. In particular, the Pashtunistan policy caused the most conflict. The Pashtunistan policy was directed at reconnecting ethnic Pashtuns who had been split up when the British government created the Durand Line, which separated Afghan and British India’s spheres of influence in the 1890s (see Figure 3 for location referred to as Pashtunistan). The boundary was chosen by the British for its defensive properties because much of the Durand Line is located in a mountainous area, which serves as a natural barrier. The disregard that the British showed to the Pashtun people when they created the boundary had lasting implications. The Durand

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48 Ibid.
Line was later set in stone with the creation of Pakistan in 1947, during which time it became the official border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Khan’s outspoken support for reuniting Pashtunistan could easily be interpreted as an intent to invade northern Pakistan, but at the same time non-Durrani Pashtuns in Afghanistan saw this as a power-play to dispel non-Durrani’s from government positions in Afghanistan and establish a government in which Durrani Pashtuns had a monopoly on the power.\(^{51}\) His goal of strengthening and modernizing Afghanistan’s armed forces was in preparation for an impending war with Pakistan. When Khan approached the United States with a request for military aid in March of 1951,\(^{52}\) the United States countered with an offer that it knew Khan would not agree to.

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\(^{52}\) Majid, “Prime Minister.”
Khan was insulted, although he tried once again to approach the United States for military support in 1953. This time, Khan received a lecture by then Vice President Richard Nixon regarding Khan’s Pashtunistan policy. According to then Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Naim, who was present at the meeting, “Nixon was patronizing, dogmatic and offensive, strongly implying that the Afghan case was just nonsense.”

Nixon went on to further infuriate Khan when he then traveled to Pakistan and publicly chastised Khan’s Pashtunistan policy.

This is one of the first of many instances of the United States meddling in the affairs of Afghanistan, which has produced a see-saw-type relationship between the two over the years; teetering from economic and military assistance to embargos. It appears that early on, the United States cast its lot with Pakistan, the regional rival of Afghanistan, deeming Pakistan’s support as more strategically important than Afghanistan’s in maintaining US interests in the region. A few years later in 1956, the US government formally recognized the Durand Line as the official boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This, in essence, ended any hope that Khan had to receive economic and military support from the United States. The US government attempted to salvage its deteriorating relationship with the Afghan government during Khan’s reign by initiating a number of public works projects, such as improving school and roads. However, these attempts ultimately ended in failure.

The already fragile relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan took a turn for the worse when, in 1961, Pakistan closed its shared border with Afghanistan. This was as a result of Khan’s hostile policies toward Pakistan, as well as his support for militias hostile to Pakistan that operated on the border, the disputed Durand Line. Khan had always played a delicate balancing act with his relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States. These relationships yielded a great amount of support, much of it in the form of military materials.

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
In 1962, Khan flexed his growing military might by crossing the Afghan/Pakistan border and creating a troop presence in Pakistan’s Bajaur region.57 The Barjaur region was of key strategic importance as the main route from Kabul to Pakistan (until the adoption of the Khyber Pass). The Barjaur region provided one of the few viable crossing points in the surrounding mountainous region. Khan’s motivation for invading the Barjaur region was most likely to initiate a conflict between the two countries, which he hoped would result in a conclusion to the Pashtunistan issue. However, Khan misjudged the power of his newly equipped Afghan army, which was soundly defeated by the Pakistani armed forces.58 Shortly after this humiliating defeat, Khan was forced by his cousin and brother-in-law, King Mohammad Zahir Shah (who also had the support of Afghanistan’s political elite), to resign in 1963.59 Prior to Khan’s forced abdication, King Zahir Shah was little more than a figurehead; a puppet under the rule of Khan, his more powerful prime minister. In 1964, King Zahir called a Loya Jirga (a large meeting, consisting of important Afghan figures, including members of the National Assembly, Supreme Council, and Senate).60 The result of this Loya Jirga was the creation of a new constitution, which called for many amendments, such as the end of nepotism, the improvement of civil rights, and the acknowledgment that Islam would be Afghanistan’s official religion.61 The fact that the constitution eliminated nepotism thus ensured that his cousin, Mohammed Daoud Khan, would never again hold office during Zahir’s reign. It also barred Zahir’s family members from office, who were vying for control over the Afghan government.

The issue of the Durand Line and Pashtunistan is still a problem today. Over a century after its creation, the Durand Line continues to be a point of contention, particularly among Pashtuns, in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The fact that this remains such a volatile issue gives proof to the depth and importance that tribal life plays in the region. The borders of countries, territories, and kingdoms in the Middle East have continuously been carved up

57 Ibid., 91.
58 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 93.
and re-carved throughout history. The Western powers are, for the most part, responsible for constructing the borders of the modern day Middle East. The vast majority of the people have adapted to these new borders, even going so far as to strongly identify with their new countries rather than their historic tribes and territories. One example of this occurred during Operation Iraqi Freedom, when many Iraqi Kurds, who were split up from their Syrian Kurdish brothers with the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, identified themselves as Iraqis, rather than Kurds.

It is unclear what Sayyaf’s thoughts were on Khan’s Pashtunistan policy, but it is obvious that Sayyaf held a strong contention with the majority of Khan’s other policies. Although Sayyaf and Khan are both Pashtuns, their similarities seem to end there. Khan’s regime is characterized by his strengthening of ties between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union; where Sayyaf would later go on to take up arms against the Soviet Union. It can be assumed that in Sayyaf’s early years he held the majority of the same views as the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood. If this was true, then Sayyaf would not only disapprove of Khan’s increasing reliance on the Soviet Union, but also of Khan’s earlier (unsuccessful) attempts at seeking support from the United States. The Afghan Muslim Brotherhood viewed this as selling out the Muslim people by seeking the support of the infidels. (Sayyaf would later go on to enlist the support of the United States during the Afghan-Soviet War, thus showing that, at least later in his life, his religious and political views took a backseat to opportunism.) Khan also supported more progressive policies, such as taking steps toward the emancipation of women, a policy that was in stark contrast to Sayyaf’s strict, extremist Islamist beliefs, which served to oppress women or worse (e.g., the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood’s modus operandi of throwing acid in the faces of unveiled women, as was discussed earlier). Khan was hated by the ethnic Tajik community in Afghanistan because of his Pashtunistan policy. The Tajiks viewed this as Khan putting the interests of the Pashtun people above the interests of other ethnicities. The Tajiks feared that eventually Khan would dispel all Tajiks and Uzbeks from the Afghan government, and replace them with ethnic Pashtuns. Burhanuddin Rabbani, an ethnic Tajik, was a great friend and mentor of Sayyaf for many years. It is possible that his influence further served to demonize Khan in Sayyaf’s eyes, even though

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62 Ibid., 89.
Khan’s Pashtunistan policy may have benefited Sayyaf in the long run. It appears that at this time (1960s and early 1970s) Sayyaf was more concerned with his religious beliefs than his quest for political power.

It can be argued that the current political situation in Afghanistan is a result of events that took place in 1973. A decade after his removal as Afghanistan’s prime minister, Khan staged a coup against King Zahir. Sources indicate that this coup was a year in the making and had the support of both the K Khalqi and Parchami (under Babrak Karmal, who would later become president of Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion) factions of the PDPA (People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a communist political party that would later become the puppet government of the Soviet Union during the Soviet invasion). Many celebrated the coup as an end to what they saw as four decades of weak leadership under King Zahir. However, time has proven that the coup actually put an end to Afghanistan’s four decades of relative peace. Afghanistan has been in a state of perpetual war since Khan’s 1973 coup.

In the summer of 1973, King Zahir left Afghanistan for Britain to receive medical treatment. Khan, who was then a Lieutenant General in the Afghan army, saw this as his chance to take action after months of careful planning and gathering of allies. The coup was carried out by junior officers in the army, but there is no doubt as to who was behind it. After seizing power, Khan declared himself President of Afghanistan. This was a monumental event in Afghanistan’s history, as Khan had overthrown the last king of Afghanistan and established himself as the first president of the nation.

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64 Ibid.


the deprived and our young, to provide a positive financial and spiritual environment.”⁶⁷ In a
country as politically divided as Afghanistan, it was impossible for Khan to please everyone.
One man who was more than displeased with Khan and his pro-Soviet, anti-extremist beliefs
was Sayyaf.

Considering how pivotal this moment would become in Afghanistan’s history, there
is little solid evidence as to the events that unfolded shortly after Khan took power in 1973.
The exact date is not known, but sometime in late 1973, Sayyaf, Burhanuddin Rabbani,
Ahmed Shah Massoud (an ethnic Tajik and member of Jamiat-e Islami), and Gulbuddin
Hekmatyar plotted to overthrow Khan, the Afghan president. The fact that there is such little
information on such an important event is curious, but there are a few explanations for this.
The most obvious is that an attempted coup against Khan only months after taking office was
an embarrassment and a potential excuse for other opposition groups to attempt the same.
President Khan could not afford to appear weak or inept, so it is likely that he destroyed all
documentation of the coup, as well as many of the collaborators.

Another possibility, one that borders on a conspiracy theory, is that the US Central
Intelligence Agency (CIA) could have possibly been involved in the coup. President Khan
represented a threat to US influence in the region, considering the fact that Khan was openly
sympathetic to the Soviet Union and the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)
who was influential in establishing him as the president. Even more compelling evidence to
this theory is the fact that the CIA supported Sayyaf’s and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s
mujahedeen groups by supplying them with weapons during the Afghan-Soviet War.⁶⁸

Given the “public” stance of the CIA against political assassination, it would seem obvious
that if the CIA was behind the attempted coup against President Khan, they would attempt to
destroy all evidence that would lead to them. It is interesting to note that although the CIA
previously stated that it did not participate in political assassinations, it was investigated two
years after the coup, in 1975, for misconduct, including assignations and attempted
assassinations, during the Church Committee Hearings.

