



# Weapon of Choice in Afghanistan

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**U.S. Army Special Operations Forces in  
Afghanistan**

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# Foreword

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This extensive account of U.S. Army Special Operations soldiers and their actions in Afghanistan is an important contribution to understanding how these unique individuals removed the *Taliban* from power and destroyed *al-Qaeda* and *Taliban* strongholds in Afghanistan as part of the US global war on terrorism. The originating idea, research, and writing that went into it are strictly the product of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and its assigned authors.

The Combat Studies Institute (CSI), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is pleased to have been selected to provide the technical editing and production assistance required to produce this novel work. The editing section of CSI's Research and Publication Team has faithfully produced the thoughts, ideas, and sentiments of the original authors.

Lawyn C. Edwards  
Colonel, Aviation  
Director, Combat Studies

# Acknowledgments

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*Weapon of Choice* is a history of the Army special operations forces in Afghanistan from 11 September 2001 to 15 May 2002, during America's global war on terrorism (GWOT). Lieutenant General R. Doug Brown, commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), directed and personally sponsored this initial effort "to capture the current operations history of the Army special operations soldiers as they fought the war in Afghanistan." Writing an unclassified, well-documented history of current operations was a first for the command and staff of USASOC as well as for the supported headquarters, U.S. Central Command (CENT-COM); U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM); Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC); and Special Operations Command, CENTCOM (SOCCENT). The "learning curve" was steep for all parties, but the final results—a special edition of *Special Warfare* magazine, "ARSOF in Afghanistan," and this book, *Weapon of Choice*—demonstrate what can be accomplished.

Appropriate thanks are due a myriad of people whose encouragement, assistance "above and beyond," and constant support made this timely history possible. Within the USASOC history community are Dr. Cherilyn Walley, USASOC historian, and Dr. Kenn Finlayson, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy *Special Warfare* Center and School (SWCS) historian, who read, commented on, and edited *Weapon of Choice* and who proofread the final manuscript; Mr. Earl J. Moniz, resident "computer wizard," who physically organized and compiled all of the written material into a manuscript, scanned photographs and leaflets into the text, and designed the cover for *Weapon of Choice*; LTC Robert Jones, a mobilized U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) historian, who

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Finally, accolades are due for Dr. W. Glenn Robertson, Combat Studies Institute (CSI), Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and editors Patricia H. Whitten who edited and laid the book out and Robin D. Kern who assisted with layout and worked on the covers, Research and Publication Team, CSI, for producing a quality *Weapon of Choice*.

While all authors sincerely appreciate the help rendered by everyone mentioned above, errors of fact and identification, and the nonattributable observations and reflections section in *Weapon of Choice* are my responsibility as senior writer and editor.—Dr. Chuck Briscoe



# Introduction

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The purpose of this book is to share Army special operations soldier stories with the general American public to show them what various elements accomplished during the war to drive the *Taliban* from power and to destroy *al-Qaeda* and *Taliban* strongholds in Afghanistan as part of the global war on terrorism. The purpose of the book is not to resolve Army special operations doctrinal issues, to clarify or update military definitions, or to be the “definitive” history of the continuing unconventional war in Afghanistan. The purpose is to demonstrate how the war to drive the *Taliban* from power, help the Afghan people, and assist the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) rebuild the country afterward was successfully accomplished by majors, captains, warrant officers, and sergeants on tactical teams and aircrews at the lowest levels. If Army special operations forces (ARSOF) operations and the operational employment of teams in Afghanistan by various Joint Special Operations Task Forces (JSOTFs) create doctrinal debate, the appropriate venue within which to resolve those issues is at the U.S. Army *Special Warfare* Center and School. Combat operations in Afghanistan remain classified by the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). This is a carefully “sanitized” rendering of selected combat operations, and used pseudonyms for military personnel in the grade of lieutenant colonel and below (unless the individuals had received so much media exposure that this simple security measure would be meaningless). Likewise, the “eyes” of ARSOF personnel below the grade of colonel have been “blacked-out” in the photos for operational security (OPSEC) reasons. Chapter introductions and the vignettes have been written so that individuals with little previous knowledge of the military can

understand and appreciate the contributions of the small Army special operations units that succeeded in driving the *Taliban* from power in Afghanistan.

