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Afghanistan before the Invasions: The Subversion of Democracy in 1973

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Abstract

Using the Wikileaks PlusD Archive of US State Department cables from Kabul in 1973, this thesis presents an analysis of the politics of the Helmand Water Treaty between Afghanistan and Iran and the role of the US in Afghanistan's politics at the time. The analysis of the cables shows: a) that US policy was directed towards the promotion of neoliberalism in Afghanistan; b) that Afghanistan in 1973 was the site of a largely neglected struggle for democracy, and c) that the US, as well as the Afghan establishment, worked together to suppress this democratic struggle. These broader political dynamics are illustrated through a focus on the Helmand Water Treaty as discussed in the cables.

Dedication

For my love Justin, without whom nothing is possible, and for Cyrus, my little Halfghan, for whom I hope this narrative fills some of the gaps in the road to self-discovery.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Since 2001, in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan by NATO forces which followed the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center, many of the journalistic and scholarly endeavours to explain Afghanistan's plight involve narratives of a "failed state", a savage people and an obsession with the burqa that has come to symbolize the horrors of the Taliban regime. These popular narratives serve to categorize the country and its people as *uncivilizable*, *unconquerable* and ultimately, *ungovernable*. Furthermore, they place the blame for the country's dire socio-political conditions squarely on the perceived incompetence and savagery of the Afghans themselves, simplifying, and in some regards, completely erasing a complex history of political dynamism and struggle for democracy, which is presented in this thesis.

Afghanistan's recent history, as told in these accounts, follows a simple formula: Communist governments came to power in a series of coups, initially against President Daoud Khan, in 1978. This was followed by a Soviet invasion in 1979 at the request of these communist leaders, who were fought by valiant and patriotic mujaheddin sponsored by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and of course, Washington. The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 eventually led to the collapse of communist rule in the country in 1992 which marked the beginning of civil war and warlord rule. The civil war, lasting between 1992 and 1996, brought the Taliban to power for five years before they were ousted by NATO in 2001, by

which time, Afghanistan was undeniably a failed state. Since the occupation of the country by NATO forces, there have been three separate elections, signifying some rough sense of democracy, albeit one charged with corruption and of continuing to be a source of Islamic extremism.

In this version of the country's past, history begins in 1978, when Daoud's government is ousted in a People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) led coup. What is omitted in this history is the democratic opening before the coups of the late 1970s. While the country's recent history has been portrayed as an endless cycle of chaos and barbarism within popular literature, this thesis seeks to challenge these simplified and essentialist accounts of the country through a careful examination of a time in Afghanistan's history that is largely forgotten. An investigation of official US embassy cables from the early 1970s, through WikiLeaks' PlusD archives, reveals an alternative account of history, in which a fragile, but optimistic attempt at democracy was made by the Afghan people. This democratic opening coincided with Cold War hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union as well as the beginnings of an aggressive global campaign of neoliberalism implemented by the United States.

In 1973, Afghanistan was the site of a conflict between a popular grassroots movement for democracy and sovereignty over the country's natural resources and an early United States sponsored neoliberal campaign to subvert this process through anti-democratic practices. This thesis reconstructs this lost history of US involvement before the Soviet invasion, of neoliberalism in Afghanistan at the beginning of the neoliberal era, of

the Afghan people's struggle for democracy decades before NATO, and of the subversion of democracy by the US and the traditional Afghan authorities. This study focuses on a single year, 1973, beginning where the cables are available, and for a single issue, the Helmand Water Treaty.

The Helmand Water Treaty is a treaty dividing the water resources of the Helmand Valley between Afghanistan and Iran. Viewed in Afghanistan as an infringement on sovereignty, the treaty was deeply unpopular and became the flashpoint of the democratic uprising described in this thesis. Through the case study of the Helmand treaty, this study aims to illustrate the following themes: the subversion of parliamentary procedures, the vilification and exclusion of “the left”, and US interests and attitudes towards Afghans.

The treaty offers a unique opportunity to analyze unpublicized discussions and details of political processes that largely determined the fate of the country but remain outside of media or academic scrutiny. Furthermore, this revelation of a sabotaged democratic opportunity poses a direct challenge to present-day orientalist characterizations of the country's history and people as wholly incapable of self-determination and democracy. These orientalist narratives will be discussed in greater detail below.

The data used in this study was assembled by Wikileaks from declassified US state department cables as part of their archive of public diplomacy or PlusD (search.wikileaks.org/plusd). This data comprises original official diplomatic communications and intelligence reports shared between the US embassy in Kabul

(Afghanistan) and US officials in Washington. The choice of US diplomatic cables is intentional. The published history of the left in Afghanistan is wrought with propaganda and biased accounts. Accusations of violence, undemocratic practice, invitation of foreign (Soviet) invasion and occupation, and insensitivity to Afghan culture have been levied against the different left parties and formations. It has proven difficult to find sources on this time in Afghanistan's history that are not partisan (see, for example, Phillip Bonosky's pro-Babrak Karmal account that brings serious charges of US collaboration and political sabotage against Afghan politician Hafizullah Amin, charges that are dismissed as untrue in Beverley Male's account).[1]

The US embassy cables, in contrast, are a source of information whose bias is well-known and well-understood. US intelligence on political developments in Afghanistan, while steeped in anti-left and, as this paper will discuss, anti-democratic bias, included reports back to Washington of important developments, prominent figures in the democratic uprising, and prominent figures in the government, that are simply not available anywhere else. The data gleaned from the cables describes a period in Afghan history before the country's infamous coups – initiated by President Daoud Khan against the monarch and followed by a series of coups by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) – and before what has been described in popular literature (and which will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter) as the country's supposed spiral into "chaos" and "anarchy". A careful study of the cables uncovers significant trends and themes of the time

1 See: Bonosky, Phillip. *Washington's Secret War Against Afghanistan.* New York: International Publishers, 1985; Male, Beverley. *Revolutionary Afghanistan.* London: Croom Helm, 1982.

including targets of US interest and surveillance as well as targets for recruitment.

The availability of the cables, and the search engine developed by Wikileaks through their PlusD archive, provides primary sources for scholarship on moments in history thought lost. Wikileaks, like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden who leaked secret government documents, have made classified information such as these cables available as part of a movement against universal US surveillance processes. Their leaks have made it possible to understand how US surveillance operates, and the data they have placed in the public domain makes it possible for researchers to better understand US interventions, and, in this case, aspects of countries', such as Afghanistan's, histories that cannot be found anywhere else.

In an effort to most accurately present the political context of the country in 1973, this study does not emphasize population characteristics such as ethnicity. While divisions along ethnic lines were present, they were rarely, if ever, mentioned within the cables as a significant factor in major political developments at the time. Major political developments at the time were shaped instead by the struggle for democracy by historically excluded and marginalized groups (including students, faculty, workers, dissidents, and women) against the traditional authorities (including the monarchy and the political class) and elites and their US sponsors. These struggles – which, as will be demonstrated below, have been largely absent from scholarship on Afghanistan – have been chosen for this study, rather than the relatively overemphasized contradictions of ethnicity and religion, which often mask underlying issues of class and regional political economy.

In this case, regional political economy refers to the fact that ethnic groups are not homogenous. For example, consider the group that is often called “the Pashtuns”. There are urban, Dari-speaking Pashtuns who were 'detribalized', who live in Kabul and in other urban centres. There are nomadic Pashtuns called Kuchis who cross between Pakistan and Afghanistan and live traditional lifestyles as herders. There are also Pashtuns who live in the south of Afghanistan as farmers and still recognize tribal affiliation. Each of these groups has a different social and economic position in Afghanistan, and within groups there are different political affiliations. The same is true for Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek ethnic groups, for Sunni and Shia denominations.

Even writer and Afghanistan 'expert', David Isby, who writes in the same orientalist traditions that many Western writers[2] do when writing about Afghanistan, says as much:

> “It is clear, then, that just as ethnic identification is not fixed, Afghanistan cannot be easily divided into ethnic cantons. Ethnolinguistic maps of Afghanistan are approximations at best and too often misleading. Ethnicity can be fluid, situational, and multilayered. This especially applies to Pushtuns with often-competing loyalties to an overarching Pushtun identity, to tribal groups (e.g. Durrani) and, often most significant, to a specific clan or tribe...” (Isby, 2010, p. 5).

And also,

> “Afghanistan is not a land of centuries-old ethnic rivalries that doom it to internal conflict, but rather continues to suffer from the results of ethnolinguistic polarization and mobilization during the conflicts in 1978-2001. Afghanistan's history is marked much more by cooperation across and between groups rather than conflict” (Isby, 2010, p. 188).

2 David Isby's work, along with other Western histories of Afghanistan, will be critiqued below.

In 1973[3] there was a struggle for democracy that was not based in ethnic or religious mobilization, a struggle which deserves specific attention, and that is the main focus of this study.

1.2 Orientalist Discourses: Afghans as "uncivilizable", "unconquerable" and "ungovernable"

> *"The picture that emerges [from rhetoric about war in Afghanistan] is a land teeming with wild-eyed warlords, malnourished children, abused women, mud huts and treacherous mountain terrain whose caverns and underground caves are home to minions of malevolence – basically, a scene out of Lord of the Rings"* [4]

This section reviews popular literature and journalistic and academic publications on Afghanistan and their representations and narratives of the country's culture, politics and history. A pattern emerges of essentialist accounts that are part of a larger theme of orientalism, portraying Afghans as incapable of self-governance and political dynamism. The popular descriptions of Afghanistan and its people, as they are discussed below, are in line with the traditions of nineteenth-century orientalism, which Edward Said described as a:

> "...distillation of essential ideas about the Orient – its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness – into a

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3 1973 was an important year in world politics and especially in the history of neoliberalism. The importance of 1973 in the context of neoliberalism will be discussed further below.

4 Gonsalves, Sean. "War on Terrorism Has Oily Undercurrent." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* September 3, 2002, B5 – As cited by Dana L. Cloud (Cloud, 2004, p. 286).

> separate and unchallenged coherence; thus for a writer to use the word *Oriental* was a reference for the reader sufficient to identify a specific body of information about the Orient. This information seemed to be morally neutral and objectively valid; it seemed to have an epistemological status equal to that of historical chronology or geographical location" (Said, 1978, p. 205).

This description of orientalism applies to contemporary narratives of Afghanistan which have also led to the construction of a "body of information" that is seemingly "morally neutral and objectively valid". In this body of information, the same limited themes and sources are repeatedly cited by journalists, Afghanistan experts and academics alike. The critique of orientalism, as it was developed by Said and others, is one of the core methods of analysis used in this thesis. As such, a larger discussion of the orientalist themes in the representations of Afghanistan is presented in Chapter 2.