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⁶⁷ Synovitz, “Afghanistan: Coup Anniversary Remembered.”
⁶⁸ Milton Bearden and James Risen, The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA’s Final Showdown with
the KGB (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2003), 233.
Beginning in 1975, a series of hearings took place in an attempt to investigate certain "illegal goings on" within the CIA. It ran the full gamut from wiretapping, domestic espionage, assassinations and mail tampering. Heading up the Senate Select Committee was Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho), and the hearings were dubbed The Church Committee.69

In the "Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders" report, the CIA was accused as being responsible for masterminding attempts on many important political leaders, including Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala, President Patrice Lumumba of Congo, President Salvador Allende of Chile, revolutionary leader Che Guevara, President Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Ngo Din Diem of South Vietnam, President Sukarno of Indonesia, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier of Haiti, and multiple attempts on Cuban president Fidel Castro.70 71 When called to testify, then Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms stated that not only was the CIA not personally involved with any attempted assassinations against political leaders (i.e., being the trigger men), but the assassination attempts that it had supported, via assisting nationals with weapons and logistics, had failed due to ineptitude or missed opportunity.72 Thus, even though the CIA had planned and attempted political assassinations, Helms stated that none had succeeded. Whether this is true or not, it is likely that no one will ever know. It is an unofficial CIA policy to cover-up, deny, or destroy damning evidence against the Agency, spanning from Richard Helms’ prosecution and conviction for perjury during the Church Hearings to the recent denial of torture and rendition during the War on Terror. Even more damning evidence to the CIA’s scientific approach to political assassination was when “A Study of Assassination” was


72 Civil Intelligence Association Defense Oversight Group, “Political Action.”
released on May 23, 1977, as a result of the Freedom of Information Act.\textsuperscript{73} This document is, in essence, a “how to” guide on different methods of assassination. It details the type of person that should be chosen for the mission (including personal attributes) and what type of personality should be chosen for a certain type of assassination (such as a transient in some cases while a fanatic [whether political, religious…etc.] may be more appropriate in other cases). It is interesting to note that Sayyaf and his co-conspirators fit the definition of religious fanatics. The manual then proceeds to explain how to plan and carry out an assassination. It spends a great amount of time detailing the types of techniques that can be used and their pros and cons. There are weapons (blunt instruments, edged weapons, firearms, explosives…etc.) as well as drugs, poisons, arson, drowning, and pushing the target from a height of over seventy-five feet onto a hard surface; the latter of which can be employed to make the assassination appear as an accident.\textsuperscript{74}

Regardless of the lack of evidence surrounding the attempted coup against Khan, the fact is clear: that it occurred, and that it failed. The masterminds behind the coup, including Sayyaf, were forced to flee while many of their subordinates were captured and either imprisoned, tortured, or executed. Sayyaf, along with Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmed Shah Massoud, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar successfully escaped to Pakistan.\textsuperscript{75} Following their escape, there was a rift between the leadership of the Jamiat-e Islami. Rabbani, Sayyaf and Massoud continued to operate under the original name, Jamiat-e Islami while Hekmatyar, along with Qazi Muhammad Amin Waqad, founded the Hezb-e Islami-i Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan) or Hezb-e Islami for short.\textsuperscript{76}

Just as with the attempted coup against Khan in 1973, there is surprisingly little evidence (at least “declassified” evidence) as to Sayyaf’s time spent in hiding in Pakistan. When Sayyaf decided to return to Afghanistan in the mid-1970s, he was imprisoned by Khan’s regime. On April 19, 1978, events were set in motion, which would eventually lead

\textsuperscript{73} CIA, “CIA Study of Assassination.”

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} “Ustad Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.” \textit{GlobalSecurity.org}.

\textsuperscript{76} Ruttig, “Islamists, Leftists,” 14.
to the assassination of President Khan and the establishment of a communist government. On April 19, 1978, a funeral was held for the recently assassinated Mir Akbar Khyber. Mir Akbar Khyber was an intellectual as well as the leader of the Parcham faction of the PDPA.\textsuperscript{77} At his funeral, a crowd of mainly communist sympathizers (estimated to be between 10,000 to 30,000 strong) were whipped up into a frenzy by stirring speeches delivered by PDPA leaders Nur Muhammad Taraki, Hafizullah Amin, and Babrak Karmal.\textsuperscript{78} The PDPA was comprised of two main factions that did not always agree, but the assassination of Khyber caused them to put aside their differences and unite. President Khan was rightly worried about the unity formed within the PDPA between the Parcham and Khalq factions (the Parcham faction being led by Babrak Karmal, while the Khalq faction was jointly led by Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin)\textsuperscript{79} as a result of Mir Akbar Khyber’s assassination. Khan took steps to end the danger of this newly formed PDPA coalition by going after its leaders. Nur Muhammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal were arrested, and Hafizullah Amin was placed under house arrest.\textsuperscript{80} Amin was able to coordinate the coup against President Khan while under house arrest by using his family members as couriers. On April 26, 1978, Khan placed the Afghan army on full alert. The coup began the next day at the Kabul International Airport. Within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the coup, now known as the Saur Revolution, President Khan and most of his family were assassinated. Although Khan had historically maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union (both during his tenure as prime minister and his reign as president), toward the end of his presidency, relations between the Soviet Union and the Afghan government had soured. This came to a head in a historic exchange between Soviet Premier Brezhnev and President Khan in a meeting on April 15, 1977.\textsuperscript{81} When Brezhnev unexpectedly demanded that Khan remove all

\textsuperscript{77} Khaled Siddiq Charkhi, \textit{From My Memories: Memoirs of Political Imprisonment from Childhood in Afghanistan} (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010) 258.


\textsuperscript{80} Charkhi, \textit{From My Memories}, 259.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) presence in Afghanistan, particularly along its northern border, Khan defiantly responded,

We will never allow you to dictate to us how to run our country and whom to employ in Afghanistan. How and where we shall employ the foreign experts will remain the exclusive prerogative of the Afghan state. Afghanistan shall remain poor, if necessary, but free in its acts and decisions.  

This exchange was the last that Brezhnev and Khan would share, and the steps that both countries had taken to further strengthen their relationship were effectively ruined. This break in ties with the Soviet Union obviously concerned the PDPA who saw this as a disastrous development for their goals, with Khan being the root cause. This led to Khan’s assassination a year later.

Over thirty years after the assassination of Khan, the first President of Afghanistan, he was given a state funeral (as his body, along with those of his family, was dumped in an unmarked mass grave, not to be found until years later). In a public showing of respect, a one-day cease fire between the Taliban and the coalition forces was called. Khan received all the honors due to a respected leader, including the attendance of hundreds of Afghans and foreign dignitaries. The funeral was ended with a twenty-one-gun salute personally ordered by President Hamid Karzai. Of Khan, Karzai stated, “He was always thinking of the advancement and prosperity of the country.” It is ironic that the current president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, holds Khan in such high regard (at least publicly) while one of his most important advisors (Sayyaf) had previously attempted to assassinate Khan.

As with most coups, the political aftermath was chaotic. After Khan’s assassination on April 27, 1978, Colonel Abdul Qadir Dagarwal formed the Revolutionary Military Council, essentially a military regime, which was quickly replaced two days later with a joint civilian/military council called the Revolutionary Council. Colonel Dagarwal had previously assisted Khan during the 1973 coup against King Mohammad Zahir Shah. The newly established Revolutionary Council was headed by Nur Mohammad Taraki, who

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82Ibid.
83 Wafā and Gall, “State Funeral.”
85 Ibid.
named himself as president and prime minister.\textsuperscript{86} He then quickly installed Babrak Karmal, Hafizullah Amin, and Mohammad Aslam Watanjar as his deputy prime ministers in an attempt to keep the shaky truce between both factions of the PDPA.\textsuperscript{87} The truce between the leaders of the PDPA, which began shortly before the Saur Revolution, did not last long. As is common in the history of Afghan politics, a quest for power took precedence over the best interests of the nation. Despite the fact that Taraki was a charismatic leader, he made many enemies during his short reign, which was marred by a Marxist-style reform (in essence a communist purge) of Afghanistan. The PDPA began a “Red Terror” campaign aimed at members of the social elite, intellectuals, leaders of the religious establishment, and others who had held positions of power (politically, religiously, and militarily) prior to the Saur Revolution.\textsuperscript{88} As a former professor at Kabul University, as well as a quasi-religious leader in the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyaf fit two of the main stereotypes of persecuted individuals. Sayyaf was imprisoned after his return to Afghanistan in the mid-1970s, following the failed 1973 coup against Khan. He remained in prison during the reign of Taraki. However, the volatile political climate that Afghanistan was experiencing eventually led to his freedom.

A power struggle between the Khalq faction (which included President Taraki and his deputy prime minister, Hafizullah Amin) and the Parcham faction (which included Babrak Karmal and Mohammad Najibullah) soon erupted. The power struggle led to purges within Taraki’s government. Amin turned on his ally, President Taraki, in a power struggle that resulted in the assassination of Taraki on September 14, 1979, after only a year and a half in office. Amin’s reign was even shorter than that of his predecessor. Yet it was a pivotal time for Sayyaf and an influential moment in shaping Afghanistan’s future.

When Amin took power, his first task was to perform damage control on the anti-Islamic policies that the PDPA implemented while Amin was deputy prime minister. Amin first attempted to pass the blame off onto the recently assassinated Taraki. He then set about

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 190.
a program to repair damaged mosques, distribute Qurans, and implement pro-Islamic laws. His public speeches were also filled with references to Allah. All of these outward gestures did little to appease the public, who still saw him as being originally responsible for the earlier anti-Islamic purges. It is rumored that during his short reign, Amin personally released Sayyaf from prison, as Sayyaf was his distant relative. This information could not be confirmed, and even the exact year of Sayyaf’s release is in question. Sources range from 1978 (when Amin was still deputy prime minister) to 1980 (during the reign of Babrak Karmal). It is highly likely that Amin was behind Sayyaf’s release from prison. Westerners underestimate the importance of family ties in the tribal society of that region of the world. As stated earlier, in Afghan tribal society, family ties are paramount, followed by clan, tribe, and finally beliefs (whether religious or political), in order of importance. In addition to family ties, there was another crucial reason for Sayyaf’s release – an insurgency was growing. Amin may have released Sayyaf as a gesture of appeasement.