The selected historical vignettes tell the ARSOF story. Many of these soldier stories demonstrate the capabilities of special operations forces (SOF)-unique equipment, while others point out the skills and bravery of the soldiers and aviators. The strength of ARSOF resides in its highly trained, very motivated soldiers. While technology plays a part in ARSOF, the soldiers make the difference. There has been a conscious effort to ensure that the stories of all ARSOF elements are presented. Thus, to provide a fair representative sampling of different activities within the security constraints, not all interviews became vignettes. One hundred-percent coverage of all participating teams was impossible. The examples selected were the best of those available to demonstrate a capability, illustrate an activity, or clarify a combat mission. The sensitive classified parts have been sanitized based on specific security rules, hence special forces elements do not always mean special forces teams, and pseudonyms are used predominantly. A limited-access U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) classified annex of sources will contain true names and specify documents and briefings to corroborate the material included. The controlled classified annex will not be available to researchers who do not have the appropriate security clearances and a clear “need to know.”

This historical project is not intended to be the definitive study of the war in Afghanistan. It is a “snapshot” of the war from 11 September 2001 until the middle of May 2002. Since the published word promotes analysis and provokes discussion, the first official account of this successful unconventional war should come from Army Special Operations because they spearheaded the ground campaign that forced the *Taliban* from power in Afghanistan. The vignettes are based primarily on recorded interviews, after-

action reports, personal notes of participants, and tactical operations center (TOC) logs. Open secondary sources were also used, but for this operations history, the recorded interviews of soldiers from tactical teams to various JSOTF and Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) staff personnel proved to be the most valuable. Where minor differences were found between accounts by a tactical team and headquarters records and cross-referencing corroborated data provided by the “team on the ground,” that was adopted. In the interest of producing a timely product while the war was still “fresh,” discrepancies that could not be resolved satisfactorily were handled by the project director who evaluated importance, relevance, and whether they contributed to or confused the issue.

This is a current history of war. The decision to have professional historians with ARSOF experience capture the history of current operations in Afghanistan is proof that the book is not intended to be a public relations piece. War and combat have never been “all sunshine and roses.” Just as campaign plans and units orders tend to “go to the winds” once the fighting starts, reluctant and ill-prepared leaders are replaced, confusion and incomplete information are relegated to the “fog of war,” and recollections from the headquarters afterward as to what really happened on the ground tend to dominate after-the-battle reports. The writing team— composed of retired ARSOF veterans— understood those “given” elements. When everything goes according to plan, professional soldiers consider it an anomaly. Thus, to reach 95-percent objectivity, the writing team veterans kept the following sports adage in mind: “It’s easy to fool the fans, but you can’t fool the players.” While observations and reflections are included, complete analysis can be done only when the ARSOF mission in Afghanistan is concluded.

# Chapter 1

## Prelude to Terror

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Oh, East is East, and West is West,  
and never the two shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at  
God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West,  
Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face,  
tho ' they come from the ends of the earth.

On 11 September 2001, two strong men from the ends of the earth stood face to face— President of the United States George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden, leader of the *al-Qaeda* terrorist network. Although they had never met, both stood at the epicenter of one of the most cataclysmic events ever to strike the United States. These two men embodied the clash between Western liberalism and eastern Islamic fundamentalism. One culture valued freedom, equal rights, and religious tolerance. The other culture epitomized hatred—especially for the United States and Israel— suppression of women, demonization of any religion other than Islam, and strict adherence to a radical form of Islam that embraced terrorism and equated death in the *jihad* (holy war) against perceived enemies as glorious martyrdom. Although Americans had encountered Muslim fanaticism in 1993 with the bombing at the World Trade Center and again in 1998 when bin Laden terrorists attacked U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, most failed to understand the vicious nature of a man who viewed “hostility towards America [as] a religious duty.” On that

September morning, the extent of that hostility was brought home to millions of Americans in a flaming shower of glass, metal, and death.