One study that captured an important representation of Afghanistan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was undertaken by Andrew Rojecki, Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Illinois. After conducting a frame analysis of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in a study that examined the concept of an "American exceptionalism" as a justification for the Bush administration's aggressive foreign policy, Rojecki discovered important differences in the discourses of war between Afghanistan and Iraq. While citing a "promise of democratic and economic reform following regime change" as an argument for invading Iraq, the case for Afghanistan inspired moral arguments involving terms such as "evil, corruption, perversion, darkness, and backwardness" (Rojecki, 2008, p. 77). The study concluded that "the two crises elicited two

different frames of analyses in the opinion pages, realism for Afghanistan and liberal internationalism for Iraq" (Rojecki, 2008, p. 75). While liberal internationalist perspectives promote free market principles and a movement towards global democracy, realist perspectives traditionally view nations in terms of their threat to one's own national security and survival.

In this scheme, in which different theories are used to justify foreign intervention, Afghanistan is represented as an exceptional country, unlike the rest of the world – including even its regional counterparts who are also characterized as needing foreign intervention – where the possibility of democracy is not an option, even in the pursuit of Western interests and global capitalism, and instead, is characterized as "evil" and "backwards". These matter-of-fact discussions that leave no room for the possibility of democracy in Afghanistan, neither as a goal of intervention nor even as a conceivable notion in the country's past or future, are supplemented with visual representations of women in burqas and bearded men, as part of a larger diagnosis of the people's "uncivilized" nature.

While these discussions of the Afghan people's uncivilized nature and current state of ungovernability were made in relation to the current NATO intervention, they are used in a self-fulfilling cycle of production and reproduction of mythical characterizations through the purported deeper reading of the country's history. These mythical characterizations include the aforementioned *uncivilized* and *ungoverned* nature of the country and its people, but also includes descriptions of the country as a brutal and dangerous home to a

ferocious and *unconquered* people. When these characterizations of the people as *uncivilized*, *unconquered* and *ungoverned* are mapped onto the country's history through the emphasis of certain historical events and the omission of others, they produce essentialist accounts of the Afghan people's supposed inherent qualities. The *uncivilized* become the *uncivilizable*, the *unconquered* become the *unconquerable*, and the *ungoverned* become the *ungovernable.* Popular histories of Afghanistan, which are discussed below, connect the country's distant past with its "chaotic" present by providing proof that democracy and sovereignty have never succeeded in the country. This feat is only possible by overlooking or dismissing the real attempts at democracy and sovereignty that did occur in the country's recent history, which are presented in this thesis.

Uncivilizable: Burqas, bearded men and 'backwardness'

A simple search of popular contemporary literature on Afghanistan results in a large number of references to "lifting" or going "behind", "beneath", and "under" the veil[5]. The preoccupation with Afghan women and the burqa has been part of a broader polemic about the Western liberation of Afghan women from the oppression and violence of the Islamic world, of which Afghanistan has been used as an extreme example. In addition to the literary references to the veil, widely circulated images of veiled women, bearded and armed men, and war ravaged villages, as well as descriptions of barbarism and a

5 See Reuter's, *Afghanistan: Lifting the Veil* (2002), Sally Armstrong's, *Veiled Threat: the hidden power of the women of Afghanistan* (2003), CNN's "Beneath the Veil" (2001), Cheryl Bernard's, *Veiled Courage: Inside the Afghan women's resistance* (2002). Other's popular literature includes: Deborah Rodriguez's, *Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes behind the Veil* (2007), Laura Moe's fictional work, *Under the Veil* (2011), and Anisa Mahmoud Ulrich's autobiography, *Lifting the Chaderi: My Life as an Afghan Refugee* (2012).

continuously warring people have portrayed Afghans, either directly or indirectly, as inherently *uncivilizable*.

These images and narratives have been the subject of scholarship since 2001, most notably in their relationship to colonial discourses in justifying war and occupation against "oriental others" who are traditionally portrayed as in need of a civilizing mission. Yasmin Jiwani, Associate Professor in Communications (Concordia University), describes popular media representations of the NATO mission to liberate Afghan women as the "rescue motif" which is used in colonial discourse to justify the invasion and subjugation of the "colonized" (Jiwani, 2009, p. 731). In doing so, Jiwani claims that, "conquest and containment...are legitimized through the soft power of intervention through rescue and aid leavened by civilizational discourses" (Jiwani, 2009, p. 729). Moreover, in her criticism of the Feminist Majority Foundation's (a non-profit organization) campaign to showcase the oppression of Afghan women, Jiwani cites Associate Professor Ann Russo (DePaul University) who argues that it contains an,

> "Orientalist logic [that] constructs an absolute difference between the 'West' and the 'East'/'self' and 'other'. It does so by erasing the history and politics of Afghanistan and by projecting a cultural barbarity in need of a civilizing mission" (Jiwani, 2009, p. 732).

Similarly, in an examination of widely circulated images of Afghan people following the NATO invasion, Dana L. Cloud, Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas, concluded that images of Afghans constructed them as "backward and pre-modern" (Cloud, 2004, p. 286), "helpless and savage" (Cloud, 2004, p.

290), and as “dehumanized [Others]” (Cloud, 2004, p. 293). In an analysis of such imagery in justifying US intervention and occupation, Cloud investigates the relationship between the concept of a “clash of civilizations” and the imperialist belief in the concept of a “white man's burden” (as it is described in Rudyard Kipling's poem of the same name[6]), arguing that the narrative of the “'white man's burden' is a core element in the belief in a clash between white, Western societies and inferior Others requiring policing and rescue” (Cloud, 2004, p. 286). Within this framework of a “clash of civilizations”, images and narratives that depict Afghans as uncivilized are directly contrasted with representations of the West as “heroic, white, rational” (Cloud, 2004, p. 291), and “[democratic]” (Cloud, 2004, p. 292).

While images and narratives describing Afghans as savage and *uncivilizable* have been critically investigated and analyzed within academic scholarship through critiques of orientalism, popular historical narratives of Afghans as ferocious and *unconquerable* as well as incapable of democracy and *ungovernable* have not been subject to the same volume of critical analysis. These different representations of Afghans are interconnected and used together to form a body of information regarding the politics, culture and history of Afghanistan as a whole. They are also used to justify the invasion and occupation of the country, as well as avoid responsibility in the subversion of its politics by placing the blame for the country's failings on the Afghans themselves, using these essentialist descriptions in order to make claims on what has and has not been historically possible within the country.

6 Rudyard Kipling, and his relationship to depictions of Afghanistan, will be revisited in more detail below.

Unconquerable: Afghanistan as a "graveyard of empires"

While images, such as those of burqas, bearded and armed men and destroyed villages, are used in conjunction with narratives of oppression and backwardness to evoke an idea of an *uncivilizable* people, official accounts of Afghanistan's history have been used to describe Afghanistan and Afghans as *unconquerable* as well. Some of the same sources that denounce the savagery of modern Afghanistan, marvel at the ferocity of the Afghan people, paying homage to their historically acknowledged place as great, "unconquerable" warriors. Additionally, the country is presented as a brutal and treacherous terrain, *unconquerable* in its own right. This characterization of the Afghan people and their land is produced through a reading of the country's "deeper history" and the popular use of descriptions such as the "graveyard of empires". Often, discussions regarding the "unconquerability" of Afghanistan are prefaced or supplemented with a reference to a poem by the English poet and novelist, Rudyard Kipling. Examples of the use of such passages in academic journals and in newspaper articles have been selected and presented below.

In his article, "Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires", detailing the military history of Afghanistan from "The Great Game" to the NATO occupation, Milton Bearden, a former CIA station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989, includes a popular passage from Kipling's infamous poem, "The Young British Soldier", to describe the second British Afghan War (1878-1881):

"When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains
And the women come out to cut up what remains
Jest roll to your rifle an' blow out your brains
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier"

-Rudyard Kipling, "The Young British Soldier"

This passage, which evokes the image of a violent and barbaric people, is used in conjunction with the description of the country as a "graveyard of empires" (as the name of the article suggests), to speak to the *unconquerable* nature of Afghans. This narrative is accompanied by a description of an *uncivilizable* people who continually exist in what Bearden describes as a "natural state of ethnic and factional squabbling" (Bearden, 2001, p. 18). Finally, Bearden also describes the *ungovernable* nature of the country as it "festered through the 1970s" and then began a "rapid spiral into anarchy" after the communist coup of 1978 (Bearden, 2001, p. 19).

In her New York Times piece, "Obama's War: Fearing Another Quagmire in Afghanistan", journalist Helene Cooper pays tribute to the same popular passage from Kipling's "The Young British Soldier" at the beginning of her article. The passage is immediately followed with a reference to Afghanistan as "that long-lamented 'graveyard of empires' – a place that has crushed foreign occupiers for more than 2000 years" (Cooper, 2009). The article, using an overall tone of cynicism for the future prospects of the country, continues with the theme of "unconquerability" by citing the consequences and difficulties for NATO in keeping the country from "sliding back into Taliban control" and describing the counterinsurgency as a "dynamically deteriorating situation" (Cooper, 2009).

Furthermore, the article references the country's *uncivilizable* nature by including a quote by former US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, comparing Iraq and Afghanistan, concluding that while the former was "a fairly advanced country", the latter is "still basically a tribal society" plagued by corruption and drugs (Cooper, 2009). Lastly, in addition to the narratives of Afghanistan as *uncivilizable* and *unconquerable*, Cooper investigates the country's *ungovernable* nature as well, noting international relations professor (Boston University), Andrew Bacevich's criticism at sending more troops, citing his reservations about whether a "modern cohesive Afghan state" is a realistic objective, believing instead, "it could be that sending 30,000 more troops is throwing money and lives down a rat hole" (Cooper, 2009).

Bearden and Cooper are two examples of the popular usage of the imaginary of Rudyard Kipling and the "graveyard of empires" phrase (often used together) to assess the successes and failures of military strategy in Afghanistan throughout its history, and specifically, within the context of the NATO occupation. Scholar Geoffrey Hamm criticizes the treatment of Kipling's work as if it were historical fact, arguing that Kipling's writing was largely fictional and historically inaccurate. He claims that writers that rely on his fictional account of historical periods and events, such as "the Great Game" are "characterized by innuendo, exaggeration, generalization, and a demonstrated lack of serious historical analysis" (Hamm, 2013, p. 397). Hamm also accurately predicted that as NATO troops were preparing for their departure from Afghanistan in 2013, popular (albeit inaccurate or exaggerated) characteristics about the country would resurface:

> "...it seems likely that the 'graveyard of empires' epithet will be thrown around again, as it was in 2001. Commentators with little more than a cursory knowledge of history will line up on news programs and editorial pages to point out that the NATO mission failed to learn from the ill-fated Soviet invasion. They will pronounce Afghanistan 'unconquerable', pointing out that the British Empire also failed, twice, to conquer Afghanistan. They will express disbelief that such obvious historical lessons could have been missed, and they will attempt to draw parallels with 'the Great Game in Asia', the 19th century contest between Great Britain and Russia for influence in Central Asia and control over strategic access to British India that was immortalized in popular imagination by Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim*" (Hamm, 2013, p. 395-397).