The assassination of President Amin was inevitable. He had acquired too many enemies, and his attempts at appeasement only served to instill more anger. The growing Islamic insurgency was fostered by Afghans who had fled to Pakistan and Iran. Their goal was to destroy the “infidel communist” government that Amin had helped create. Amin’s efforts to appease the insurgents, while at the same time attempting to solicit support from Pakistan and the United States, only served to anger the Soviet Union. They saw Amin as a threat that was destabilizing Afghanistan. There were even claims that he was a secret CIA agent. This sounds farfetched, but it was a strong possibility in the eyes of the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti or Committee for State Security (KGB) and the Soviet government. One reason is that Amin had previously attended Columbia University in the late 1950s and early 1960s during a time in which the CIA was known to regularly recruit foreign students to be used as agents upon return to their home countries. Amin’s actions

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were seen by many in the Soviet government as an attempt to destabilize Afghanistan, and thus the Soviet influence that they held in the country. The KGB made the decision to assassinate Amin. There were two failed attempts to poison Amin. On December 27, 1979, KGB Alpha and Spetsnaz GRU operatives that were dressed in Afghan military uniforms, infiltrated the Tajbeg Palace, and assassinated Amin. The fact that the Soviets were behind Amin’s assassination could not be covered up. Therefore, the Soviet government chose to do the opposite and embrace it. The Soviet military command announced on Radio Kabul that they had liberated the Afghan people from the tyrannical rule of President Amin. They claimed that they were only serving to uphold the 1978 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborliness agreement signed by Premier Brezhnev and former President Taraki. The Soviet government justified the assassination of Amin by alleging that he was behind Taraki’s assassination (which may or may have not been true). Prior to Amin’s assassination, the Soviet government was already employing sabotage operations, such as advising the Afghan army to undergo a massive overhaul of their tank corps while at the same time destroying links between Kabul and other cities, thus isolating the capital. On the same day that Amin was assassinated, the Soviet Union invaded the sovereign nation of Afghanistan.

92 Ibid., 49.
96 Amstutz, Afghanistan: The First Five Years, 39.
97 Arnold, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion, 83-84.
98 AllExperts, “Soviet War in Afghanistan.”
CHAPTER 5

AFGHAN-SOVIET WAR

The Soviet Union had maintained a military presence in Afghanistan since Taraki took power under the auspices of combating the anticommunist Islamic insurgent groups. Surprisingly, the Soviet Politburo was reluctant to send troops onto Afghan soil as they were afraid it may turn the populace against them. 100 The Soviet Union had been building its troop force in Afghanistan up until the all-out invasion on December 27, 1979. At 1900 hours local time, the Soviet military began the invasion by destroying the communication hub in Kabul, thus isolating the Afghan army command from its troops. Fifteen minutes later, at 1915 hours, Amin was assassinated. 101 While this was taking place, Soviet airborne troops were dropped into Kabul. After Amin’s assassination, Babrak Karmal arrived back in Afghanistan, after his exile in Moscow, and was established as the puppet president of Afghanistan. Within days after Amin’s assassination, Soviet forces had spread throughout the country, occupying major cities and towns. Despite initial Soviet success, victory was far from certain. According to an article written by James Phillips on January 8, 1980, the Soviet troops were “waging a full-fledged counter-insurgency campaign against the rebellious Moslem tribesmen who were on the verge of winning a 20-month guerrilla war against the Taraki-Amin communist regime.” 102

The Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan quickly turned into a stalemate. The Soviet armed forces had control over major cities and fortified positions. However, they were only able to hold twenty percent (at the most) of Afghanistan’s landmass. 103


101 AllExperts, “Soviet War in Afghanistan.”


103 Arnold, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion, 98.
anticommunist mujahidin took an exacting toll on the Soviet armed forces, who were not equipped to fight a guerilla war in the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. Soviet armor became easy targets for the mujahidin, as they were limited to roads and large paths. The Soviets retaliated with a “scorched earth” policy of destroying villages by air (through the use of Mil Mi-24 Hind gunships and bombers) with the cooperation of ground forces.\textsuperscript{104}

The mujahidin played a major role in the Afghan-Soviet War and set a precedent for how guerilla wars were fought in the region for decades to come. Guerilla war is not a new concept. Examples of guerilla warfare can be found dating back to ancient texts, including the Bible. The guerilla war waged by the mujahidin in Afghanistan was different from previous guerilla wars because of the emphasis that Islamic extremism played. The mujahidin guerrilla war used large amounts of foreign fighters, who were united by this religious extremism, to conduct their version of a jihad against the invaders (although the effect that foreign fighters played in the outcome of the war is debated).

After Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s release from prison (most likely procured by Hafizullah Amin, as previously discussed), he once again fled to Pakistan. Soon after the Soviet invasion, Sayyaf established the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan (Ittihad-i-Islami Baraye Azadi Afghanistan), which was actually a coalition of several smaller mujahidin groups. Ittihad-i-Islami Baraye Azadi Afghanistan (or Ittihad-i-Islami) mainly comprises Pashtuns and is known for its ultra-conservative view of Islam, its support by Wahhabist Saudi Arabia, and its hatred for Shi’a Muslims, specifically the Hazara ethnic group.\textsuperscript{105} Dozens of mujahidin groups were formed prior to and shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In May 1985, seven of the largest and most influential mujahidin groups band together to form The Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahidin (also known as the Seven Party Mujahidin Alliance or Peshawar Seven). The Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahidin comprised seven mujahidin groups; all based out of Pakistan and were split into two main categories, the political Islamists and the traditionalists. The political Islamists

\textsuperscript{104} Coll, \textit{Ghost Wars}, 118.
\textsuperscript{105} Frank Clements, \textit{Conflict in Afghanistan: An Encyclopedia} (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 128.
were the more fundamentalist while the traditionalists’ beliefs were considered moderate.\textsuperscript{106} The two groups consisted of the following:

**Political Islamists:**

- Hezb-i Islami (also known as Islamic Party (HIH) and Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin) - Led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Hekmatyar supposedly cofounded HIH sometime between 1974-1977 with Maulawi Khalis, who broke off to form his own mujahidin group.\textsuperscript{107}

- Islamic Party (HIK) (Hezb-i-Islami-Khalis) aka Khalis faction - A split from Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami; was led by Maulawi Khalis and consisted of such famous commanders as Abdul Haq,\textsuperscript{108} Amin Wardak, and Jalaluddin Haqqani.\textsuperscript{109} Haqqani would later go on to found the Haqqani Network, which is one of the major insurgency groups fighting against the US forces in Afghanistan today.

- Islamic Society (JIA) (Jamiat-i-Islami) - Originally began as the Muslim Brotherhood in Afghanistan until many of its members branched off to form their own groups. By the time of the Soviet invasion, Jamiat-i-Islami was mainly a Tajik group led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and consisted of such famous commanders as Ustad Zabiullah, Ahmad Shah Massoud, Ismail Khan, Atta Mohammad Noor, Mullah Naqib, Dr Fazlullah, and Qazi Islamuddin.\textsuperscript{110}

- Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan (IUA) (Ittihad-i-Islami) - Led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.

(“Ittihad-I-Islami was founded by Abd Al-Rab Abdul-Rasul Sayyaf (Abdul Rasul Sayyaf). This was called the Etehad-e Islami (EIA) until 1981. The faction is militant fundamentalist and anti-Shia. In the mid-1980s, they again changed their name was changed to the Islamic Union of Afghanistan (IUA). The IUA was heavily financed by the Wahhabi sect out of Saudi Arabia. Sayyaf was known for recruiting motivated Arab youths for jihad in his organization.”\textsuperscript{111})


\textsuperscript{107} Clements, *Conflict in Afghanistan*, 126.


Traditionalists:

- **National Islamic Front for Afghanistan (NIFA) (Mahaz-i-Milli-Islami)** - A mainly Pashtu group led by Sufi leader Pir Sayed Ahmed Gailani. The group mainly consisted of ethnic Pashtuns and most of its power bases lay in the Paktia, Paktika, Ghazni, and Kandahar provinces.

- **Afghanistan National Liberation Front (ANLF) (Jebh-e-Nejat-i-Melli Afghanistan)** - Led by Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, who would later become the first president of Afghanistan after the fall of the PDPA in 1992. The party mainly consisted of Sufi Muslims from the Paktia and Kunar provinces in the south. Mojaddedi was often at odds with some of the more extremist mujahidin groups, particularly Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s Ittihad-i-Islami, as a result of Mojaddedi’s outspoken opposition to the ideology and influence of Wahhabism.

- **Revolutionary Islamic Movement or Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan (IRMA) (Harakat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami)** - Led by Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, the group was considerably less powerful than some of the others in the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahidin. The group was moderate (traditional Islamist) and consisted mainly of liberal Pashtun intellectuals. IRMA’s main power base was in the Lowgar Province and the Helmand Valley.

There were also four main mujahidin groups based in Iran, although they did not hold nearly the amount of power as The Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahidin. These groups were mainly Shi’a and consisted for the most part of ethnic Hazaras from the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan, also called the central highlands. The four main Iranian-based Afghan mujahidin groups were:

- **Revolutionary Council of the Islamic Union of Afghanistan (Shura-i Inqilab-i Ittifagh-i Islami-i Afghanistan)** - Was a traditionalist Shi’a party led by Sayyad Beheshti. It recruited among the Hazara peasants and social elite. Many defecting

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113 “Anti-Soviet Mujahideen,” *GlobalSecurity.org*.