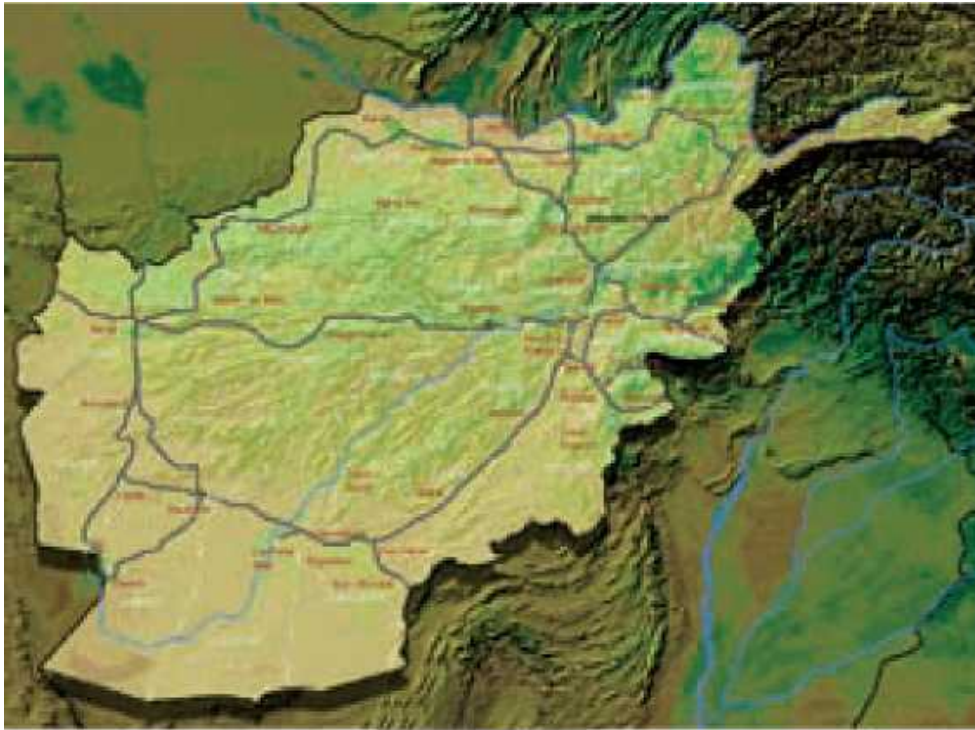


Figure 1. Regional map and selected cities in the country.

Even after the events of 1993 and 1998, Afghanistan had little relevance to most Americans as they went about their daily lives. What was unfolding there, however, suddenly would dominate the news, the stock market, the airlines, and the very security of the United States. Only soldiers, diplomats, historians, and oil pipeline executives expressed any interest in or knowledge of that far-away Third-World country. Few Americans understood why the United States would be drawn into a conflict with religious overtones that seemed so distant and so confusing. While the United States was not at war with Afghanistan and had no interest in attacking, occupying, or intervening in that country, *al-Qaeda*, with the support of the *Taliban*, saw the world differently.

To better understand this most recent war in Afghanistan, a summarized history of the region is provided. What should become very apparent are three constants: perpetual internal fighting between tribal ethnic groups, the dominance of Islam in society, and intervention by external actors using this discord to achieve influence in the country. Afghan leaders, in turn, have sought to take advantage of power plays, whether they were made by regional actors or international superpowers engaged in Cold War or more powerful warlords. To Westerners, internal alliances seem to “shift with the wind.” The limited number of large cities makes them critical control points in the country. The dominant ethnic group has controlled the population centers. Thus, the significance of their capture or control in 2001 can be related to past wars and internal tribal fighting. Mountains, among the highest in the world, have always dictated the natural flow of traffic in and out of this landlocked country. Throughout this story, historical references will be made to show links between the present war and past conflicts.

Foreign invasion is an integral part of Afghanistan’s history. Alexander the Great invaded the region between 330 and 327 A.D. In the seventh century, Arab Muslims, after conquering Iran, moved east and reached Kandahar around 700 A.D. By 715, Mohammad Bin Oasim had overrun the entire area and begun to convert the populace to Sunni Islam. From the Ghaznavid capital at Ghazni, Yamin ad-Dawlah Mahmud, of Turkish descent, led his military forces through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of India during the first half of the 10th century. His conquests assured the domination of Sunni Islam throughout the region. Various Turkish rulers would rule Afghanistan until 1221 when, from the North, Genghis Khan crossed into present-day Afghanistan and destroyed the city of Balkh. Fifty years later Marco Polo would comment on the ruins of the town. Although his Mongol horde was halted just north

of Kabul, Genghis Khan quickly regrouped and proceeded to devastate the area. The destruction was so complete that one historian has referred to Genghis Khan as “the atom bomb of his day.” But what the Mongols could not destroy was Islam, and by 1295, the descendants of Genghis Khan were Muslim.

In the late 1300s, the warrior Tamerlane (Timur the Lame) moved south from his home near Samarkand in present-day Uzbekistan to incorporate Afghanistan into his Timurid Empire. Tamerlane’s interest in conquest rather than administration prompted the empire’s dissolution after his death in 1405. Although his immediate successors established Herat as a cultural center, they were unable to control the competition for power. For the next three centuries, turmoil characterized what would become Afghanistan. Babur (Zahiruddin Muhammad), a descendant of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, founded the Moghul Dynasty that captured Kabul in 1504 and extended his rule throughout India. Simultaneously, the Persian Safavid Empire seized territory around Kandahar, and Uzbeks attempted to gain control over Herat. Native Pashtun tribes attacked what they perceived to be foreign invaders, but disunity precluded large gains. Competition, lack of unity, and weakness were ingredients that enabled the Persian, Nadir Shar, to control the region with military might.