In addition to criticisms of its historical inaccuracy, Kipling's work has been at the centre of critiques of orientalist caricatures of the histories, cultures and politics of the orient. Said has noted that while 19th century orientalists' "scholarly frame" was influenced by people such as "William Muir, Anthony Bevan, D. S. Margoliouth, Charles Lyall, E. G. Browne, R. A. Nicholson, Guy Le Strange, E. D. Ross and Thomas Arnold", the orientalists' "imaginative perspectives were provided principally by their illustrious contemporary Rudyard Kipling" (Said, 1978, p. 224). A broader investigation of mainstream literature on Afghanistan uncovers a considerable number of references to Kipling's work, either as an homage or for historical descriptions of Afghans in the presentation of their country's history[7].

While the *uncivilizable* theme is used in popular literature to discuss superficial accounts of Afghans as backwards and pre-modern, a broader narrative of the country emerges in the work of writers who purport to provide a deeper reading of its history, to

7 For example, see William R. Hawkins' "What Not to Learn from Afghanistan" (2002) and Sean M. Maloney's "Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?" (2004).

present a seemingly more cohesive and contextualized understanding of the country as not only *uncivilizable*, but *unconquerable* and *ungovernable* as well. This reading of Afghanistan's history as proof of the backward and violent nature of the country and its people naturalizes the inevitable conclusion presented by these writers: that the country is incapable of becoming a modern, democratic state. The next section provides a critique of these histories. The use in Western debates of different frames for different political purposes is explained by Cloud in the following comparison of Western media depictions of Afghanistan and Iraq:

> "War may require vilifying visual frames, but occupation requires a humanitarian flexing of the nationalist frame. The vision of Afghans (and later, Iraqis) as incapable of rebuilding their society or becoming civilized without outside intervention bolsters the argument that the United States cannot just pull out of either Afghanistan or Iraq and leave chaos behind" (Cloud, 2004, p. 293).

While the humanitarian and civilizing mission rhetoric relies on the construction of Afghans as *uncivilizable*, these descriptions of Afghanistan as *unconquerable* support Jiwani's concept of the "legitimation of conquest". If Afghans are unconquerable, they cannot be victims, and those Western forces that are occupying Afghanistan need not take responsibility for having conquered them.

Ungovernable: A failed state and a lost history

In addition to references to the uncivilized and unconquered nature of Afghanistan, an examination of popular literature on Afghanistan uncovers an overwhelming number of

titles describing the country as a *failed*[8] or *rogue*[9] state accompanied by justifications for foreign intervention and occupation of a country that needs rescuing from itself. These discussions of a “failed state” include casual references to a history marked with “chaos”, “lawlessness”, and an absence of a strong centralized government or democracy. Ultimately, these narratives point to the *ungovernable* nature of Afghans, who are largely depicted as incapable of self-governance or political dynamism. These themes and their normalization in popular imagination are discussed below through the review of popular historical books on Afghanistan, such as David Isby's *Afghanistan: Graveyard of Empires: A New History of the Borderlands* (2010) and Martin Ewans' *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics* (2002) as well as articles published in academic journals.

In his book, *Afghanistan: Graveyard of Empires: A New History of the Borderlands,* David Isby, former congressional staff member and long-time “Afghanistan expert”, uses the analogy of the 'Vortex' as imagined by poet Ezra Pound to describe the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and arguably the region as a whole (Isby, 2010, p. 2). Within this Vortex live “bearded hard men with their Kalashnikovs, laptop computers, Korans, and limitless faith”, fighting against modernity and progress (Isby, 2010, p. 1). This clever description of a force of energy that threatens to engulf both countries through religious violence, isolation and backwardness, speaks of a thing born from within rather than imposed from without. According to this theory, “the Afghans' 1978-1992 struggle against the Soviets and their Afghan supporters and [the] 1992-2001 civil war made the

8 See Barnett R. Rubin's, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (1991).
9 See Zalmay Khalilzad and Daniel Byman's “Afghanistan: The Consolidation of a Rogue State” (2001).

Afghan state fail", ultimately creating (or rather uncovering) this Vortex.

Similarly, in *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics* – a book full of essentialist assertions about Afghans, both as a people and individual political figures – Martin Ewans, a former officer of the British Diplomatic Service, cites Afghan violence as a timeless, immutable historical fact: "Rarely have the Afghans allowed themselves, or allowed others with whom they have come into contact, to lead out their lives in peace" (Ewans, 2002, p. 12). He also describes the country, as "miserable" (Ewans, 2002, p. 295), "wretched" (Ewans, 2002, p. 299) and a "failed state" (Ewans, 2002, p. 296). On page 297, Ewans finally reveals the culmination of his rather hateful and unsubstantiated claims about the country: a call for Western powers to rescue Afghanistan from itself. "National sovereignty", he writes, "is not necessarily inviolate":

> "...the international community may have the right to intervene not merely when a state presents a threat to peace, but also when it is grossly oppressive toward its own people or has disintegrated to the extent that it can no longer provide for their basic rights and needs" (Ewans, 2002, p. 297).

Through these popular accounts of Afghan history, written by Western Afghanistan experts, this rhetoric of an *ungovernable* people and a failed state has become the standard framework for discussing the country's history and politics. They include narratives of Afghanistan and its people as *uncivilizable*, through depictions of backwardness and Islamic oppression; *unconquerable*, through descriptions of a brutal terrain and a martial people; and ultimately, *ungovernable*, through labelling of the country as a failed or rogue state, accompanied with references to the supposed chaos and anarchy that has riddled the

country's historical attempts at self-governance. This discourse of chaos also includes expressions of skepticism about the possibility of democracy in the country while dismissing or omitting completely, historical attempts at democracy made by Afghans. A review of contemporary academic literature, presented below, reveals the pervasiveness of such narratives.

In the article, “Headwaters and Headaches: Afghanistan's Need for International River Basin Agreements”, published in the Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law and Policy, then law student, Eric R. Potyondy, while giving only a “cursory discussion” of history, casually notes the following:

> “After a period of top-down modernization between 1953 and 1963, Afghanistan began its failed experiment in democracy and ventured into chaos. It has been noted that the 'domestic resource base of the Afghan state at its inception was...too weak to be able to respond to the aspirations of its modernizing rulers and elite without considerable help from foreign sources'” (Potyondy, 2006, p. 212).

Moreover, he concludes that “Afghanistan's modern history and current situation are replete with violence, chaos, and meddling outside forces” and that “ethnic divisions defined by 'permanent conflict' remain strong” (Potyondy, 2006, p. 214).

Similarly, in the article, “Failed States in a World of Terror”, Robert I. Rotberg, director of the Program on Intrastate Conflict at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, describes Afghanistan as “the international community's greatest challenge” and as “a country with a terrible history of lawlessness and infamous levels of insecurity” (Rotberg, 2002, p. 138). Rotberg also claims that “a few thousand international

peacekeepers in Kabul alone will hardly pacify the entire country" (Rotberg, 2002, p. 138). On Afghanistan as a failed state, Rotberg notes that:

> Although the phenomenon of state failure is not new, it has become much more relevant and worrying than ever before. In less interconnected eras, state weakness could be isolated and kept distant. Failure had fewer implications for peace and security. Now, these states pose dangers not only to themselves and their neighbors but also to peoples around the globe. Preventing states from failing, and resuscitating those that do fail, are thus strategic and moral imperatives" (Rotberg, 2002, p. 127).

Moreover, in the article, "Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?", regarding the future projections of the NATO occupation – which, incidentally, begins with a passage from Kipling's poem, "Arithmetic on the Frontier" – Sean M. Maloney, history professor at Royal Military College of Canada, compares Afghanistan to a "post-Apocalyptic environment" before dismissing the possibilities of democracy and human rights in Afghanistan's near future:

> "Democracy and human rights in Afghanistan – by our standards and by our concept of time – are perhaps not possible in the short term. The complexities of inter-tribal and inter-ethnic politics in Afghanistan make Bosnia look like an easy problem to solve. Given the high level of illiteracy and the probable high levels of political intimidation that will accompany any Western form of electoral process, the mere concept of democracy cannot be expressed, let alone take hold in the near term. We need to think in terms of 'modernization' as opposed to 'democratization'. The Afghan peoples have a traditional system: can they modify and update it to satisfy us? Should they?" (Maloney, 2004, p. 13).

In his article, "It Takes the Villages: Bringing Change from Below in Afghanistan", in which he reviews *My Life with the Taliban* (by Abdul Salam Zaeef) and *Decoding the*

Taliban: Insights From the Afghan Field and *Empires of Mud* (both by Antonio Giustozzi), Seth G. Jones, a Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, investigates popular debates regarding the possibilities for stability and security in Afghanistan. Jones posits that "although creating a strong centralized state, assuming it ever happens, may help ensure long-term stability, it is not sufficient in Afghanistan" (Jones, 2010, p. 121). Jones explains that:

> "Many Western countries are characterized by strong state institutions, in which power emanates from a central authority. But in a range of countries – including many in South Asia and Africa – the central government has historically been weak. Top-down reconstruction strategies may have been appropriate for countries such as Japan after World War II and Iraq after 2003, both of which had historically been characterized by strong centralized state institutions. But they do not work as well in countries such as Afghanistan where power is diffuse" (Jones, 2010, p. 122).

These matter-of-fact references to Afghanistan as historically incapable or unprepared for a strong central government, democracy, or even as Maloney insists, human rights, are supplemented with descriptions of "chaos", "lawlessness", and ethnic factionalism and violence. Moreover, these descriptions are used to support the failed state rhetoric which is widely used in the case of Afghanistan to justify foreign intervention on moral and political grounds. While the failed state paradigm is pervasive, it has been criticized as a selective framework that is used within the context of Western interests, as opposed to a political and humanitarian categorization based on a set of objective criteria.

Writers and co-directors of the Afghan Women's Mission (a non-profit organization that supports the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, RAWA), Sonali

Kolhatkar and James Ingalls discuss the flaws in the prevalent failed state framework used to describe Afghanistan:

> “One reason the 'failed state' label is convenient is that it focuses on *local* shortcomings, problems with the 'failed' government, with the geographical region the state occupies, or with the people being governed (e.g. poor education, backward culture), rather than on any external actors or externally driven trends that may have catalyzed the failure” (Kolhatkar and Ingalls, 2006, p. xiii).