114 Pande, *Explaining Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, 74.


116 “Anti-Soviet Mujahideen” *GlobalSecurity.org*.

117 Pande, *Explaining Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, 74.

118 Ibid.


120 “Anti-Soviet Mujahideen” *GlobalSecurity.org*.

121 Ibid.
Afghan Army officers led its ranks. It had wide support in the Hazarajat and Ghazni Province.122

- The Islamic Victory Organization of Afghanistan (Sazman-i Nasr-i Islami-i Afghanistan) - Was a radical Islamist party led by a council that recruited young Hazara men who were educated in Iran. This pro-Iranian party was headquartered in Daykundi.123

- Islamic Movement (HI) (Harakat-i-Islami) - Was founded by Ayatollah Asef Muhsini in Iran as a Shi’a faction. The party has a traditional Islamic orientation. It recruited educated Shia from all ethnic groups. Its most famous commander was Mohammad Anwari who fought in the Turkmen valley west of Kabul.124

- Army of the Guardians of the Revolution (Sepah-i Pasdaran) - Was a radical Islamist party led by Akbari and Saddiqi. It had very close ties with the Iranian government. This party had few fighters and mainly drew its members from the clerics who were disaffected with Behesti’s Shura.”125

Figure 4 shows a March 1993 photograph of the surviving leaders of many of the above Mujahidin groups.

Figure 5 was produced by the CIA in 1985, which shows the area of influence that each mujahidin group held during the Afghan-Soviet War at that time. Note: For enlarged image of map key see Figure 6.

Professor Oliver Roy, who served as a consultant for the United Nations Office for Coordinating Relief in Afghanistan summarized the organizational structure of the mujahidin groups.

Olivier Roy estimates that after four years of war, there were at least 4,000 bases from which mujahedeen units operated. Most of these were affiliated with the seven expatriate parties headquartered in Pakistan, which served as sources of supply and varying degrees of supervision. Significant commanders typically led 300 or more men, controlled several bases and dominated a district or a sub-division of a province.126

In the early 1980s, from his base in Peshawar, Pakistan; Sayyaf, along with Osama bin Laden, with whom he had supposedly developed a personal relationship with during his

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
years at Al-Azhar University, created a jihadist training camp network which was later used to train al-Qaeda members.

Sayyaf, a Wahhabi Muslim, had a close relationship with Osama bin Laden during the jihad against the Soviets. Together they established a network of training camps, bunkers and emplacements in the Jalalabad area. The facilities were later used by Al-Qaeda personnel.\(^\text{127}\)

Peshawar was chosen to be the location for both Sayyaf’s home base from which he established a complex of jihadist training camps. Peshawar was chosen because of its strategic position. Peshawar is across the border from Jalalabad in Afghanistan. From

Jalalabad, a road travels straight to Kabul. This allowed Sayyaf and bin Laden to funnel recently trained mujahedin from Peshawar into the heart of the war against the Soviets. The route that they utilized was along a part of the Grand Trunk Road, one of South Asia’s longest and oldest roads. The Grand Trunk Road was originally built to connect the cities along the Ganges plain with those in the eastern Punjab (e.g., Lahore). From there, the road continues on to Peshawar and finally ends at Kabul.\textsuperscript{128} Figure 7 shows the route of the Grand Trunk Road.

Two of the most infamous individuals who have trained at Sayyaf’s jihadist camps over the years include Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheik Mohammad. Ramzi Yousef planned and executed a number of terrorist attacks, including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the failed Bojinka plot (to blow up twelve airliners), and failed assassination attempts against Pope John Paul II and Benazir Bhutto (former prime minister of Pakistan). His uncle, Khalid

\footnotetext{128}{Jona Lendering, “Grand Trunk Road”, \textit{Livius.org}, last modified May 28, 2008, \url{http://www.livius.org/gs-gz/gtr/gtr.html}.}
Sheik Mohammad, is the supposed mastermind and/or co-conspirator in numerous terrorist attacks (both successful and unsuccessful), including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Bojinka plot, Bali nightclub bombings, and Millennium Plot. Mohammad is also accused of personally beheading Daniel Pearl and planning 9/11. Khalid Sheik Mohammad was a favorite of Sayyaf and served as his personal bodyguard and secretary during the Afghan Soviet War. It is disturbing to note that one of the most ruthless terrorists in history was the protégé of one of the most powerful men in the US friendly Afghan government.

After the conclusion of the war against the Soviets, Sayyaf continued to train and indoctrinate young men for jihad in places, such as the Balkans and the southern Philippines (where the terrorist group, Abu Sayyaf, was named in his honor). One of the most infamous jihadist training camps ever created was Dawa’a al-Jihad (Convert and Struggle).

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Sayyaf founded this training camp inside of an Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar. Publicly, this camp was labeled as a university. The truth is that this camp is arguably the most notorious jihadist training camp in the history of the modern Islamic terrorist movement and has been described by many as the “preeminent school for terrorism.” Future terrorists, including Ramzi Yousef are known to have attended Dawa’a al-Jihad.

Two other high-profile jihadist training camps in Sayyaf’s network include the Sada and Khaldan training camps. These two training camps have been host to some of the most infamous Islamic terrorists. Khaldan training camp, the first large-scale terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, has trained such terrorists as 9/11 hijackers Majed Moqed, Mohamed Atta, and Satam al-Suqami, as well as Zacarias Moussaoui, the 9/11 “20th hijacker,” who was arrested on immigration charges prior to the attack and was unable to participate. Ahmed Ajaj, Ibrahim Elgabrowny, Mahmoud Abouhalima, and Ramzi Yousef, all participants in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing are all known to have received training at the Khaldan camp. Other notable members include Richard Reid and Saajid Badat, both of whom unsuccessfully attempted to blow up airliners with shoe bombs; Mohamed Rashid al-Owhali, who participated in the 1997 US embassy bombings in Africa; and a number of current and former detainees of Guantanamo Bay Detention Center, including Abdul Rahman Mohamed Saleh Naser, Umar Abdullah Al Kunduzi, Abdul Bin Mohammed Bin Abess Ourgy, Ahmed Hassan Jamil Suleyman, and Abdullah Ali Al Utaybi, to name a few. Abdurajak Janjalani, the founder of Abu Sayyaf, is known to have attended one of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s camps (although it is unclear which one) where he befriended Khalid Sheik Muhammad and Ramzi Yousef, the latter of which would later train

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Abu Sayyaf members in bomb-making.)\textsuperscript{135} Another attendee of the Khaldan training camp is Abu Zubaydah, who is one of the three detainees whom the United States has admitted to subjecting to waterboarding interrogation, as he is thought to possess valuable al-Qaeda intelligence.

The Sada training camp is another infamous camp in Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s network of terrorist training camps. Sada means “echo” and was formed to handle the overflow from its sister training camp, Khaldan.\textsuperscript{136} Less information is available on the Sada training camp, but one of its known attendees is the infamous Riduan Isamuddin Hambali.\textsuperscript{137,138} Hambali is one of sixteen high-value detainees still incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay Detention Center.\textsuperscript{139} He is a member of al-Qaeda and a senior member of the Southeast Asian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiya (JI), which receives much of its monetary support from al-Qaeda.\textsuperscript{140} The information that Hambali possessed as to the interworkings of both JI and al-Qaeda was deemed so valuable that following his capture on August 14, 2003, Hambali was whisked from one CIA black site to another for interrogation (the process of which is known as rendition) until September 4, 2006, when he was finally sent to Guantanamo Bay Detention Center.\textsuperscript{141,142} Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, former leader of AQI (al-Qaeda in Iraq) until his death on June 7, 2006, is also known to have attended the Sada training camp.\textsuperscript{143} Training at Sada consisted of an initial forty-five-day basic weapons training program followed by more

\textsuperscript{135} Miniter, \textit{Mastermind}, 55-67.
\textsuperscript{136} Miniter, \textit{Mastermind}, 55-67.
\textsuperscript{138} National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. “Al Qaeda Aims at the American Homeland,” 6.
\textsuperscript{139} Scheinkman, Williams, McLean, Ashkenas, and Tse, “A History of the Detainee Population.”
\textsuperscript{140} U.S. Department of Defense, “Hambali (Riduan Isamuddin).”
\textsuperscript{142} U.S. Department of Defense, “Hambali (Riduan Isamuddin).”
\textsuperscript{143} Miniter, \textit{Mastermind}, 55-67.
extensive study into military tactics.\textsuperscript{144} Abu Burhan al-Iraqi, who previously worked for Saddam Hussein’s government, oversaw the Sada training camp.

It is now a known fact that the CIA covertly supported various mujahidin groups during the Afghan-Soviet war. Some of the ways they supported these groups, such as financial support and weapons supply (such as the Stinger shoulder-launched, heat-seeking surface-to-air missiles famous for their use in bringing down dozens of Mil Mi-24 Hind gunships) is declassified and has become common knowledge, aided by the release of the film “Charlie Wilson’s War.” Some aspects of US covert support provided to the mujahidin remain classified, or are at least denied by government sources. There are rumors that US Special Forces helped train various mujahidin groups. This was obviously denied by US officials, as this would escalate tensions between the United States and Soviet Union, just as the use of Soviet pilots during the Vietnam War was denied by the Soviet government to keep the Cold War from turning hot.