Figure 2. Regional location map and neighboring countries.

Seeking to overthrow the weak Persian ruler and eliminate the Turks from Persia, Nadir embarked on a successful campaign that not only recovered land lost to Turkey but also dealt with his Pashtun enemies at Herat, Farah, and Kandahar. Because Nadir admired the Pashtun fighting skills, he relocated them in the southwestern part of Afghanistan, the center of their power to this day. His suspicion of those closest led many to be executed, and his son was blinded before Nadir was assassinated in 1747.

Nadir had incorporated into his army a body of cavalry commanded by Ahmad Shah, a Pashtun. After Nadir's death, Ahmad and his men fled the Persian camp, stealing the treasury that Nadir had used to bribe potential enemies. They arrived at Kandahar where a *loya jirga* (council) convened to select a tribal leader. Undoubtedly, Ahmad Shah's powerful cavalry force influenced the *loya jirga's*



decision. Ahmad Shah, as the leader of the most powerful Pashtun tribe, became Ahmad Shah Durrani (Pearl of Pearls) and quickly seized Ghazni and Kabul. After military expeditions into India, Ahmad returned to quell revolts in Herat and southwest Pakistan. Then, a difficulty that would plague Afghanistan into the 21st century surfaced. "No Pashtun likes to be ruled by another," observed historian Louis Dupree, "particularly someone from another tribe, subtribe, or section." By 1752, Ahmad had subdued the northern regions surrounding Konduz, Khanabad, Balkh, and Bamian to bring the Turkmen, Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara tribesmen under his control. While he had succeeded in uniting the numerous regional tribes, their loyalty "was not transferred from their own leaders and kin to the concept of nation." Nevertheless, after his death in 1773, Ahmad Shah Durrani was called Ahmad Shah Baba, the father of Afghanistan, Baba being "father." By 1800, however, tribal rivalries had plunged the once-united country into civil war, and with civil war came foreign intervention.

The 19th century was the great period of empire for England, France, and Russia when all competed in what Rudyard Kipling described as "the Great Game" in his epic, *Kim*. With imperialism and power expansion as the guiding principles, each empire sought to dominate and influence the Indian subcontinent. Since the 1600s, England and France had competed for India's lucrative commerce. That competition quickly turned political. By 1763, British influence was dominant. While Napoleon Bonaparte's dreams of using Persia to counter British and Russian influence in East Asia died at Waterloo in 1815, the czarist dream of a warm-water port found new life. The Russian defeat of a Persian army in 1807 prompted a defense treaty between the British and Shah Shuja Mirza, the Afghan ruler in Kabul, in 1809 and with the Persians in 1814. Suspicious of Afghan intentions toward India, the British later stationed a sizable force in northwest India.

Following the overthrow of Shah Shuja in 1809 and his successor in 1818, Afghanistan disintegrated into tribal warfare. Different factions controlled the population centers of Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat as well as the Kashmir and Peshawar regions. Dost Mohammad Khan eventually achieved a measure of dominance in 1826 in the areas of Kabul and Ghazni. Balkh was lost to northern invaders, and Shuja, even with British assistance, failed to regain Kandahar in 1833. In the meantime, the Russians had been exerting influence on the Persians. In 1837, a Persian army with Russian officers accompanying it advanced on Herat. The Persian advance and the presence of a Russian commercial agent in Kabul caused Great Britain to demand that Dost Mohammad renounce contacts with Persia and Russia, expel the Russian agent from Kabul, and recognize the Indian Sikh conquest of Peshawar. When a strongly worded British note made the capture of Herat into a threat to India, the Persian army was withdrawn and the Russian agent recalled. The Governor General of India, Lord Auckland, was determined that Shuja, whom he believed he could control, should rule in Kabul and Kandahar. The "Great Game" overshadowed the diplomatic and military maneuvering between Russia and Britain where Afghanistan was the playing field.

On 26 April 1839, an invading British army occupied Kandahar, took Ghazni on 22 July, and reached Kabul on 6 August. When Dost Mohammad fled, the British installed Shuja on the throne. British soldiers moved to garrisoned Bamian, Jalalabad, and Charikar. An uneasy peace settled upon a region ruled by an unpopular Afghan puppet supported by English bayonets. The remainder of the country was controlled by tribal leaders, mostly Pashtun.