Additionally, in their article, “'Failed States' and 'State Failure': Threats or Opportunities?”, Morten Boas (researcher professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs) and Kathleen M. Jennings (researcher at the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies) argue that “the use of the failed state label is inherently political, and based primarily on Western perceptions of Western security and interests” (Boas and Jennings, 2007, p. 476). They argue that,

> “...the use of 'failed states' as pretext has an interesting converse, which is that states not facing punitive or intrusive policy interventions are typically not referred to as failed, even when they share some or all of the characteristics ascribed to those so labelled” (Boas and Jennings, 2007, p. 478).

Boas and Jennings investigate the claims that Afghanistan, Liberia and Somalia are labelled as failed states, but Nigeria and Sudan are not. Using Sudan and Nigeria as examples of countries that share similar 'failed state' criteria as Afghanistan, Liberia and Somalia but are not categorized as such, Boas and Jennings conclude that “having strategic resources and great power allies is an efficient shield against being included in the 'failed state as security threat' category” (Boas and Jennings, 2007, p. 482).

Finally, in his 2008 book, *Creating a Failed State,* retired sociology professor (University of Regina), John W. Warnock more aptly describes Afghanistan as a failed state that was *created as such* by external powers. In a 2013 essay, Warnock cites several sources about a history of US involvement in Afghanistan, and sponsorship of conservative and right-wing forces, for decades before the Soviet invasion (Warnock, 2013, pg. 52). Far from getting involved *after* the Soviet invasion, the US was already heavily involved in Afghanistan in the early 1970s, as the data presented in this thesis will show. Its involvement was to subvert Afghanistan's fledgling democratic institutions, to sponsor an early form of neoliberalism, and to promote US geopolitical objectives in the region (specifically an allegiance with the Shah's Iran). Unlike the orientalist narratives presented in popular historical accounts of those such as Isby and Ewans, this thesis posits that the war against democracy in Afghanistan began prior to 1978, not by bearded hard men with Korans and Kalashnikovs, but rather by royal officials, politicians and their US patrons.

Chapter 2. Methods and Theoretical Perspectives

This chapter reviews the methods of research and data collection used in this thesis, along with the theoretical perspectives used to analyze the data. Section 2.1 examines the embassy cables used in this thesis through WikiLeaks' archive of public diplomacy; the declassification process; how the data is extracted and made accessible; and the challenges presented in such data sources. The section also contains a discussion of grounded theory, the coding process used to analyze the data and the emerging themes.

Section 2.2 reviews the theoretical perspectives used in this thesis, including critiques of orientalism, as presented by Edward Said and Anwar Abdel-Malek; as well as Michel Foucault's concept of "truth and power" as it relates to the process of truth-making within the narratives found in the embassy cables.

2.1 Methods

The data used in this study was assembled by Wikileaks from declassified US state department cables as part of their archive of public diplomacy or PlusD (search.wikileaks.org/plusd). Wikileaks note that PlusD "holds the world's largest searchable collection of United States confidential, or formerly confidential, diplomatic communications" (https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/about/). These communications are derived and updated from several different sources, including through individual leaks, the Freedom of Information Act and documents released by the US State Department as per

their systematic declassification review. The subset of cables used in this study are what Wikileaks calls the "Kissinger Cables", comprising of 1.7 million US diplomatic records from January 1st, 1973 to December 31st, 1976, declassified through the US Department of State's 25-year declassification process. Along with cables, these documents also include intelligence reports and congressional correspondence.

According to WikiLeaks, the declassification process involves two separate reviews of the records in order to determine what is to be declassified and what is to remain classified. They are initially reviewed and categorized by the Department of State and then once again by the National Archives and Records Administration before they are released as PDFs in the National Archives' Central Foreign Policy Files collection. After their release into the National Archives, WikiLeaks explains that extracting the information contained in these files is not a trivial matter:

> "To prepare these documents for integration into the PlusD collection, WikiLeaks obtained and reverse-engineered all 1.7 million PDFs and performed a detailed analysis of individual fields, developed sophisticated technical systems to deal with the complex and voluminous data and corrected a great many errors introduced by NARA, the State Department or its diplomats, for example harmonizing the many different ways in which departments, capitals and people's names were spelled" (https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/about/).

Along with the surprising difficulty in obtaining the content of files that have been intended for public release, another challenge to completing the archive included missing files, whether specifically chosen for content deletion or because of irreversible damage caused by technical errors. These "errors" have caused the loss of data in "tens of thousands

of documents”.

The data used in this study are comprised of type “TE” documents, which are telegrams containing “official messages sent between embassies and the US Secretary of State conveying official information about policy proposals and implementation, program activities, or personnel and diplomatic post operations” (https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/about/). Each document has been provided with its own unique ID, comprising the year, city, document number, and in the case of the Kissinger Cables, the letter “b”. Each cable used in this study has been cited accordingly.

This study proceeded through archival research and a grounded theory approach to data analysis, beginning from the vantage point of critiques of orientalism and Michel Foucault's concept of “Truth and Power”. The use of grounded theory in conjunction with other theoretical starting points is described by Kathy Charmaz, professor of Sociology at Sonoma State University, in her comparison of objectivist and constructivist methods of grounded theory, as “[allowing] for varied fundamental assumptions, data gathering approaches, analytic emphases, and theoretical levels” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 511). While not committing entirely to a purely objectivist or constructivist method of grounded theory, this thesis acknowledges, in line with Charmaz's assertion, that data are “narrative constructions” rather than the “original experience itself” and as such, take on an interpretive nature, rather than an objective one (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514).

Due to the large amount of data involved, selective (or focused) coding was used to map frequently emerging themes and events into larger categories. In addition, memo

writing, as it is described by Charmaz, was used to "connect categories and define how they fit into larger processes" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517). These categories included (but were not limited to): Struggle for democracy (parliamentary procedures, public policy debate, and mass protests), Subversion of democracy (disregard for parliamentary procedures, surveillance of political movements, and secretive political engagements), US influence (US interests and US attitudes towards Afghans), Narcotics trafficking (corruption and the Western crusade against narcotics production), and Afghanistan's natural resources (Water management, mining interests, and agricultural production). These categories were ultimately linked to the larger process of neoliberalism, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

In the preliminary research for this study, I read hundreds of cables sent from and pertaining to Afghanistan, beginning from the earliest documents from 1973 to the latest in 2010. I had begun this study with the intention of studying how Afghanistan was depicted within internal US diplomatic correspondence and how, in turn, these depictions may have affected policy and also popular and media perceptions of Afghanistan and its politics. Of the Kissinger Cables, I explored the entire record of cables sent from the American embassy in Kabul from the beginning of the record in 1973, to the end of that year, which included 731 cables. 209 cables cover the span of Prime Minister Mohammad Musa Shafiq's term, beginning on March 10th, and ending on July 16th, just before the events of a coup led by Daoud Khan. 23 of these documents were either missing all data due to errors or their contents were "withdrawn". Several other cables also contained errors, such as parts of cables replaced by unrelated cables from another country or particularly interesting

sections of certain important cables were inexplicably missing. Ultimately 72 of these 209 cables were categorized and analyzed for emerging themes and 32 have been cited directly. The data gathered from these cables were classified by the State Department as either “secret”, “confidential”, or “limited official use”.

Of these hundreds of cables, I then classified and selected those pertinent to the Helmand Water Treaty and accompanying neoliberal policies. When I discovered the Helmand Water Treaty, early neoliberalism, and US intervention to subvert the democratic uprising of the early 1970s in the cables, I decided to focus my work on these issues. The choice of 1973, as opposed to later periods (1973 were the earliest cables available for Afghanistan), was specifically made because of a gap in the literature, which does cover other periods of Afghan history better (including that of Daoud's term in office and subsequent periods). In order to fully understand the later periods, the possibility of a different Afghanistan, which was a real possibility in 1973, must be understood. The democracy that was emerging in 1973 was an organic, grassroots one, as opposed to the version imposed since 2001. On the one hand, the cables were used the way the US government used them – as sources of reported information on political developments. On the other hand, they also served as source material on US objectives, perceptions, and ideology towards Afghanistan.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives that inform this thesis include critiques of orientalism – as presented by Edward Said, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and Anwar Abdel-Malek, a researcher at the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris – and the concept of "Truth and Power", as put forth by scholar Michel Foucault. Critiques of orientalism are used to analyze and contextualize popular representations of Afghans (in contemporary literature, media and academic scholarship) as well as a general lens through which the cables are critically analyzed. The data in the cables are further deconstructed through Foucault's framework of "Truth and Power" as it relates to the depictions of Afghanistan's political landscape within the cables and the consequences of such depictions in the larger apparatus of truth production.

As described in Chapter One, this paper adopts Said's description of orientalism as a "distillation of essential ideas about the Orient" constructing a "specific body of information" that seems "morally neutral and objectively valid" (Said, 1978, p. 205). Specifically, Said defines orientalism as:

> "The corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3).

By this description, orientalism is not simply an objective body of information or particular discourse, but a "product of certain political forces and activities" (Said, 1978, p.

203). Thus, the essentialist discourses of Afghans as *uncivilizable*, *unconquerable*, and *ungovernable* are inherently *political* descriptions that form a larger body of orientalist information through which Western voices "[dominate], [restructure], and have authority" over Afghanistan's culture, politics and history.

This theme of Western domination over the orient is further analyzed by Anwar Abdel-Malek, whose concise critique of traditional orientalism forms the primary critical lens through which contemporary orientalist discourses on Afghanistan are examined within this thesis. Abdel-Malek asserts that one of the main purposes of traditional orientalism was the subjugation of those in the 'Third World', a feat carried out by:

> "...university dons, businessmen, military men, colonial officials, missionaries, publicists and adventurers, whose only objective was to gather intelligence information in the area to be occupied, to penetrate the consciousness of the people in order to better assure its enslavement to the European powers" (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 49).

Abdel-Malek's critique of traditional orientalism (and arguably colonialism as a whole) was presented through a discussion of its three main characteristics: its *general conception* – the very act of considering "Oriental others" as subjects to be studied and the resulting essentialist accounts; its *methods of study and research* – the preoccupation with the subjects' decontextualized history and the representation of such history as "extinct"; and the *instrument of study and research* – the theft of native material, the inaccessibility of primary sources of colonial information, and the unreliability of orientalist secondary sources of information (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 50-53).

On the general conception of orientalism, Abdel-Malek writes:

> “On the level of the *position of the problem*, and the *problematic*, [orientalists] consider the Orient and Orientals as an 'object' of study, stamped with an otherness...of an essentialist character...This 'object' of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a 'historical' subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or 'subject' which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is that alienated being, philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed, understood, defined – and acted – by others” (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 50).