Sayyaf, as well as his one-time friend, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is believed to have been the favored Afghan warlords of the CIA. A large portion of CIA monetary and material support was given to Sayyaf and Hekmatyar. Although both Sayyaf’s Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami became allies with the creation of The Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahidin, there is no love lost between the two warlords. It is unclear when this feud began, but as is the case with most feuds between Afghan warlords, the origin is most likely the result of a quest for more power. Although it is believed that Sayyaf received some substantial support from the CIA, Hekmatyar was clearly the CIA’s go-to man in Afghanistan. Hekmatyar received between twenty percent to fifty percent of the weapons that the CIA has covertly appropriated for use by mujahidin in Afghanistan,\textsuperscript{145} despite the fact that Hekmatyar is a known opium trafficker, as well as one of the most extreme and ruthless warlords in Afghanistan. CIA Director William Casey and the CIA officers running the Near East Division are said to have chosen Hekmatyar as their favorite Afghan warlord because of their shared goals, such as


Hekmatyar’s plan to carry the fight to the enemy by invading the Soviet Union.\(^{146}\) This may have caused some jealousy between Sayyaf and Hekmatyar.

Much evidence exists to indicate that the CIA favored Hekmatyar and Sayyaf above the other warlords in the Peshawar Seven as Hekmatyar and Sayyaf received the bulk of the arms being shipped to the mujahidin. Undersecretary of Defense Michael Pillsbury twice met with Sayyaf and Hekmatyar.\(^{147}\) Although the Undersecretary of Defense is not personally responsible for the decisions of where and to whom money for fighting the Soviets should be appropriated, he is a chairman of a US interagency committee that decided which anti-Soviet forces should be supported by the United States.\(^{148}\) Thus, he was a major player when it came to deciding which mujahidin groups to support. During his meeting with Sayyaf and Hekmatyar, he asked them for their opinion on US support for Arab mujahidin groups that had been flowing into Afghanistan for a chance to participate in jihad. Both Sayyaf and Hekmatyar disagreed with the US support of Arab mujahidin groups. The most likely reason for this is greed and a lust for more power. Money and weapons that go to Arab mujahidin groups is money and weapons that would not be received by the Afghan mujahidin, specifically Sayyaf and Hekmatyar. Both Hekmatyar and Sayyaf, as well as many other Afghan warlords, employed and depended heavily on Arabs who had traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets, but they were not about to relinquish any power to them. In one meeting with Sayyaf and Hekmatyar, Pillsbury says that the two warlords viewed the Arab “shuhada” or martyrs as righteous warriors, but valued them as little more than pawns.\(^{149}\)

During the Afghan-Soviet War, Milt Bearden served as both the CIA Field Officer in Afghanistan and the CIA Station Chief in Pakistan. He was responsible for disseminating support (in the form of weapons) among the Peshawar Seven, as well as seeing that they


received the proper training to implement the weapons, the most famous being the Stinger
Missile. In his book *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with
the KGB*, Bearden describes his first encounter with the Peshawar Seven. Hekmatyar is
described as being intense, and having an obvious hatred for the United States. Sayyaf is
described as “a great barrel of a man and an ardent member of the Muslim Brotherhood.”
Furthermore, Bearden said that Sayyaf “wore a perpetual half smile, as if he were sharing a
secret with whomever he happened to have locked in his gaze…Sayyaf spoke fluent Arabic
and was particularly popular among Arabs who were arriving in Pakistan and Afghanistan in
increasing numbers from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf.” Bearden’s initial
meeting with the Peshawar Seven was followed by a luncheon. He described how Sayyaf
first ate his own salad, and then that of both Mojaddedi and Gailani whom he was sitting next
to. He then proceeded to do the same when the bread was served. Either this was a result
of confusion over the Western dining setting, or it was a subtle attempt to assert his
authority.

The United States was not the only nation to support the mujahidin fighting against
the Soviets in Afghanistan. The United Kingdom, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia were
among some of the other nations to assist the mujahidin. Although the seven major
mujahidin groups had formed a truce, it is important not to mistake this for complete unity.
The famous adage, believed to have originated from an old Arab proverb, states that “The
enemy of my enemy is my friend.” This can be translated into the formation of the Peshawar
Seven in the fact that the seven mujahidin groups were reluctant allies. The leaders of the
groups craved more power, but they realized that inter-fighting between the mujahidin
groups would result in their defeat by the Soviets. Instead, they chose to call a truce and
focus on fighting the Soviets; the logic being that once the Soviets were defeated, the
warlords could continue to fight among themselves.

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151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
Not all mujahidin groups received equal support from the nations assisting them in their cause. Sayyaf’s Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami seem to have obtained the most support. Pakistan, through its intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), threw the majority of their support behind Hekmatyar. Saudi Arabia chose Sayyaf as their favored Afghan warlord. As was stated earlier, the CIA provided Hekmatyar with between twenty percent to fifty percent of the weapons that the CIA had covertly appropriated for use by mujahidin in Afghanistan. The CIA was able to covertly supply Hekmatyar by using the ISI as an intermediary. Thus, since Hekmatyar became the favorite of the CIA, he also became the favorite of Pakistan. Although Sayyaf likely received some support from Pakistan and the CIA, he received the bulk of his foreign support from Saudi Arabia via the General Intelligence Directorate (GID). In his book *Devil’s Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam (American Empire Project)*, Richard Dreyfuss states the relationship in simple terms:

The GID’s favorite Afghan warlord is Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, while Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is the Pakistani ISI’s favorite warlord. Bin Laden quickly becomes close to both Sayyaf and Hekmatyar, even though the two warlords are not allies with each other.154

Sayyaf and bin Laden’s relationship went far beyond that of casual acquaintances. Bin Laden served as liaison between the GID and Sayyaf. It is likely that the GID chose bin Laden to serve as liaison because of bin Laden’s long-standing friendship with Sayyaf, possibly going back to Sayyaf’s time at Al-Azhar University. Of all the Afghan warlords, Sayyaf seems to be the obvious choice for the Saudi government to support. Sayyaf was one of the most powerful Afghan warlords, being the leader of Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan and member of the Peshawar Seven. Sayyaf also speaks perfect Arabic and subscribes to the conservative Wahhabist branch of Islam, which is the state-supported branch of Islam in Saudi Arabia. If Sayyaf somehow emerged victorious after the war, his religious and political goals would be similar to that of Saudi Arabia. This was common practice by the US government during the Cold War era, where it would support one politician or revolutionary leader against another because his democratic views helped to

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maintain the US sphere of influence over the threat of the growing communist movements occurring in many third world nations. The Saudi government denies that bin Laden served as an intelligence agent for the GID, although it is a known fact that the GID supported Sayyaf during the Afghan-Soviet War. Many sources have commented on bin Laden’s relationship with the GID. In his book *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, Journalist Steve Coll states that although “the character and timeline of his dealings with GID remains murky it seems clear that bin Laden did have a substantial relationship with Saudi intelligence.”

Saudi Intelligence Minister Prince Turki al-Faisal admitted to meeting with bin Laden several times during the Afghan-Soviet War and described him as a pleasant but shy man who rarely spoke. These claims were substantiated by Ahmed Badeeb, Turki’s chief of staff and former high school teacher of bin Laden. He claims that bin Laden developed “strong relations with the Saudi intelligence and with our embassy in Pakistan. The Saudi embassy in Islamabad had a powerful and active role in the Afghan Jihad.”

Steve Coll also claims that bin Laden would develop close ties with Pakistan’s ISI as well as Saudi Arabia’s GID. It is possible that the CIA used the GID to funnel money and arms to Sayyaf just as it did to support Hekmatyar, although no documents have been found to corroborate this information. If this was true, it is likely that these documents would remain classified if not destroyed, as that would prove that the CIA unwittingly (or with knowledge) did business with bin Laden. Although bin Laden, as well as Sayyaf and Hekmatyar, harbored extremist Islamist views, bin Laden was not yet hostile to either the West or Saudi Arabia. This change would not come about until the Gulf War, when the Saudi government refused to use bin Laden’s jihadists to fight Saddam Hussein’s army, and instead chose to enlist the help of the US military. The presence of the US military in Saudi Arabia, where Islam’s two holiest sites (Mecca and Medina) are located, infuriated bin Laden. This led him

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155 Coll, *Ghost Wars*.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
to harden his already extremist views to fight against the United States and all Muslim countries that he saw as being under the influence of the West.
CHAPTER 6

AFGHAN CIVIL WAR

The victory of the mujahidin over the Soviet forces in 1989 was not followed by peace and prosperity. Some scholars argue that the Saur Revolution was the first in a series of civil wars that Afghanistan faced, and the Afghan-Soviet War was the second (as mujahidin Afghans were fighting against communist Afghans). It is difficult to refer to the Saur Revolution and the ensuing period as a civil war. Instead it was a brief coup that was followed by a period of instability by insurgent groups. The Afghan-Soviet War is also difficult to define as a civil war because the Soviets were the main enemy of the mujahidin, and the Afghan communists were seen as their puppets. The purpose of this thesis is not to determine what should or should not be considered a civil war, but to explain the sequence of events that Afghanistan experienced, and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s role in these events.

After the last of the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989, the mujahidin then focused on ousting the pro-Soviet government led by Mohammad Najibullah (former head of the Afghan secret police) thus beginning what many have defined as the first phase of the Afghan Civil War. Najibullah had replaced Babrak Karmal as leader of Afghanistan in 1986. Najibullah continued to maintain power even after the withdrawal of the Soviet military. Despite the absence of the Soviet forces, the Afghan military under Najibullah was never stronger. The Soviet government continued to supply Najibullah with weapons, including tanks and fighter jets, until the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. Despite the strength of the Afghan Army under Najibullah, the PDPA only had control of fifteen percent of Afghanistan, and Najibullah’s power relied on a shaky coalition of the major government ministries.159 Three weeks after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ahmad Shah Massoud (who at the time was still a member of Jamiat-i-Islami) sensed disaccord within the leadership of the Afghan army’s northern command. A rebellion within the northern command left a general by the name of Abdul Rashid Dostam (an ethnic Uzbek) in

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From his base in Mazar-e Sharif, Dostam was able to maintain relatively stable control over Northern Afghanistan. Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostam formed an alliance that was joined by Sayyid Mansor, an important warlord in from the Baghlan Province. Massoud, along with Dostam and Mansor, would control nine provinces in the north and northeast of Afghanistan, thus establishing a precursor to what would come to be known as the Northern Alliance. This forerunner to the Northern Alliance would also ally itself with other mujahidin groups for the common purpose of defeating the PDPA.