British envoy William Macnaghten unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate with the other Afghan leaders to form alliances with Shah Shuja who remained in power only while the British occupied the country. Macnaghten's murder

by Dost Mohammad's son, coupled with successful Afghan attacks against the British garrison and the diplomatic residency in Kabul, led to the final abandonment of the city in January 1842. Of 16,500 British soldiers, families, Sepoy infantry and cavalry, and camp followers who left together from Kabul, there were only 123 Europeans and about 2,000 Sepoys who survived the Afghan attacks and the harsh winter trek. On 5 April, Shah Shuja was assassinated. The British garrison at Ghazni surrendered, but those at Kandahar and Qalat withdrew safely. Tribal anarchy plagued Afghanistan until Dost Mohammad returned in 1843 to fight 20 years to wrest control of the eastern region from rival warlords.

The Persians took advantage of the chaotic conditions to occupy Herat in October 1856. When the British declared war, the Persians withdrew. It would not be until Herat was captured by Dost Mohammad in 1863 that most of present-day Afghanistan would be consolidated under his control. In the meantime, concerned that British intervention in Afghanistan threatened their interests, the Russians steadily pushed southward, reaching the Amu Darya River in 1869, the present-day border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Four years later, in 1873, an Anglo-Russian Convention established the Amu Darya as the boundary between Afghanistan and Russia.

Following the cycle of Afghan strongmen, warfare erupted throughout the country when Dost Mohammad died in 1863. For six years his sons fought a fratricidal war until Sher Ali Khan succeeded in becoming ruler in Kabul. Again, the Persians took advantage of the family discord to occupy southeastern Afghanistan. Great Britain had long been concerned about any Russian expansion toward the Mediterranean. While the Crimean War of 1853 led to limits being placed on Russian expansion into Europe and Turkey, the British became alarmed by subsequent Russo-Turkish wars and Russian intentions. The Treaty of San

Stefano that ended the war was viewed so unfavorably by Great Britain that Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli threatened Russia with war if it were not revised. Fortunately, the 1878 Congress of Berlin alleviated British tension, but suspicions of Russian expansion remained strong.

Unfortunately for Afghanistan, the Russians sent an uninvited diplomatic mission in summer 1878 to Kabul. When they were slow to withdraw after formal protest, the British sent forces into Afghanistan in November 1878 to precipitate what is called the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Sher Ali Khan unsuccessfully solicited Russian assistance and died in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The inability of the Afghan tribes to unite against the British and Sher Ali's death led to the Treaty of Gandamak on 26 May 1879. A disturbing aspect of the fighting had been that the British were unable to distinguish friendly Afghans from enemy tribesmen. Although they had been defeated and the treaty had, in reality, imposed British rule of Afghanistan from Kabul and control of foreign affairs, the Afghan tribes could not be controlled. Native troops from Herat revolted. The British garrison fought desperately in Kabul, and another British force was defeated near Kandahar. British retaliation left more than 1,000 Afghans dead.

This combination of calamities culminated in another British withdrawal, and Abdur Rahman Khan became ruler in Kabul. He ruthlessly put down numerous tribal revolts, forcibly relocated the dissident Pashtuns from the south to the north, relieved tax burdens on non-Pashtuns, named provincial governors without regard to tribal affiliation, and raised an army that would be loyal to him. During his reign, Sir Mortimer Durand crafted the Durand Line to serve as either an international boundary or a demarcation line between Indian and Afghan influence, depending on the views of those nations at any specific time in history. Rather

than settling differences, the line became the stimulus for future fighting between Afghanistan and British-controlled India and later between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The British also delineated the Afghan borders with India and China in the extreme northeast part of the country, although the Chinese did not officially recognize the demarcation until 1964. After Abdur Rahman's death in 1901, Afghanistan enjoyed the first peaceful transfer of power in history. The country was united as never before, and a geographic area to serve as a buffer between Russia and British India had been defined. During the reign of Abdur Rahman's son, Habibul-lah, at the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, Russia conceded that Afghanistan was outside its sphere of influence. Habibullah Khan did not agree to the convention, but the Russians and British imposed it anyway.

As World War I engulfed Europe, the Turks and Germans pressured Habibullah to join them in an attack on British India. Habibullah's response was to approach the British with an offer. If Great Britain would relinquish control of Afghan foreign policy, he would stall the Central Powers in the region. The threat relieved, British control over Afghan foreign policy continued. Then, Habibullah was mysteriously assassinated—by whom has never been determined.