Abdel-Malek asserted that the result of such a conception of 'orientals' as subjects to be “studied”, “posed”, “understood” and “defined” led to the adoption of an “essentialist conception of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient under study, a conception which expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology” (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 50). This “ethnist typology” contains within it, ideas about the “essence” of the objects of study, about which Abdel-Malek writes:

> “According to traditional orientalists, an essence should exist...which constitutes the inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered; this essence is both 'historical', since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally a-historical, since it transfixes the being, 'the object' of study, within its inalienable and non-evolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other beings, states, nations, peoples and cultures – as a product, a resultant of the vection of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution” (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 50).

It is within this description of an “oriental other” – of an “essentialist character”, containing a common and unifying “essence” that is both timeless and “transfixed” – that parallels are found between these traditional discourses of orientalism and contemporary descriptions (by popular writers, 'experts', journalists and academics) of Afghanistan and

Afghans as *uncivilizable*, *unconquerable*, and *ungovernable*. These descriptions naturalize ideas about a common Afghan "essence" or nature that *is* and *has been* historically shared among all those defined by this label, but also renders these subjects frozen within an "inalienable and non-evolutive specificity". The result is what Abdel-Malek describes as an "ethnist typology", in which these descriptions essentialize certain characteristics about Afghans as a whole, both historically and presently, but also remain decontextualized outside of other historical socio-political forces and events.

On orientalist methods of study and research, in which there existed a preoccupation with oriental histories, Abdel-Malek writes:

> "The past of Oriental nations and cultures quite naturally constitutes the preferred field of study: in 'admitting implicitly that the most brilliant periods of the Orient belong to the past', one admits, by the same token, 'that their decadence is ineluctable'" (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 51).

Through this preoccupation with the Orient's past, the same essentialist characterizations (e.g. the *uncivilizable*, the *unconquerable*, and the *ungovernable* nature of the Afghans) that are historically developed, but remain outside of evolving socio-political factors, are produced and reproduced. The result is a repetitive cycle of orientalist rhetoric regarding the unchanging and inescapable "essence" and histories of the Orient. Within this framework, Abdel-Malek explains that "this past itself was studied in its cultural aspects – notably the language and religion – detached from social evolution" (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 51). Additionally, "history, studied as 'structure' was projected, at its best, on the recent past. That which re-emerged, appeared as a prolongation of the past, grandiose but extinct.

From historicizing, history became exotic” (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 52).

This pattern of historicizing and exoticizing the orient is evident in the popular representations of Afghans discussed in Chapter One. More specifically, this is done through the emphasis of the traditional “backwardness” of Afghans, the purported historic incompatibility of Afghanistan with democracy, the widespread usage of the phrase “graveyard of empires” and the use of decontextualized references to historic Afghanistan as imagined by poet Rudyard Kipling through his poetry and literary writing. These representations are, as Abdel-Malek would describe, “detached from social evolution”.

Lastly, on orientalist instruments of study and research, Abdel-Malek provides a three-part critique in which he challenges their methods of data collection; the lack of accessibility to primary sources of information; and the legitimacy and accuracy of secondary sources. Regarding orientalist methods of data collection, Abdel-Malek writes:

> “These are constituted essentially by the accumulation and concentration of the treasures belonging to the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the great European cities”. “In the field of Arabic studies, especially, the situation is particularly serious: several tens of thousands of manuscripts (the number 140, 000 has been mentioned) are outside the Arab world, that is, practically out of reach of Arab researchers themselves; hence, they must work most of the time on the basis of indirect sources dealing with the matters at the core itself of their own national and cultural history” (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 52).

In addition to criticizing the methods of data collection, Abdel-Malek challenges the lack of accessibility of the data itself, writing that:

> “In the field of modern and contemporary history, the greatest and even the essential part of the materials concerning the colonial and dependent countries...which are

> collected in the state archives of the great ex-colonial powers, are for the most part inaccessible, subject to various kinds of interdictions (the least serious being the famous rule of 'fifty years'). The approximative knowledge of the past is thus prolongated into a quest of one's self, full of perilous gaps" (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 52).

In the case of Afghanistan, this criticism of inaccessibility is even more pronounced given the precarious use of its incomplete history as a land of *uncivilizable*, *unconquerable*, and *ungovernable* people as a justification for military intervention, international moral condemnation and a lack of accountability (among both internal and external forces) in the violations of its sovereignty and the subversion of its democratic processes. It is through the absence of an examination of primary sources of information – sources such as the embassy cables studies in this paper – that misrepresentations, such as those described in Chapter One, permeate all discussions of the country's past, present and future and continue to shape regional and international policies and political trends.

Lastly, Abdel-Malek criticizes the use of secondary orientalist sources, challenging their legitimacy and accuracy in forming reliable information regarding the orient. He writes:

> "The secondary sources used by traditional Western orientalists – reports by colonial administrators, by Catholic or Protestant religious missions, balance sheets and reports of boards of directors of companies, travel descriptions, etc. - are profoundly tainted by all the variants of ethnism and racism; the most moderate are exotic and paternalistic. One may see that, though furnishing numerous data, these secondary sources hide many other facts and could not, in any case, validly sustain scientific research work" (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 53).

This characterization of the unreliability of widely cited secondary sources in the

accumulation of orientalist knowledge mirrors the sentiment shared by Hamm, who, as was previously discussed, criticized the use of Kipling's work as historical fact. Moreover, this critique can be applied to the widely referenced "graveyard of empires" description as well as the popular descriptions by Western journalists, former CIA agents, and Afghanistan experts, of Afghans as "backwards" and uncivilized.

In addition to the critiques of orientalism, as put forth by Said and Abdel-Malek, Michel Foucault's concept of "truth and power" is used in this thesis to trace the specific genealogy of language used in the cables as well as the larger narratives of Afghanistan's socio-political landscape in 1973 as it is described by Afghan and US officials. Foucault argues that:

> "...truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power...each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault, 2000, p. 42).

In this description of the relationship between truth and power, the politics of truth-making are contextual, meaning they are situated within the larger socio-political institutions and trends of the time. In the case of present-day Afghanistan, the "types of discourse" that are accepted as true about the country and its people – as *uncivilizable*, *unconquerable*, and *ungovernable* – arise in the context of counterinsurgency and occupation. The cables, however, reveal a different set of characteristics attributed to the Afghan people by American political officials whose job was to surveil and influence

Afghan politicians, political organizations and popular movements of the time. In these cables, the Afghan people are described as politically complex and not as homogenous as today's popular accounts would conclude. The cables refer to Afghans both as allies and enemies of American interests and rather than being great warriors or religious fanatics, they are described as potential "leftists", "anarchists", and politically cunning – in other words, as *political* agents, not the eternal warriors of Kipling's imagination.

Furthermore, on the "political economy" of truth, Foucault argues that,

> "In societies like ours, the 'political economy' of truth is characterized by five important traits. 'Truth ' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, not withstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles)" (Foucault, 2000, p. 42).

In this context, truth is not necessarily derived from objective knowledge or a set of empirical facts, but is produced and disseminated through an exclusive system of power, controlled by a "few great political and economic apparatuses" and their "ideological struggles". In the case of the cables, the ideological objectives of embassy officials can be analyzed through the genealogy of language used to describe all political positions in terms of their relationship to US interests. This is especially evident in the characterization of any political opposition as "leftist" and therefore, "mercurial", "reactionary" and "rabid" as

opposed to Western-led policies (such as the Helmand Water Treaty and general campaign against narcotics trafficking), which are described in more positive terms. A larger analysis of these themes are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Historical Context

While a more in depth examination of Afghanistan's pre-1973 history is outside the scope of this thesis, this section presents a cursory discussion of important historical, socio-political developments that are relevant in contextualizing and analyzing the events of 1973, as they are presented in the embassy cables.

Thomas Ruttig, a long time scholar and Afghanistan expert, argues that the decline and destabilization of the “pre-1973 Afghan monarchy” was largely dependent on three “lesser-noticed domestic developments”, including a change in the country's social fabric (as a result of long standing progressive reforms made by the late King Amanullah[10]); a new political dynamic that arose as a result of a new constitution in 1964; and an “environmental crisis” in the form of a drought from 1969 to 1972 (Ruttig, 2013, p. 2).

This chapter explores these events, the decline of the monarchy and the rise of political dynamism in the country from the democratic opening of 1949 through the 'decade of democracy' (1964-1973). Additionally, this chapter also explores the response of the government to this growing political dynamism and its own declining popularity through information control and repression – tactics that are continued throughout 1973, the time period analyzed in Chapter 4. Lastly, Afghanistan's social, political and economic landscape is contextualized through a brief examination of its institutions in 1973,

10 The progressive reforms made by King Amanaullah, who ruled from 1919 to 1929, had a significant and lasting affect on the social and political trends in the country, including the time period discussed in the data. These reforms have been extensively discussed by writers such as Warnock (2013) and Ruttig (2013).

throughout Prime Minister Shafiq's term in office and just before President Daoud's coup in July 1973.

3.1 The decline of the monarchy and experiments in democracy

In 1933, a nineteen year old Zahir Shah inherited the throne from his assassinated father, King Nadir Shah, becoming Afghanistan's last ruling monarch, ruling the country from 1933 to 1973. From 1933 to 1963, his rule was mainly in name only, relegating leadership to his uncles, Mohammad Hashim Khan (who ruled as Prime Minister from 1929 to 1946) and Shah Mahmud Khan (who ruled as Prime Minister from 1946 to 1953).

In 1949, Prime Minister Shah Mahmud began an “experiment in political liberalization” when he allowed national assembly elections to take place without much interference, resulting in a parliament that had a distinctly “liberal” character (Baynard, 1986, p. 56-57). Mahmud also allowed for the freedom of press, oppositional political groups and a newly formed student union. These new freedoms signified a new trend towards the possibility of real democracy in the country, inspiring the formation of political groups made up of dissidents – such as the “Wikh-i-Zalmayan”, meaning the Awakened Youth – as well as allowing for criticism of the government and political debate among students, journalists and parliamentarians. This period of burgeoning democracy saw much debate about politics and even religion, with students performing in plays critical of Islam and “many groups and individuals [beginning] to demand a more open political system” (Baynard, 1986, p. 57).

This experiment in democracy was short lived as the government began reverting to repressive tactics when the formation of political parties threatened their popularity and power. When two newspapers, *Neda-ye Khalq* and *Watan*, announced newly formed political parties, *Hezb-e Khalq* (People's Party) and *Hezb-e Watan* (Fatherland Party), the government took action against the growing political consciousness (Ibrahimi, 2012, p. 4). The student union was dissolved 1951, newspapers that were critical of the government were banned and opposition leaders were arrested. However brief, this historical moment of democracy provided "the breeding ground for the revolutionary movement that would come to power in 1978" (Baynard, 1986, p. 57). Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal, and Hafizullah Amin, all significant political figures associated with the communist movement of the 1970s, were part of the youth movement at this time as reformists, later to be radicalized when democratic options were shut down.[11]

Mohammed Daoud Khan, cousin of King Zahir Shah, served as Prime Minister from 1953 to 1963, during which he cautiously implemented reforms that were opposed by conservative elements of Afghan society. During his term, political activists who were jailed, exiled or forced underground by Mahmud, "regrouped in small study groups" mainly held in private homes in Kabul (Ibrahimi, 2012, p. 4). Researchers Smith et al, of the Foreign Area Studies (The American University), argue that, in 1963, Daoud was "removed from office in an assertion of power by the king" and "had since then been precluded from

11 This period also saw the emergence and popularity of a grassroots Maoist movement, whose lost history has been reconstructed by researcher Niamatullah Ibrahimi in his article, "Ideology without Leadership: The Rise and Decline of Maoism in Afghanistan" (2012).

official government activity" due to a "new law forbidding all members of the royal family, except the king from holding office" (Smith et al, 1980, p. v).