On April 15, 1992, the capital (Kabul) fell after a rebel offensive. Najibullah was unable to escape the city, so he fled to a NATO compound within the city for safe-haven. This compound was eventually overrun by the Taliban on September 27, 1996, almost three and a half years later, at the end of the next phase of the Afghan Civil War. Najibullah, along with his brother, were then hanged.

The next phase of the Afghan Civil War began shortly after the fall of Kabul in April 1992 (when Najibullah fled from his seat of power as President of Afghanistan and into the safe-haven of a NATO compound). The groups that had united to fight the communists were about as different from each other as they were from their common enemy. It is important to note that Afghanistan is prone to disunity by the very nature of its ethnic makeup, along with its tribal society. In diverse places, such as the United States, different minorities or ethnic groups have, for the most part, assimilated into the nation as a whole. The tribal society in which Afghanistan is deeply rooted does not easily allow for assimilation.

The four main ethnic groups are the Pashtuns, from the south and west, and the Tajiks and Uzbeks who dominate in the north and east. Also, the Hazari minority accounts for most

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161 Maley, The Afghan Wars, 208-209.


of the country's Shiite Muslims. Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Tajiks are mostly Sunni Muslims.\footnote{Roger A Lee, “The Afghan Civil War: 1978-Present,” \textit{The History Guy Website}, last modified September 21, 2011, \url{http://historyguy.com/afghan_civil_war.html}.} It is usually taboo for a person to marry outside of one’s clan, let alone one’s tribe or ethnic group. In most of the country, it would be very unusual to see a Pashtun marry a Tajik, or a Hazari marry an Uzbek, and it would be almost unheard of for a Sunni to marry a Shi’ite. Although mujahidin groups were led by and consisted of members of different tribes, mujahidin groups with dramatically different viewpoints and different socio-linguistic groups with different religious beliefs (whether it be Sunni or Shi’ite, extremist or moderate (or even secular), were able to unite into a shaky marriage to fight the PDPA. Once there was no common enemy, the various mujahidin groups turned on each other, and new alliances were formed.

One reporter’s trip to Afghanistan following the fall of the PDPA regime perfectly describes the fragility that existed in alliances between various mujahidin groups. Michael Semple, a reporter with an illustrious background, traveled to Afghanistan, following the collapse of the PDPA regime. He said that during his travels from Hazarajat to central Afghanistan, he was forced to cross “the fault lines of ethnicity, language and religion and the front lines between the armed factions.”\footnote{Michael Semple, “Afghanistan: Fault Lines in the Sand,” \textit{NewStatesman}, last modified July 7, 2011, \url{http://www.newstatesman.com/asia/2011/07/civil-war-taliban-afghanistan}.} Semple was initially taken under the protection of the Hezb-i-Wahdat, the most powerful Shi’a mujahidin group in Afghanistan, which mainly comprises the ethnic Hazara minority. From there, he was driven by members of the Hezb-i-Wahdat to meet with members of the Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Sunni mujahidin group that had recently allied with Hezb-i-Wahdat, during which time Semple and his Hezb-i-Wahdat escorts were forced to dodge Sayyaf’s Ittihad-I-Islami forces, which held a major portion of central Kabul. When one takes a step back and looks at the situation, it seems ironic. A Shi’a mujahidin group has allied with a mainly Sunni, Pashtun group to fight against Sayyaf’s mainly Sunni, Pashtun Ittihad-I-Islami. It is an example of the fact that alliances are built on convenience rather than political, ethnic, or religious beliefs. After arriving safely into Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin territory, Semple managed to take a bus to the front line, which was located in west Kabul. During the bus
ride, he heard an exchange between two Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin mujahidin individuals that sums up the notion of alliances in Afghanistan.

The old man seated in front of me on the bus asked his companion: ‘Why has Hekmatyar taken these infernal Hazaras into his lap? They are more murderous than the Soviets.’ The companion reassured him: ‘Do not worry, brother, I am sure it is a stratagem. It will not last.’ The journey reminded me that the conflict in the early 1990s was a civil war - and a complex one at that. Almost twenty years later, many of the fault lines remain.167

After the fall of Kabul in April 1992, there was a power struggle among the various groups as to who would rule Afghanistan. It would be Rabbani and his allies that would emerge victorious. An alliance of mujahidin groups led by Massoud (a member of Burhanuddin Rabbani’s Jamiat-i-Islami) and Dostam were able to oust Hekmatyar, thus ending the mujahidin’s war against the PDPA and beginning another phase in the Afghan Civil War.168 After the fall of Kabul, guerilla leaders assembled in Peshawar (for what would become known as the Peshawar Accords). It was decided that an interim council called the Islamic Jihad Council would be established. The Islamic Jihad Council comprised fifty-one warlords and religious leaders and was led by Professor Sibghatullah Mojaddedi.169 After two months, the Islamic Jihad Council was dissolved in favor of a ten-man Leadership Council headed by Rabbani. Four months later, a Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) was convened and Mojaddedi was elected as the first president of the Islamic State of Afghanistan with Ahmad Shah Massoud appointed as Minister of Defense.170 After only two months as president, Mojaddedi relinquished his power to Rabbani, thus once again making Rabbani the President of Afghanistan.171 Sayyaf benefited from this new change in government as he was a longtime ally and former member of Jamiat-i-Islami, as well as a longtime rival of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. No records can be found, however, of Sayyaf holding any government positions during the early phases of the creation of the Islamic State

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170 Ibid.
171 Ibid., 67.
of Afghanistan. It is known that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar initially refused to participate in this newly formed government (even refusing Mojaddedi’s offer of a post within the government) and continued to fight against the newly formed coalition forces that comprised the Islamic State of Afghanistan.\footnote{Ibid., 66-67.}

It was during Rabbani’s reign (1992-1996) that the Taliban was formed and would eventually lead to his downfall. The Taliban was formed in 1994 by Mullah Omar in the southwestern town of Kandahar.\footnote{Peter G. Mandaville, Global Political Islam (New York: Routlege, 2007), 225.} Most of the initial members were current or previous students of Pakistani madrasas (religious schools), hence the name Taliban,\footnote{Ibid.} which translates to “students” in Arabic. The Taliban quickly spread their influence throughout southern Afghanistan (which mainly comprises ethnic Pashtuns) and even crossed the border into Pakistan.\footnote{Ibid.} Pakistan soon became the new favorite of the ISI after it became obvious that Hekmatyar and his Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin did not have the strength that they previously had during the Afghan-Soviet War.\footnote{Ibid.}

This next phase of the Afghan Civil war lasted from 1992-1996. It began with the resignation of Najibullah and ended when the Taliban took power of the central government. The first two years of this phase were relatively docile compared to the second two. Initially, Kabul was the main fighting ground. Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin did not have the strength to take Kabul, so instead camped on the outskirts, hurling rockets into the city. This prompted Dostum to launch a counterattack. In a perfect example of the ever-shifting alliances between warlords, Dostum abandoned Massoud and joined Hekmatyar, who he had just been fighting.\footnote{Terry Bryant, History’s Greatest War (West Sussex, United Kingdom: Global Media, 2007).} The phase of the civil war that was fought between 1992-1996 was characterized by rocket attacks and reprisals in which all sides, including Sayyaf, were accused of war crimes. Sayyaf’s Ittihad-i-Islami was allied with Rabbani’s government and was mainly engaged with Hekmatyar’s ally, Abdul Ali Mazari’s Hezb-i-Wahdat. Many of
the battles were fought in residential areas of Kabul, causing countless civilian deaths. Sayyaf’s mujahidin group was accused of kidnapping, torturing, and killing hundreds of ethnic Hazara civilians. Strong feelings regarding Sayyaf’s war crimes still exist in Afghanistan today. Signs depicting Sayyaf’s image (such as the image below) are often vandalized with red paint as a metaphor for the innocent blood that Sayyaf has on his hands.

One of the more infamous war crimes perpetrated by Sayyaf was the Afshar Massacre in 1993. The massacre began as retaliation against Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin and Hezb-i-Wahdat rocket attacks. Sayyaf’s instructed his Ittihad-i-Islami mujahidin to enter the Afshar district of Kabul and massacre all of its inhabitants. “According to the report one commander testified that before the Afshar massacre of Shia civilians in 1993, jihadi leader Abdul Rasool Sayyaf told his officers, ‘Don't leave anyone alive -- kill all of them.’”

Figure 8 shows a poster of Sayyaf that has been smeared with red paint to symbolize the blood he has shed with his war crimes.

In 1994, after two years of fighting between Rabbani’s government and his allies (including Massoud and Sayyaf) and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami-i-Gulbuddin and its allies (including General Abdur Rashid Dostum and the Shi’a mujahidin group Hezb-i-Wahdat), the Taliban, led by Mullah Mohammad Omar entered the fray. From 1994 to 1996 civil war raged between the three sides. The Taliban emerged as the victors after their capture of Kabul in the late summer of 1996.