Although several of Habibullah's sons and his brother claimed succession, his third son, Amanullah, who controlled the treasury and the army, gained most Afghan tribes' loyalty. His reign as emir brought significant change to Afghanistan. As British troops withdrew to fight in the Great War, the Afghan tribes began launching small raids against British border posts. Sensing weakness, in May 1918, Amanullah used his army in several attacks. This precipitated the Third Anglo-Afghan War. After the initial setbacks, the British rallied and countered with air attacks against Kabul and Jalalabad. After a month of fighting, negotiations were sought. The Treaty of Rawalpindi, signed 8 August 1919, ended Great Britain's 40-year control of

Afghan foreign policy but did not stop tribal attacks on British border posts.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Reds had brutally oppressed Muslims during their consolidation of power in the southern regions. Amanullah wanted to stabilize the situation on his northern frontier and to play off his northern neighbor against the British to his east. In 1921, Russia and Afghanistan signed a Treaty of Friendship—the first treaty signed by the Afghans since regaining control of their foreign policy. The Soviets considered the treaty a diplomatic strike against a European power that opposed the rise of a communist state. The treaty provided the Kabul government with money, airplanes, and technicians. Telephone lines were established between Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif as well as between Herat and Kandahar. Despite the treaty, Soviet troops occupied an island in the Amu Darya River in 1925, forcing Afghan forces to withdraw. The issue was settled peacefully by a Pact of Neutrality and Nonaggression, recognizing the borders as previously established, affirming nonaggression, and resolving that neither would become involved in the internal affairs of the other. The “Great Game” continued as the British responded with an ambiguous treaty with Afghanistan that failed to resolve the disputes over the status of Pashtun people sitting astride the Afghan-Indian border. However, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs declared that Afghanistan was “within the British sphere of political influence.”

Emir Amanullah kept a wary eye on the Soviets while twisting the British lion’s tail with his anti-Great Britain speeches at public events that English diplomats attended. While walking the diplomatic tightrope between the two regional powers, Amanullah also dealt with the Afghan tribal leaders who saw their power being eroded. Revolts continued to be a common response as Pashtun leaders near Khowst rebelled against his reforms. The British and

the Afghans blamed each other for stirring rebellion, but as Afghan historian Louis Dupree observed, "In the frontier areas trouble does not need to be stirred up; it is constantly whirling in the air waiting to light."

Further alienating the traditional tribesmen were Amanullah's social reforms. Intent on bringing the country into the modern era, he sought to impose education for women, to abolish the requirement for women to be veiled, to eliminate government subsidies for tribal chiefs, and to reform the army. Religious leaders declared many of his reform ideas to be anti-Islamic and pointed to photographs of Amanullah's wife, regarded as Afghanistan's queen, taken during their European tour, unveiled and with bare shoulders. As the reforms posed threats to both religious leaders and tribal chiefs, revolt became widespread. In January 1929, Amanullah abdicated. Following another period of tribal warfare, a *loya jirga* (grand council) proclaimed one who advocated reasonable reforms to be emir. Nevertheless, he was assassinated in 1933.

Muhammad Zahir Shah became king in 1933 and reigned until 1973. Afghanistan joined the League of Nations and received official diplomatic recognition from the United States in 1934. Being very aware of the "Great Game" and distrustful of Russia and Great Britain, Zahir Shah turned to Germany for technical and economic assistance. Lufthansa scheduled regular flights between Kabul and Berlin. The United States acquired oil exploration rights in Afghanistan but relinquished them as Europe became embroiled in World War II. Except for some minor frontier skirmishes, Afghanistan, which declared its neutrality on 17 August 1940, remained relatively at peace while much of the world was engulfed in war. Two significant regional postwar political changes that impacted Afghanistan heavily were Indian independence and the separation of Muslim Pakistan from Hindu India. Vastly separated into an eastern and a western Pakistan, the newly created country refused to

adjust the Durand Line of 1893. Thus, the Pashtun region was divided between West Pakistan and its northern Muslim neighbor. In retaliation for cross-border attacks, the Pakistanis cut off oil shipments to Afghanistan in 1950. With the British Empire in the process of collapsing, testy Pakistani relations, and western influence prevailing in Iran, the Soviets seized the opportunity to reestablish friendly relations with Afghanistan.

In need of oil and anxious to obtain money for internal improvements, Zahir Shah looked north. The Soviets gladly provided both. One of the more impressive engineering achievements was a highway with a 2-mile-long tunnel through the Salang Pass about 60 miles northwest of Kabul. Diplomatically, the two nations renewed the 1931 Pact of Neutrality and Nonaggression and signed a major trade agreement in 1956. As Cold War tensions heightened, the United States sought to improve relations throughout the region to counter perceived Soviet expansion. U.S. foreign aid funded an airport in Kandahar and a major irrigation project along the Helmand River in southern Afghanistan; however, military aid was not forthcoming. While Pakistan was invited to join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1955, Paki-stan-Afghanistan differences over the Pashtun region and the level of Soviet aid made membership in the regional defense organization moot. The Soviets were quite willing to provide the desired military aid.

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) concluded that "Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States" and that "it would be desirable for Afghanistan to remain neutral." The National Security Council adopted a similar position. Officially, then, Afghanistan remained neutral as the United States became more active in the "Great Game."