With Daoud's resignation, the King announced "the appointment of a commission to draft a new constitution" (Warnock, 2013, p. 48). The new constitution stipulated the formation of an elected parliament with two houses along with a series of progressive reforms, including the precedence of individual rights over tribal rights; equal rights for women; an independent, secular judiciary; and the precedence of secular law over Sharia law (Warnock, 2013, p. 49). The constitution also officially recognized the formation of political parties and a Political Parties Bill was passed by the parliament, however, the king refused to legalize the bill, fearing that it "would result immediately in the formation of left-wing and radical democratic parties" (Warnock, 2013, p. 49). Ultimately, this period of democracy, similar to the one initiated in 1949, was heavily suppressed by the monarchy. As Ruttig notes, "despite some political opening, the party-less constitutional monarchy proved too inflexible to accommodate and absorb conflicting political agendas" (Ruttig, 2013, p. 8).

While the first 30 years of his reign were heavily influenced by his advising uncles and cousin, the resignation of the latter saw King Zahir Shah elevated to become "the most powerful individual in the government as well as in the country" (Smith et al, 1980, p. xi). Although the newly formed 1964 constitution had relieved the king of many responsibilities and devolved them to his appointed ministers and Parliament, he had "reserved authority and initiative to himself" (Smith et al, 1980, p. xi).

Nonetheless, the formation of the new constitution marked a celebrated period of history widely referred to as 'the decade of democracy':

> “The 1964-73 period became known as the 'decade of democracy' in the history of Afghanistan. The thaw in the political climate paved the way for an unprecedented mushrooming of political movements and parties in the country. Previously suppressed study circles and underground associations took advantage of the relatively free political environment to compete for ideological and political influence among the nascent intelligentsia and urban middle class of Kabul and other major urban centres” (Ibrahimi, 2012, p. 3).

During this time, “three major ideological tendencies” dominated Afghanistan's political landscape: the *Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan* (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, PDPA), representing a pro-Soviet communist political orientation; the *Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutaraqi* (the Progressive Youth Organization, SaJaM), promoting a Chinese-style peasant revolution; and the *Jawanan-e Musalman* (Muslim youth), representing an Islamic movement inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and formed in direct opposition to the “growing influence of leftism” (Ibrahimi, 2012, p. 3).

The student movement of the 1960s and 1970s

The 'decade of democracy' also saw major developments in the student movement at this time:

> “During the 'decade of democracy', Kabul experienced three successive waves of student demonstrations and strikes, in 1965, 1968-69 and 1971-72...As an indication of the government's desperate need to control the student crowds, it completely closed the universities in Kabul for a period of six months in 1968” (Ibrahimi, 2012, p. 7).

The large-scale student demonstrations of 1969, in particular, are a testament to this time of political curiosity and growth of Afghan society. They began in May with a large group of students at a Kabul college protesting against a nepotistic hiring process at the school. When they refused to heed the orders of the Minister of Education to return to class, the police were instructed to arrest the leaders and disperse the others, leading to the death of one student and injuries to at least 50 other students (Smith et al, 1980, p. Xii). The body of the slain student was taken by the student demonstrators from police custody for a "hero's funeral" which was attended by thousands, who were again subjected to police arrests when the body was recovered (Smith et al, 1980, p. Xii). The protesters found allies in Kabul University where they planned another large march along with students from other institutions, including secondary schools. On May 19, however, Kabul police once again attacked the students by surrounding and storming the campus, injuring 12 faculty members and approximately 500 students (Smith et al, 1980, p. Xiii). The students responded to the police attack with yet another massive rally at the campus with over 15 000 students from a wide range of institutions and ages.

The campus tensions grew and spread to other schools, turning into a successful strike by the students and faculty and a series of demands, including punishment of the police, respect for the "territorial integrity" of the campus, the right of organized political activity by faculty and students, the end of nepotism, increased freedom of the press, and changes to post-secondary entrance exams (Smith et al, 1980, p. Xiii). The government

dismissed the list of demands and threatened to fire secondary school teachers who continued to strike, forcing them to return to work. On June 28th, then Prime Minister Nur Ahmad Etemadi gave a radio speech in which he announced the creation of a government-sponsored student union as the "sole legal venue capable of expressing the wishes of the university students" and threatened any newspaper that gave voice to the students or their views (Smith et al, 1980, p. xiii). Despite these tactics, students continued to protest their treatment and the papers, *Masawat* and *Afghan Millat,* expressed disagreement with the prime minister, leading to bans on those issues (ibid.). When Kabul University was shut down on July 6th, the protests spread among the other provinces, but eventually slowed down as students returned to classes because of social and political pressure.

Ultimately, "under intense pressure, the government finally agreed to the formation of a new students' union" in 1969 which was followed by the formation of the "Union of Lecturers of Universities of Afghanistan" in 1971 (Ibrahimi, 2012, p. 8). Moreover, the cables reveal the continuing trend of student movements in 1973:

> "Small but regular demonstrations by high school students in progress since April 19 triggered by announcement that 2200 graduates admitted to Kabul University...Over 7500 took entrance exam and seems likely demonstrations, usually calling for jobs or KU placement, will continue and grow. Demonstrations so far non-violent and closely controlled" (1973KABUL02998_b).

These protests were a sign of changing times, a desire for democracy and the declining popularity of the monarchy. While student dissent continued throughout the 'decade of democracy', other forms of protest were observed as well. Smith et al note the

“various kinds of dissidence among students, labor unionists, and others, which have characterized the country for a number of years” (Smith et al, 1980, p. v). There are many examples of such dissent including a demonstration in April of 1970 in which 5000 women protested against the conservative elements of Afghan society who threatened their rights and freedoms (Smith et al, 1980, p. xv). Smith et al write about these times:

> “At least ten other major demonstrations were recorded that year, expressing such varied grievances as displeasure with United States aid to Israel; anger at supposedly anti-Moslem acts; demands for higher pay, the right to strike, bus transportation, improved working conditions, and changes in university entrance requirements; and dissatisfaction with the prime minister” (Smith et al, 1980, p. Xvi).

An “Environmental Crisis”: Drought, famine, and an inadequate response

By 1973, Afghanistan was recovering from, as Smith et al writes, a drought “of apparently unprecedented severity” that lasted from 1969 to 1972 (Smith et al, 1980, p. xi). The number of casualties remains unknown, as Smith et al note, “thousands of persons died of starvation...the exact number of deaths will probably never be known, but various estimates placed the total as high as 500 000” (Smith et al, 1980, p. xi). Furthermore,

> “The drought also seriously depleted the country's huge herds of livestock, especially the Karakul sheep, the skins of which have been a major export item. Hundreds of thousands of livestock either died of starvation or were slaughtered because of inadequate pasturage and because of the people's need for food. It presumably will be several years before the herds can be built up to their former size” (Smith et al, 1980, p. Xi-xii).

Ruttig notes that “few contemporary sources mention this crisis, and data are even scarcer” (Ruttig, 2013, p. 11). Furthermore, he argues that:

> "The legitimacy of the Afghan monarchist government was also undermined by a food crisis, triggered by a severe drought in the early 1970s, and its inability to react. The drought led to crop failures, food shortages and food price hikes across the country as well as famine..." (Ruttig, 2013, p. 11).

The 1969-72 drought is not only relevant in contextualizing the decline of the monarchy, but also in examining the political climate in which the Helmand Water Treaty was passed through Parliament, despite widespread protest. These events will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

3.2 The traditional authorities respond: information control

The monarchy and the Afghan elite, faced with a powerful student movement, a parliament seeking to use its new powers, and growing unpopularity due to their inadequate response to the country's devastating drought, responded with a range of tools. One of these was the control of information. This was evident in the early 1970s through the censorship of journalists in the midst of a drought-related scandal and, later, the use of unpublicized royal decrees to pass important laws.

In 1971 and 1972, during the country's destructive drought, emergency food shipments were sent via the United Nations' World Food Program and from several countries, such as the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Canada, the People's Republic of China and Iran. The Afghan government was at the centre of domestic and international scrutiny when foreign observers claimed that corruption within the government and general inefficiency prevented the aid from reaching its intended

population. These claims appeared in several foreign publications, including the *New York Times*, and eventually, by late spring, 1972, began appearing in the local press (Smith et al, 1980, p. xx-p.xxi). The government began banning reporters from visiting the areas that were suffering from the food crisis after the editor of local newspaper, *Caravan,* reported on the conditions of people in Ghor Province (an area thought to be among the most devastated). The government was forced to launch an investigation into the matter and improve distribution of the aid. The inquiry resulted in several officials being discharged, including (at least) one governor and several police officers and development functionaries (Smith et al, 1980, p. xxi).

Furthermore, in 1973, with a move that seemed to have surprised even US officials, King Zahir Shah signed royal decrees enacting a new law and enforcing a series of revisions and amendments to existing laws without any public announcement and before Parliament had reconvened on March 13th (1973KABUL01831_b). These decrees promulgated an anti-bribery law, a revised police act, made amendments to the basic organization law (creating four new ministries: higher education, public needs, social development and tribal affairs), civil service law and to the judiciary law and raised the rank of the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Liaison Chief to Minister. Notable changes in these laws include the compulsory retirement of older judges and new regulations regarding the promotion of civil servants. Cable 1973KABUL01831_b emphasizes that the laws must be presented to the Parliament but can be enforced right away.

The royal decrees were published in the government's official gazette but were not

published or publicly announced in any other medium. When the US officials enquired about the lack of publicity of what they deemed “significant changes”, Deputy Minister of Justice Zhouand told the American embassy's Political Officer that the government did not believe the public needed to be informed of such changes and that “[they] did not like to publish them” (1973KABUL01831_b). The cable notes that the “official gazette is neither widely distributed or read” (ibid.).