The year 1996 was an important year in Afghanistan’s history. The ISI-backed Taliban was created in 1994 and scored their first major gain with the capture of Kandahar, often referred to as the key to Afghanistan. By 1996, they captured the capital of Kabul, thus

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securing the power of the central governing body of the country. The Northern Alliance would continue to fight against the Taliban until after the invasion of US/coalition forces after 9/11, but the Taliban was, in essence, in control of the country. That same year that the Taliban took power, Osama bin Laden, who had grown to become a major Islamic terrorist and enemy of the United States and Saudi Arabia, was forced to flee his safe-haven in Sudan as a result of international pressure against the Sudanese government. He fled to Afghanistan. The Taliban welcomed him with open arms. It is interesting to note that upon his arrival into Afghanistan, he first stayed with Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, at Sayyaf’s invitation. Sayyaf was not an ally of the Taliban, as bin Laden was. Al-Qaeda was close partners with the Taliban and even had independent units in the Taliban’s army. Sayyaf, on
the other hand, openly opposed the Taliban and was a member of the Northern Alliance. Despite this, bin Laden first stayed with Sayyaf upon his arrival to Afghanistan. This is a glaring example of how strong the personal friendship between Sayyaf and bin Laden was. They had fought together in the Soviet-Afghan War and had trained mujahidin to fight in future Islamic-based conflicts. They both held extreme views of Islam. It cannot be stressed enough how like-minded bin Laden and Sayyaf were. The major difference between them is that bin Laden would be hunted and eventually killed by the US government. Sayyaf, on the other hand, would become a major figure in Afghanistan’s new US-backed government after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001. An interesting note is that although these two men have similar backgrounds and religious convictions, they have polar opposite relationships with the US government.

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184 “Profiles of Afghan Power Brokers,” Center for American Progress.
CHAPTER 7

POST-9/11

Prior to the invasion of US/coalition forces after 9/11 (September 11, 2001), Abdul Rasul Sayyaf is believed to have directly or indirectly assisted in the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud. It is common knowledge that either the Taliban or al-Qaeda was responsible for the assassination of Massoud two days before 9/11.185 The question is: which of the two was the mastermind? Massoud was killed in a suicide bomb that was planted inside of a television camera. Two suicide bombers were able to gain access to Massoud on the auspices that they were journalists from an Arab newspaper in North Africa.186 The bombers stayed a week in Massoud’s camp until they were allowed access to him. None of Massoud’s followers had thought to check the camera, as the so-called journalists came highly recommended from people within Massoud’s own government.187 Many have accused Sayyaf of personally setting up the meeting between the bombers and Massoud. According to one source, Sayyaf and Burhanuddin Rabbani may have been additional targets of the bombers. The source states that the bombers asked if Massoud, Sayyaf, and Rabbani could pose together for a picture, but this request was denied.188 Other sources claim that Sayyaf is the man responsible for arranging the meeting, and with full knowledge of the planned assassination. It is possible that these are baseless allegations. Sayyaf was an open opponent of the Taliban, but he still maintained a strong friendship with Osama bin Laden. The fact that Sayyaf had been longtime allies with Massoud does not mean much in a society of ever shifting alliances. Many believe that it was al-Qaeda, not the Taliban, who was

187 Ibid.
responsible for the assassination of Massoud. This is based on the fact that Massoud was assassinated two days prior to 9/11. Massoud was the main opponent of the Taliban, whom offered al-Qaeda a safe haven. Osama bin Laden must have known that after 9/11, there would be a massive US reprisal. He would need the help of the Taliban more than ever, and the elimination of the Taliban’s main enemy was also the elimination of the United States’ potentially most important ally.

We think it was well coordinated with the [Sept. 11] American terrorist action," said Sabawoon. "They wanted to kill all these leaders and remove the United Front from Afghanistan. Then they could capture all this territory and attack America. Maybe they expected a reaction from America, and if there were no United Front forces, it would be very difficult for America to send their ground troops to Afghanistan."\(^{189}\)

An interesting note is that many sources claim that the ISI also assisted in the assassination of Massoud. The ISI had motive, as it was an ally of the Taliban. The fact that the United States is allied with the ISI in the War on Terror is yet another example of how the US government is many times forced into forming alliances out of necessity, such as the US support of Afghan warlords during the Afghan-Soviet War. Many times the US government is forced to side with the lesser of two evils to achieve its aims.

Sayyaf has been confirmed by the Human Rights Watch as a war criminal.\(^{190}\) A 220-page report prepared by the UN high commissioner for human rights lists many of the war crimes committed in Afghanistan by the Soviets, PDPA, Taliban, and various mujahidin groups.\(^{191}\) It was set to be released in January 2005, but was shelved for eighteen months because it named a number of men who held current positions of power; many of whom were appointed by President Hamid Karzai, including Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Afghan Parliament) member Sayyaf. Sayyaf was elected as a delegate in the 2003 Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly). Loya Jirga’s are unique to Afghanistan and Pakistan’s tribal societies. The tradition of jirgas (or assemblies) is as old as the tribal society that they live in. Throughout their history (long before Afghanistan and Pakistan were divided and created into modern

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\(^{189}\) Branigin, “Massoud's Assassins.”


\(^{191}\) The Guardian, “UN Details Atrocities.”
“countries”), there has been a tradition of the various clans and tribes joining together for a Loya Jirga. This is held very infrequently, and is only called to discuss matters that span beyond the interests of an individual tribe. There are two types of Loya Jirga’s; the first type is called by the people to decide matters, such as going to war or electing a king. The second type is called by the leader to consult the people over important matters, such as the enactment of fundamental laws, endorsement of treaties with foreign nations/empires, defense of territorial integrity, and national sovereignty.192 The first of the modern Loya Jirga’s was called in the early eighteenth century by Mirwais Khan Hotak. Since that time there have been twenty-two Loya Jirga’s held in Afghanistan, nine of which were held after 9/11. After the fall of the Taliban by US/coalition forces, a bicameral (two-house legislature) government was established. The Wolesi Jirga (Lower House, also known as the House of the People) is the more active of the two. “The House of the People is the chamber that bears the greater burden of law making in the country, as with the House of Commons in the Westminster model.”193 The Wolesi Jirga’s primary job is to make and ratify laws, as well as to approve the decisions of the president. It currently consists of 249 delegates who are elected by the people. Members of the Wolesi Jirga are elected by district to serve five-year terms. At least sixty-four delegates (two from each province) must be women who are appointed by the president. The president also nominates two representatives of the physically disabled and two Kuchi nomads.194

The Meshrano Jirga, or Upper House, can have an unlimited number of people. It currently has 102 members.

The Meshrano Jirga of the National Assembly of Afghanistan consists of 102 members. Two-thirds were elected indirectly through Provincial Councils (one-third representing the Provincial Councils and one-third representing the District Councils) and one-third were appointed by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.195

194 “Wolesi Jirga (House of the People),” Ronna.
There must also be a certain percentage of women, disabled, and Kuchi nomads present in the Mesherano Jirga just as in the Loya Jirga. The purpose of the Mesherano Jirga is to approve those laws that are passed by the Wolesi Jirga. The Mesherano Jirga serves in more of an advisory role to the Wolesi Jirga, although it does have some veto power.

After the creation of the modern US-backed Afghan government, Sayyaf was elected as a representative of Kabul to the Wolesi Jirga. Sayyaf maintains a strong degree of influence within the Wolesi Jirga for a number of reasons, including the fact that he is one of Afghanistan’s most powerful surviving warlords. Also, President Hamid Karzai listens closely to Sayyaf. Sayyaf is head of the Islamic Dawah Organization of Afghanistan political party, which was renamed from the former Ittihad-i-Islami in 2005. The renaming of his political party may have been a move to legitimize it, as the Ittihad-i-Islami was responsible for atrocities against fellow Afghans. One of his most infamous acts while serving in the Wolesi Jirga was to push through a law that sought to bar the prosecution of former mujahedeen for war crimes. Sayyaf’s influence is so strong that he also managed to persuade Karzai to appoint Fazal Hadi Shinwari, an ally of Sayyaf, as chief justice of the Afghan Supreme Court, despite the fact that Shinwari is neither a trained judge nor an Islamic scholar. Shinwari has since pushed through laws that reflect Sayyaf’s extreme Islamic beliefs and reflect Taliban-style Islamic law, such as his views over women’s equality, as well as his promoting of mullah’s, rather than qualified judges, in the judiciary system. Even though Sayyaf openly fought against the Taliban, his religious and political beliefs were more in line with the Taliban’s extremist Islamic beliefs rather than his ally, Ahmad Shah Massoud’s beliefs. Several diplomats in Kabul have voiced their concern over the close relationship between Sayyaf and Shinwari.

It is important to address the modern insurgency against the US/coalition forces to better understand Sayyaf’s importance in the current Afghan government. Researchers at the

196 “Profiles of Afghan Power Brokers,” Center for American Progress.
197 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
National Defense Research (RAND) Institute compiled data from ninety insurgencies that have occurred since 1945 to gain an understanding of what factors contribute to the emergence of an insurgency and its outcome. This was done to strategize on how the current insurgency in Afghanistan should be fought, as each insurgency has unique factors which must be addressed. The researchers at RAND have determined that three questions must be asked when planning a strategy to fight against an insurgency. They are: What is the nature of the insurgency, what factors have contributed to the rise of insurgencies (particularly that of Afghanistan), and what capabilities should the US military consider developing to improve its ability to wage effective counterinsurgency operations?201

The modern Afghan insurgency comprises three main groups: The Taliban (led by Mullah Omar), Hezb-i-Islami (led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar), and the Haqqani network (led by Jalaluddin Haqqani).202 203 Along with the three main insurgent groups, there exist hundreds of smaller, independent groups of foreign fighters, local tribes, and criminal organizations.204 The insurgency can be divided into two main groups or tiers. The top tier comprises insurgents who are considered to be extremists. They are motivated by radical Islamic beliefs, such as the belief that Afghanistan, and all Islamic lands for that matter, should be purified of Western infidels and that puppet governments of the United States (such as the current Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai) should be destroyed.205 The Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, and the Haqqani network are listed in the top tier of insurgent groups, along with hundreds of other military and political groups currently fighting against the US.206

The bottom tier comprises insurgents who do not subscribe to a radical Islamic belief, but are rather “soldiers of opportunity.” The bottom tier insurgents are commonly hired by

204 Ibid.
205 Jones, “Afghanistan's Local Insurgency.”
206 Ibid.
the top tier insurgents to carry out their “dirty work.” This includes activities, ranging from planting roadside bombs for a small fee, up to engaging in small-scale battles (hit and run guerilla tactics) against US/coalition forces.