Reminiscent of Amanullah's unsuccessful social reforms to modernize Afghani society were the bold efforts of Prime Minister Daoud Khan to end the isolation of women. In 1959,



the wives and daughters of government officials were allowed on a reviewing stand with their faces uncovered. This supposedly violated two Muslim religious traditions—women wearing a veil and women remaining apart from men in public. Before this episode, the Zahir Shah government had sanctioned working without a veil for the stewardesses on Ariana Afghan Airlines because it was impractical. Females were also permitted to work as radio announcers, and young women could work in a pottery factory. These exceptions were nothing compared to the upheaval caused by the women's public appearance on the reviewing stand.

Mullahs, many of whom were illiterate, protested vehemently, but when challenged to cite specific passages from the Koran to support their position, they could not. While those who spoke openly against the government were arrested, they were soon released. Some recanted their positions; others did not. Two explanations can be given for the mullahs' views. Some mullahs sincerely believed an Islamic woman played a very minor role in society, which Westerners would consider sexual discrimination. Additionally, any social measure that touched on religion diminished the power of the mullah. Education could lead to serious questioning by the people, and the people might question mullahs who could neither read nor reason.

Politically, the period from 1953 to 1973 was one of tension between liberalism and fundamentalism, nationalism and tribalism, and monarchy and democracy. Islam established by Mohammad Bin Oasim and interpreted by the mullahs had been an inherent part of Afghan society since 715. Daoud's attempts to wrench Afghanistan from its feudal state into modernity produced mixed results. Although some women obtained liberties not previously available, they were freedoms generally limited to women in large cities. Modernized infrastructure came only by accepting aid from a nation that had once been a threat.

Taxation to support the efforts of a central government caused antigovernment riots in Kandahar. Because Afghanistan had been a country created geographically with little regard for cultural lines, it was constantly plagued with conflicts along its southern border with Pakistan over the artificial boundary that split Pashtuns who considered the dividing line irrelevant. Border crossing closures prompted clashes between nomads seeking to move animals back and forth between grazing areas as they had for centuries and Pakistani border guards who considered such movements to threaten national stability. The Pakistani actions compelled the Afghans to seek economic relief from Russia.

This new development prompted the National Security Council to reassess its position. The decision was made to adopt a more active role in the region: "The United States should try to resolve the Afghan dispute with Pakistan and encourage Afghanistan to minimize its reliance upon the Communist bloc . . . and to look to the United States . . . for military training and assistance." U.S. government efforts, however, proved to be too little, too late.

In 1963, Prime Minister Daoud, whom many Afghans blamed for Pakistan's problems, stepped down in a surprise move. Two weeks later, the new prime minister, Muhammad Yousuf, formed a committee to draft a new constitution and sought to resolve differences with Pakistan. Instigated by the Shah of Iran, envoys from Pakistan and Afghanistan met in Tehran, and on 29 May 1963, diplomatic relations were reestablished.

Demonstrating its neutral, nonaligned status, Afghanistan did not seek advice for drafting its new constitution from the United States but instead, sought guidance from France, which had 15 constitutions since 1789. After the document was drafted, the king called for a *loya jirga* to convene in September 1964 to review it. Elected delegates countrywide attended. This was no small feat since the literacy rate was about 5 percent. Election

details were disseminated primarily by radio. After deliberations, the loya jirga submitted the 128-article constitution to the king. On 1 October 1963, Muhammad Zahir Shah approved the document. It declared Afghanistan to be “a constitutional monarchy” having an elected bicameral parliament and that “Islam is the sacred religion.” With no tradition of democracy, only approximately 16 percent of the eligible voters turned out for the first election. Still, four women were elected to the parliament.

For the next decade, Afghanistan vacillated between monarchy and democracy. Political parties were forbidden. Newspapers were allowed but were closely controlled. Parliament was ineffective. The four female members were defeated in the 1969 elections. Drought and famine brought misery to the population. During King Zahir’s visit to Europe in 1973, former Prime Minister Daoud initiated a coup and abolished the monarchy. Within two years, he approved a new constitution that created a one-party government overseen by a president. In an attempt to reduce Soviet influence, President Daoud sought aid from India, Iran, and the United States and removed Russian military advisers from many units. He also improved relations with Pakistan. Daoud’s actions infuriated Communists in Afghanistan. On 27 April 1978, the reactions turned violent as Afghan armored units and MiG-21s attacked the presidential palace. The next day Daoud was killed. Nur Mohammed Taraki became president, and the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan—the Communist Party—took control of the country.