3.3. Afghanistan in 1973

In order to contextualize the subsequent data and analysis contained in this study, this section provides an assessment of Afghanistan's politics and economy in 1973. In addition to the significance of this year in regards to political developments in Afghanistan, 1973 was an important year in global politics. A major war was fought in the Middle East, which led to an oil embargo against the US by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The Bretton Woods financial system established at the end of World War II began to collapse, ending the era of global Keynesian financial management and beginning the era of neoliberalism, which was brought to Latin America through a violent coup in Chile. Neoliberalism and its influence in the Afghan context will discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Officially a constitutional monarchy at the time, the country was ruled by King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister Mohammad Musa Shafiq. On December 5th, 1972, then Foreign Minister Shafiq was ushered in as the new Prime Minister of Afghanistan by the

king himself, after accepting the resignation of the previous Prime Minister, Abdul Zahir, who had been the former ambassador to Rome and Minister of Health (Smith et al, p. xvi).

Afghanistan in 1973 officially adhered to a nonalignment policy through which a balance was sought in its relationship between Eastern and Western power, preventing any formal civil or military alliances that would disrupt this balance (Smith et al, 1980, p. Viii). Nonetheless, the Cold War era saw massive foreign involvement in Afghanistan from both the Soviet Union and the United States. This thesis investigates American interests and perspectives of the country during this time.

According to the cables, 1973 was a time in which Afghanistan was classified as among the twenty-five least developed countries in the world, with a population between fourteen and seventeen million people and a per capita income of approximately eighty dollars (1973KABUL02254_b). The economy, which was growing between two and three percent annually (only slightly above the population growth at the time), was largely agriculture-based, with seventy-five percent of the labour force participating in agriculture and livestock. 1970 to 1972 was a time of severe droughts that had a "marked negative impact on the economy" (ibid.). The cable also notes that "primary convertible foreign exchange" came from karakul skins, dried fruits and nuts, and cotton. Furthermore, the "number one export is natural gas, almost all of which is exported to the [Soviet Union] under barter" (ibid.).

Afghanistan had been receiving substantial foreign assistance from a wide variety of sources since the early 1950s, including the Soviet Union ($800 million), the Federal

Republic of Germany ($180 million), and the People's Republic of China ($72 million) (ibid.). Along with these specific countries, organizations such as the Asian Development Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development had been increasing their development financing while the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies had also been providing assistance.

The United States and the Soviet Union exerted the strongest influence and had the highest investment in Afghanistan since the 1950s. The Soviets were interested in "economic planning, oil, gas and other geological exploration; urea fertilizer plant; highway construction; power development; land reclamation; technical education; housing and food grain storage" (ibid.). In the 1950s and 1960s, both the Americans and the Soviets were interested in infrastructure projects concentrating on "land reclamation, airports, water and power development and highway transport" (ibid.).

The cables note that since 1968, American assistance has been focused on "technical assistance in agriculture, education, family planning, private enterprise development, public administration, and PL-480 food grains" (ibid.). Their largest focus has been in the Helmand Valley, in which they had ongoing projects in land reclamation, agriculture and water development, including "two Eximbank financed dams" and a "USAID $15 million loan for the installation of power generation equipment and a transmission system" (ibid.). The Americans were also providing aid in the form of 425 000 tons of wheat and 8 000 tons of edible oil to address the droughts, and as a result, initiated the creation of a "food for work and provincial development program" (ibid.). Similarly, the Peace Corps had also

been involved in Afghanistan since the early 1960s, specifically in “public health, education, agriculture, industrial management, accounting, public admin, animal husbandry and family planning” (ibid.). The year before, they had also helped provide relief in “operation emergency assistance” to approximately 200 000 Afghans “in isolated mountain areas who were facing starvation as [a] result of the droughts” (ibid.).

Furthermore, the cables reveal details regarding the country's socio-political trends as they were interpreted by US officials. They describe Afghanistan as representing a typical third world country and suffering from the “underdevelopment problems” that such a country would, including “special limitations [to] Afghan society which renders neat categories difficult to daw” (1973KABUL03075_b). Examples of these limitations include the fact that the political system functions without political parties as they are illegal at this time. Additionally, there is no legislation on associations, resulting in the absence of any legal student associations, though two associations existed since late 1972: an inactive Non-Governmental Journalists' Association and a growing and active Afghan Manufacturers' Association (ibid.). Lastly, while there is some promise of labour legislation at this time, the Ambassador notes that there are no trade unions in the country (ibid.).

The cables also indicate a sense of changing political trends at this time, namely the growing political activity within the country. The Ambassador reports that though currently illegal, political parties and labour unions “will probably develop over [the] short term” (1973KABUL03075_b). They also indicate that associations, “covering everything from students to professional societies...will probably mushroom after enabling legislation [is]

passed" (ibid.). The embassy cables give the sense of observing Afghanistan at a time of real political dynamism.

Chapter 4: Data and Analysis

This chapter presents the data sourced from official US embassy cables, summarizing the historical events and socio-political context of Afghanistan in 1973. The data used in this chapter focus on the Helmand Water Treaty as a case study of the fragile but successful democratic institutions in Afghanistan in 1973, and of the attempts at undermining these institutions by the declining monarchy and Western-aligned Prime Minister Musa Shafiq. Furthermore, emergent themes centring on oppositional ideological battles, US interests and neoliberalism are examined as they relate to important political developments and trends of the time.

Despite the significance of this period in Afghanistan's history both for the country's future and for its global implications, the 'decade of democracy' and, specifically, the period just before the coup of 1973 is characterized by a gap in scholarship. Two widely cited papers, A. H. H. Abidi's "Irano-Afghan Dispute over the Helmand Rivers" (1977) and Richard S. Newell's "The government of Muhammad Moussa Shafiq: The Last chapter of Afghan Liberalism" (1982), represent some of the only scholarship, and therefore some of the only records of this time. These scholars (Abidi and Newell) were writing at a time when neoliberalism was still an emerging political phenomenon globally, and as a result its implications on the political developments of Afghanistan in 1973 are overlooked in their studies.

Instead, in these studies, the unpopularity of the Helmand Water Treaty and the

demise of Shafiq's government are objects of speculation, explained by Abidi in terms of psychological phenomena – Afghan "suspicion" and distrust of Iran – and by Newell in terms of divisions between the liberal-minded Shafiq and the repressive monarchy. Neither scholar had access to the diplomatic record. Due to the lack of transparency, tactics of information control undertaken by the Afghan government, and the covert nature of US political operations at the time, the motives and designs behind the events of the time are matters of conjecture for both authors.

This paper seeks to analyze the political developments of 1973 through the previously unavailable contextual details provided by the embassy cables. The conclusions reached through this analysis challenge traditional orientalist ideas about the lack of success of democratic institutions in the country; Afghanistan's supposed Cold War neutrality and its non-alignment policy; and the timeline of US interests and involvement in the country.

In this context, the Helmand Water Treaty is significant, not in its details, but in its symbolic representation of the struggle for democracy in a country that has largely been described as being incapable of such a struggle. Specifically, the mass non-sectarian protests against the treaty; the parliamentary tensions regarding its passing; the insistence on proper parliamentary procedures by deputies regardless of political orientation; and the widespread criticism of the repressive tactics used by the traditional authorities in dealing with opposition, all signify the growing political consciousness and desire for democracy on part of the Afghan people, a continuation of the trend of the 'decade of democracy'.

While representing the struggle for democracy, the Helmand Water Treaty and its passing through Parliament is also symbolic of the tactics used to subvert democratic practices. This is illustrated through the pressure placed on certain deputies by traditional authorities (both the monarch and prime minister's office) in order to influence the speed with which the treaty was debated and the final voting outcome. Furthermore, this is evident in the overall lack of transparency and public accessibility to the details of the treaty and its negotiation process; the unwavering confidence with which its successful passing in Parliament is discussed among various government officials within the embassy cables long before it is passed; and the intentional exclusion from certain important decision-making processes of parliamentary deputies opposed to the treaty.

Additionally, through the case study of the Helmand Water Treaty, a theme of US influence in Afghan political developments emerges. Though Afghanistan was formally nonaligned, the cables reveal a strong preference for the West Bloc, through Shafiq's close relationship with the US Ambassador. A lot of the information contained in this study was gleaned from reports made by Ambassador Neumann after informal, sometimes even secret, meetings with Shafiq and other members of his cabinet (on March 19 - 1973KABUL01833_b, March 27 - 1973KABUL02120_b, April 17 - 1973KABUL03073_b, and May 20 - 1973KABUL03778_b, among other dates). Furthermore, the American ambassador is given “Dean of DIP Corps” status and cites it often within the cables (1973KABUL01653_b).

A further investigation of this theme of US influence within the 1973 cables reveals

a broader campaign of early US involvement in the region and evidence of the beginnings of an early attempt to implement a system of neoliberalism in the country. The Helmand Water Treaty was treated as an important marker of success or failure of the then newly formed neoliberal campaign that was eventually implemented globally. Afghanistan, in fact, may have been one of the earliest targets of this campaign, which has been noted to originate in Latin America (Chile) in 1973. Evidence of this campaign is observed through the promotion of formal economic alliances with Western aligned nations (with Iran through the Helmand Water Treaty and with Pakistan through a joint project of iron ore and steel mill exploration in the Northwest Frontier); the promotion of private enterprise "wherever possible" (1973KABUL03780_b); and Shafiq's noted desire to encourage further foreign private investment (American in particular) and future oil and mineral exploration through US assistance.

Due to the large volume of data and number of themes, they have been categorized in this section through the following headings: 4.1 The Helmand Water Treaty; 4.2 Popular repudiation of the Helmand Water Treaty; 4.3 The Helmand Water Treaty in Parliament; 4.4 Pressure on deputies; 4.8 US involvement; 4.9 US attitudes towards Afghans; 4.10 Surveillance, vilification, and exclusion of the "Left"; 4.11 Balancing US interests; and 4.12 Early Neoliberalism in Afghanistan. The data is further categorized with subheadings to note different themes within each section.

4.1 The Helmand Water Treaty

A large portion of the cables throughout Prime Minister Shafiq's term involve the Helmand Water Treaty. Largely shrouded in secrecy and ambiguity, the 1973 treaty engineered by Afghan Prime Minister Shafiq and Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda, has been in the centre of geo-political debates, both internally within Afghanistan and externally by the international community, and most recently, by the NGOs studying the complications resulting from resource sharing in the area.

Like the flow of the river itself, the relationship between Afghanistan and Iran has fluctuated throughout history with many conflicts, among which was a dispute over rights to the Helmand River. Seemingly a straightforward dispute over water, tensions over the river have historically pointed to underlying issues of sovereignty, border disputes, and changing regional politics. While a more extensive analysis of political relations between Iran and Afghanistan is outside of the scope of this thesis, a brief historical overview of disputes related to the Helmand waters will be presented here.