The top tier of insurgents fight, for the most part, out of a pure religious conviction that they are required to wage jihad against the Crusaders (US/Coalition forces aka International Security Assistance Force [ISAF]). Other reasons also exist, such as the quest for more power, but the public declaration for waging an insurgent campaign is always that of religious conviction. The bottom tier of insurgents is, for the most part, not motivated by the conviction that it is their calling to wage jihad. They are opportunists. Unlike the top tier, who have a simple goal for waging an insurgent war, the bottom tier’s motives are more complex, but can almost always be narrowed down to opportunism. Some fight for money (as stated before, many bottom tier insurgents are paid by top tier insurgents to plant IEDs and engage in hit and run attacks against the ISAF. Some are using the war as an excuse to engage in vendettas. (One tactic that is simple and effective is for an Afghan to inform ISAF that an individual is a member of the Taliban or al-Qaeda, knowing full well that the individual will be arrested and possibly never be seen or heard from again.) This is also a popular tactic for an envious individual to take over his neighbor’s property. Some insurgent groups are no more than criminal gangs that engage in typical criminal activity, such as drug smuggling and extortion.

Sayyaf, ever the opportunist, has realized that the best way to increase his power base is not to fight against the ISAF and the newly established Afghan government, but instead to join the new government. There are many possible reasons for Sayyaf to join the newly established Afghan government. One reason is the fact that Sayyaf is mortal enemies with two of the three main mujahidin commanders, Hekmatyar and Mullah Omar. Sayyaf has openly fought against both Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami and Omar’s Taliban during the Afghan Civil War, which began in 1992. The Afghan Civil War officially ended in 1996, when the Taliban established itself as the governing body of Afghanistan. However, Sayyaf and his longtime ally Ahmed Shah Massoud continued to wage a guerilla campaign against the Taliban until Massoud’s death on September 9, 2001, and the US intervention in Afghanistan shortly after. True to the saying, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” it is likely that the United States supported Sayyaf in the combined effort to eliminate the
Taliban. No declassified information has been found to confirm the assertion that Sayyaf received support from the United States following 9/11, but it seems fairly certain given the fact that Sayyaf received support from the CIA during the Afghan-Soviet War and the Northern Alliance received much support after 9/11 (and possibly before as well) that Sayyaf should also reap both financial and military support from the United States. Although Sayyaf’s extremist beliefs run in stark contrast with the predominantly Christian democratic United States, he has the sense to play the game of politics and side with the newly established Afghan government headed by Karzai. The United States should forever keep an eye on Sayyaf. His opportunism, mixed with his extremist Islamic beliefs, make him a ticking time bomb.

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207 Bearden and Risen, The Main Enemy, 233.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

According to Randy Pherson, a former senior official at the CIA and the President of Pherson Associates, the main problem with the new generation of analysts, which he affectionately calls the “Google generation,” is their reluctance to give an opinion on the information that they have gathered. They excel at researching and organizing the information, the scientific part of analysis, but lack the creativeness to produce likely scenarios from the gathered information, which, according to Pherson, is more of an art.  

The majority of the information directly relating to Abdul Rasul Sayyaf was gathered from the internet, including various biographies (severely lacking in detail), blogs (many from Afghan people who reside in Afghanistan or have relatives who do), interviews, as well as briefings, after action reports, and analyses from government and military personnel. Considering how important Sayyaf has been in the forming of modern day Afghanistan, and the potential importance he will play in its future, it is interesting to note that there is relatively little scholarly information on him. Much of the available information is contrasting.

The news media provides unreliable and biased information at best. Also, the news media attempts to sensationalize events to increase its own profits. Lastly, the news media does not have access to classified documents and most of the time does not have the time or resources to access important sources or documents that have been declassified. Internet blogs are similar to newspapers, in that they are biased. There are blogs that praise Sayyaf as a hero, while others condemn him as a war criminal. Blogs about the current state of Afghanistan are as varying as those of Sayyaf, and are for the most part, uneducated and full of emotion.

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Therefore, a careful attempt was made to determine the validity of the information sources and to present all sides of the story of Sayyaf’s life. This thesis intends to educate the reader as to the modern history of Afghanistan, and how the events that have unfolded within the last forty years have led to the current political situation. More importantly, this thesis is meant to inform the reader as to Sayyaf’s involvement in these events, and how he has gone from obscurity to one of the most powerful men in the Afghan government.

An important question is what does the future hold for Sayyaf and the nation of Afghanistan? A briefing by an unnamed intelligence officer stationed in the Kandahar Provence of Afghanistan helped shed light on the future political situation in Afghanistan. During his intelligence briefing, the officer raised awareness to one of the major problems facing the development of Afghanistan into a modern, functioning democracy: education. Although Afghanistan’s deep seated tribal society roots, along with the long-standing rivalries between clans and warlords is a major factor, the most important hindrance to the unification and modernization of Afghanistan is a lack of education. The goal of the US government, through the US troops and coalition forces, is to establish a modern democracy. This means that among other things the country must develop local police forces and jails. According to the unnamed intelligence source, he stated that in the province of Kandahar, two percent of females and eight percent of males have received education past the primary stages. The fact is that the vast majority of Afghans are illiterate. How can one create a local government, including a functioning police force, if all its members are illiterate? How are laws to be recorded and police reports to be written? Literacy has previously not been a necessity as the Afghanistan society of oral traditions passes down stories from generation to generation. This is not effective when running a modern government. Although many schools have been opened, the “literate generation” will not take power for decades. In the meantime, old school warlords, such as Sayyaf, will retain much of the control of Afghanistan.

A more obvious problem facing the future of Afghanistan is the insurgency. According to the unnamed intelligence, Afghanistan is divided into spheres of influence controlled by either the government, Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani Network, and other smaller insurgent groups and criminal organizations. The borders between these spheres of influence are complex. The most similar comparison is that of the West Bank, in which the
border between Israel and the Palestinian territories is erratic and inter-dispersed are Palestinian towns surrounded by Israeli territory and Israeli settlements burrowed into Palestinian territory. In Afghanistan, there are Taliban strongholds surrounded by territory controlled by the government and vice versa. Currently, the insurgency does not have the power to overthrow the coalition government, while the coalition government is unable to pacify the entire country. If the coalition government eventually succeeds in defeating the insurgency, warlords such as Sayyaf will continue to play a key role for years to come (as stated earlier regarding the disproportion of literate Afghans, thus necessitating the need for warlords to maintain the tribal society until the country is ready to function as a democracy). It is also possible that the stalemate situation in Afghanistan will result in the creation of small fiefdoms within the nation ruled by various factions. This outcome would also result in warlords such as Sayyaf playing a major role, in which they will rule their various fiefdoms and create coalitions, as has been happening for decades. No matter what the final outcome of the current conflict in Afghanistan, warlords such as Sayyaf will continue to remain important in the upcoming future.

The recent assassination of Sayyaf’s longtime mentor, Burhanuddin Rabbani, on September 20, 2011, by a Taliban suicide bomber, has only elevated Sayyaf’s relevance as one of the most powerful Afghan warlords, and one of the last from the Peshawar Seven. Sayyaf, himself, was on the receiving end of at least one highly publicized assassination attempt on November 20, 2009, in which sixteen people were killed when a suicide motorcycle bomber detonated a bomb next to Sayyaf’s convoy. Afghanistan is a volatile country. The last decade of the War on Terror has seen dozens of high profile actors, both in the government and in the insurgency either killed in drone strikes, suicide bombings, or various other assassination attempts. It is impossible to say with certainty that Sayyaf will play a major role in Afghanistan’s future, as he remains a major target to opposition groups,

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but as long as Sayyaf is alive, and the government does not fall to the Taliban or other insurgent forces, then Sayyaf will remain a major player in Afghan politics for years to come.

One last issue must be addressed: the possible death of Sayyaf and what this may mean for the future of Afghanistan. As stated many times previously in this thesis, Afghanistan is a volatile country where assassinations are common. One can only speculate as to the future of Afghanistan in the absence of Sayyaf. Sayyaf has always been a violent opponent of both the Taliban and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami. The Afghan government has been making strides to bridge the gap between the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami. Rabbani, Sayyaf’s former mentor, was the leader of Afghanistan’s High Peace Council and was involved in reconciliation efforts with the Taliban prior to his assassination. He was attempting to engage the Taliban in negotiations for peace. Current and former members of Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami are also integrating into the new Afghan government including the current economic minister Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal and candidate Abdul Ghafur.211

The integration of Hezb-i-Islami into the Afghan government as well as the attempts to make peace with the Taliban most likely does not sit well with Sayyaf. The Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami are his mortal enemies and the more power they gain within the Afghan government, the less influence Sayyaf will hold. Although the integration of Hezb-i-Islami and the Taliban may benefit Afghanistan in terms of assisting in curbing the bloodshed, it does not benefit Sayyaf political ambitions. Although the short term goal of the integration of these two groups could lead to temporary peace, there is always a danger that it would also lead to the return of a tyrannical government such as that of the Taliban before the US invasion after 9/11 as these two groups are known for their extremist views of Islam. Also, as has been shown throughout this thesis, alliances are built on necessity and are not known for their longevity. It is unlikely that the integration of the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami will lead to a sturdy, long-lasting government. This could be disastrous for US interests in the region. As for Sayyaf, if he were to die, it is unclear who would take his place, but it would make it that

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much easier for the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami to integrate into the Afghan government. The importance that Sayyaf holds in the Afghan government is not to be underestimated.
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