President Taraki’s programs included cleansing Islam of “bad traditions, superstition, and erroneous belief.” He redesigned the Afghan flag, eliminating the color green (the color of Islam), and made the dominant color red to resemble the flag of the Soviet Union. Loan payments, gender equality, female education opportunities, and land reform were dictated by government decrees. The rural

villagers considered these Taraki reforms to be anathema because they overturned the traditional ways of social life. Faced by numerous antigovernment uprisings and increased desertions from the army, the president responded by signing a Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighborliness with the Soviet Union and invited Russian military advisers to help suppress the rebels. In February 1979, U.S. Ambassador Adolph Dubs was kidnapped in Kabul, presumably by a Maoist extremist group, and killed during the rescue attempt.

The U.S. government, absorbed by the Shah of Iran's overthrow and the return of Ayatollah Khomeini, considered Afghanistan a lower priority. In Herat in March 1979, after rebels killed nearly 100 Soviet advisers and their families, more than 5,000 Afghans died when government forces, equipped with substantial quantities of new Russian weapons and armored vehicles, recaptured the city. Traditional Afghan factional infighting erupted in the Communist Party. President Taraki was murdered on 14 September 1979 by his Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, who seized power.

Infighting quickly flared into full-scale civil war. Amid a growing apprehension that Russian communists were dominating Afghanistan, the intelligentsia and well to do fled the country. The Afghan armed forces, whose officers had been trained in the Soviet Union, fell apart. Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*, announced that the Soviet leadership could not "remain indifferent" to a civil war "in direct proximity to us." The Russians responded by sending an infusion of advisers to shore up the collapsing ground forces and experienced pilots to fly combat missions against the antigovernment rebels. In October 1979, Soviet-advised forces moved into Paktia Province. Rebel forces retreated, but when government troops withdrew, they returned. Shortly afterward, U.S. intelligence reported heightened Soviet military activity as reservists were called

up, bridging equipment was centralized, and an army headquarters was established near the Amu Darya River. In early December, a reinforced airborne regiment sent to Bagram earlier quickly moved to secure the Salang Tunnel and Kabul International Airport.

On the night of 27 December 1979, Soviet troops assaulted Darulaman Palace in Kabul and killed President Amin. Soviet leaders attempted to explain their actions using the pretext that “We are responding to an appeal from the Afghan leadership to repel outside aggression.” General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev had invoked Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) charter that guaranteed “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.” Afghan communists claimed that Soviet assistance was necessary to defend themselves against attacks by the United States, Pakistan, and China. Then, in a clumsy attempt to justify their actions, the Soviets proffered former deputy premier Babrak Karmal as the new president. Karmal broadcast a message to the Afghan people on the Radio Kabul frequency that “the torture machine of Amin . . . has been broken” and to declare a *jihad* “for true democratic justice, as respect for the holy Islamic religion.” The newly touted president did not mention that he was actually broadcasting from Termez, Uzbekistan. During another broadcast, Karmal claimed that he had requested military assistance from the Soviets.

Careful scrutiny of the invasion timetable of events revealed how inept the Soviets were in their attempts to legitimize the heavy-handed actions. The individuals whom the Soviets claimed had elected Karmal were in prison during the supposed election; announcements that first Amin and then later, Karmal had requested intervention contradicted each other; the propaganda apparatus did not explain why Amin—if he had requested military intervention—was killed and replaced by Karmal; and there were no

explanations as to why Karmal did not appear in public in Kabul until 1 January 1980. Efforts to portray Amin as a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent had no credence based on his supposed request for a massive Soviet invasion.

Russian scholar Robert Baumann writes, "The motives for a large-scale Soviet military intervention were the subject of exhaustive comment and speculation." Documents released in the 1990s prove that Taraki and Amin did ask for military intervention at least 16 times between 14 April and 17 December 1979. Soviet military advisers in Kabul, however, had advised against such intervention. Although the real reasons for the Soviet intervention may never be known, a 31 December 1979 article in *Pravda* provided as good an explanation as any to date. The article spoke of holes in the "strategic arc." The perception that there were holes in Afghanistan that needed to be plugged may explain why the Soviet army's nightmare began.

Reaction in the U.S. government was outrage. President Jimmy Carter blocked sales of grain and high-technology equipment to Russia and boycotted American participation in the 1980 summer Olympics in Moscow. More ominously, he declined to submit the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II (SALT II) to Congress for ratification. Signed in Vienna on 18 June 1979, SALT II would have limited U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear offensive weapons. In his State of the Union Address of 21 January 1980, the president enunciated a sweeping foreign policy declaration that became labeled the "Carter Doctrine." Specifically alluding to the Soviet invasion, Carter made clear that "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."