A widely cited paper, "Irano-Afghan Dispute over the Helmand Waters", by scholar A.H.H. Abidi (1977), provides the most extensive discussion of the politics of the Helmand water dispute and the Helmand Water Treaty. While the context provided by Abidi is invaluable, the current thesis, drawing on the US Embassy cables to which he had no access, disputes some of his conclusions regarding the independence and neutrality of the 1973 Helmand Water Treaty. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

The Helmand River basin forms the border in the Sistan region between Afghanistan (the upper riparian state) and Iran (the lower riparian state) for approximately seventy-five miles and covers 135 140 square miles, one tenth of which falls within Iranian territory (Abidi, 1977, p. 358). While experiencing a range of fluctuations, an average year would see 60 000 cusecs of water delivered in flood conditions and 2000 cusecs during the dry season (Abidi, 1977, p. 358). One of four major rivers, it is the longest in land-locked Afghanistan (running along more than half of the country) and extensively used for irrigation.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the dispute over the river was largely a dispute over land and border demarcation, with Iran "[nurturing] a grievance over the partition of Sistan" (Abidi, 1977, p. 359).[12] From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the dispute took the form of inharmonious water sharing relations with an aggrieved Iran (as a lower riparian state) demanding its "due share" which was "never defined" (Abidi, 1977, p. 359). Throughout the history of this 'dispute', both countries sought "foreign intervention and advice" to resolve this problem (Abidi, 1977, p. 360). This history is presented below.

After the first of many requests for mediation was made by both parties to British officials, a tripartite commission (with the British, Iranian and Afghan governments nominating the commissioners) met in 1872 and the Sistan region was partitioned into

12 This grievance rested on Iranian land claims over the Afghan-controlled portion of the historic Sistan region based on "ancient rights" stemming from territory belonging to the Persian Empire (Abidi, 1977, p. 358). This grievance, coupled with a lack of consideration for Afghan sovereignty led to a general atmosphere of mistrust between the two countries, ultimately resulting in a military occupation of the Afghan Sistan region by Iran. This aggressive military action lasted from 1865 until 1870, when Afghanistan threatened war against Iran (Abidi, 1977, p. 361).

"Sistan Proper" and "Outer Sistan" with Iran given control over the former, and Afghanistan control over the latter (Abidi, 1977, p. 361-362). In 1934, under the terms of a "Treaty of Friendship", the water dispute was once again submitted for arbitration, but to Turkey, which was viewed as a "neutral power" (Abidi, 1977, p. 364). At the conclusion of the Turkish mediation, the two countries agreed to share the waters on an "equitable basis" (Abidi, 1977, p. 365). The two countries once again sought mediation in 1947, this time from the US (Abidi, 1977, p. 367). This was addressed between 1948 and 1951, when an Helmand River Delta Commission made up of representatives from the United States, Chile and Canada studied the water dispute and came up with a solution that the Iranian government, wanting a larger share of water, dismissed (Adle, 2005, p. 485).

Abidi critically describes these requests for foreign mediation – specifically regarding British and American mediation – as invitations for Western imperialist powers to promote their own interests in the region. Abidi argues that the British mediators were "[exploiting] the situation with a view to promoting [their] own influence" and "[obstruct] any Russian advance towards the south" (Abidi, 1977, p. 360). Similarly, Abidi argues that American mediation came at a time when the US, entangled in its own Cold War tensions against the Soviet Union, "was engaged in the process of expanding its influence in the region" through financial aid – both Afghanistan and Iran were given Eximbank loans of $21 million and $25 million, respectively – and an "integrated development plan for the Helmand basin" through the American firm, Morrison-Knudsen (Abidi, 1977, p. 367).

While critical of this history of foreign (Western) intervention in the Helmand

waters dispute between the two countries, Abidi celebrates the water treaty of the early 1970s as a “settlement [reached] through bilateral negotiations, in a spirit of self-reliance” (Abidi, 1977, p. 369). This treaty is described as independent of foreign interests despite noting the growing alliance between the US and Iran, characterized by US support for the monarchy, Iran's newly delegated task of “policing the region”, and the “sale of sophisticated arms to Iran, unprecedented in nature and quantity for that country” (Abidi, 1977, p. 369). Furthermore, regarding the unpopularity of the treaty in Afghanistan, Abidi notes:

> “By and large, the treaty was hailed in Iran, but there was opposition in Afghanistan right from the negotiating stage...former Prime Minister, Hashim Maiwaindwal, denounced the talks as 'an undesirable deal to the detriment of the Afghan nation' and 'a plot against the people of Afghanistan'. Organized political groups such as the Khalq and Parcham continued to voice their opposition to any agreement with Iran on the issue. The basis of the public opposition was a suspicion of Iranian motives in the context of Iran's continued orientation towards the Western bloc...In this context, Iran's gestures were construed as palliatives designed to tempt Afghanistan in a subtle way and distort its non-aligned posture” (Abidi, 1977, p. 372).

The data provided by the cables suggest that these criticisms of the treaty were not unfounded and that, far from being an independent and neutral initiative, the Helmand Water Treaty was extensively supported by the US. Moreover, Afghanistan's “non-aligned posture” was indeed threatened by Prime Minister Shafiq's own growing alliance with US officials, which will be presented in greater detail later in this chapter.

Details of the Treaty

The Helmand Water Treaty consists of 12 articles – regarding the release of an average monthly flow to Iran, the points of delivery, and statements regarding future disputes – and two extensive protocols providing guidelines for communication regarding water flow, the formation of a joint council for dispute resolution and guidelines for arbitration, should the need arise (1973KABUL01788_b). The treaty stipulates that Iran is entitled to a "normal average monthly flow" of 26 cusecs of water – 22 in accordance with the 1951 arbitration award and four representing "Afghan good will" (1973KABUL01769_b). This ranges from as low as 2.32 cusecs in September to as high as 78.16 cusecs in February (1973KABUL01788_b). It is important to note here that this volume of water awarded to Iran remains the same as the volume awarded by the 1948-51 Helmand River Delta Commission, which Iran had refused. Abidi explains that:

> "The fact that Iran ultimately agreed to the release of an average of 22 cusecs of water would indicate that either its insistence on a higher volume was exaggerated or that Iran's new foreign policy posture dictated the subordination of the narrow problem of water to the larger objective of regional dominance" (Abidi, 1977, p. 372).

In a radio speech described in cable 1973KABUL01680_b, Shafiq explained that though the Helmand water belongs to the Afghan people, it also flows into Iran where people depend on it and therefore, both must be accommodated. He argued that complete settlement of all issues is too complex of a matter and it is more important to settle the major points of the conflict. He explained that the settlement includes a treaty to fix the

amount of water to be given and how it is to be measured, as well as two protocols dealing with arbitration of disputes and the responsibilities of a regulatory commission on both sides. Lastly, he noted that the final decision rests with the parliament and king, emphasizing that the parliament was an “equal partner of [the] government with authority to reject government's action” (1973KABUL01680_b).

One of the “complex issues” that Shafiq was describing was determining the details of the sale of the water to Iran, which he argued was a minor issue to be handled later. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the treaty, as Afghanistan's financial situation is dire and many cables indicate a desperate need for funding and debt relief. In contrast, not only does Iran have more wealth, it also has more abundant water resources while Afghanistan is recovering from its 1969-72 drought.

In September, 1971, acting as Foreign Minister at that time, Shafiq himself had reported on the widespread devastation caused by the drought, including the destruction of the wheat crop resulting in a “predicted deficit” of 500 000 tons and a loss of 70 percent of the 20 million livestock (Smith et al, p. xx). At that time, it was determined that the country's major rivers, the Helmand, Arghandab, Hari Rud, and Farah Rud, were severely depleted of their water and “some important reservoirs held as little as 1 percent of capacity” (Smith et al, p. xx).

Given the lack of any radical changes in the treaty regarding the long-standing water dispute, the deliberate ambiguity regarding important details, and the context of drought and famine (fuelling the unpopularity of the treaty), the promotion of the treaty in a large-

scale campaign as a national priority and important solution to an 'ancient problem' is critically analyzed below.

A Resolution to an "Ancient Problem"

Throughout the cables, the Helmand Water Treaty is presented as the resolution to an ancient dispute that was framed as one of the most important items on the country's political agenda, despite the wide range of what could be argued more pressing problems such as the drought related starvation, protests over lack of job and school opportunities for youth (especially rural youth), and a broader demand for democracy in the face of government repression.

The cables describe the treaty in very celebratory terms, presenting it as a diplomatic miracle without ever effectively explaining its political significance beyond being a solution for a local water problem in Iran. Cable 1973KABUL01727_b describes the scene between Shafiq and Hoveyda and others, noting that an "exceptional atmosphere prevailed for visit" and that the "ambassador was struck by obvious warmth and sincerity in speeches on both sides-- actions which created virtual euphoria" and "led [the] participants [to] actually believe what they [were] saying". Within the cables, the treaty has also been credited as an "historic achievement" (1973KABUL2396_b) and for ushering Afghanistan into a "new era" (1973KABUL01727_b); creating a "friendly atmosphere" (1973KABUL01769_b), and a "virtual paean of praise" (1973KABUL01707_b) in which the "common culture" (1973KABUL01707_b) and "traditional ties of brotherhood"

(1973KABUL01769_b) between Iran and Afghanistan can be encouraged.

Cable 1973KABUL01727_b notes that Iranian foreign minister Farhadi had told the American ambassador that the water treaty is an "important beginning of reduction of sensitivities between two countries and opening of perspectives of greatly increased cooperation in all fields". This "increased cooperation" is explained by Abidi, who argues that:

> "...Iran initiated the idea of buying closer relations with Afghanistan, and for the first time it offered financial payment and concessional transit rights for Afghan exports through Bandar Abbas in return for more water by Afghanistan. Being a landlocked country, the Afghan economy was further choked when Pakistan denied transit facilities to Afghan exports" (Abidi, 1977, p. 369).

This is further complicated by the fact that the treaty did not offer a larger volume of water than its predecessor and was aggressively pursued at a time of when, through its "tremendously improved" economy and strengthening alliance with the US, "Iran geared itself to promote its political dominance in the region" (Abidi, 1977, p. 369). It is clear that the treaty itself did not benefit drought and famine stricken Afghans who already suffered from scarce water sources, but opened opportunities for an official alliance and economic "cooperation" between the two countries' governments under the patronage of the US.

4.2 Popular repudiation of the Helmand Water Treaty

While the water dispute has not been a priority in scholarly research of the area, the cables reveal that it was an incredibly important and contentious issue, especially in the early 1970s, when discussions arise regarding who the water belongs to and who has the

right to use it. Some of the criticisms held against the treaty centred on a larger theme of anti-imperialism (both against Iran and the US) and the right to self-determination. American Ambassador Neumann summarizes the main points of one large protest, stating that "strong criticism [was] levelled against [the Royal Afghan government, RGA] for acting against people's will. [The] US [was] also criticized as [a] 'torch bearer of international imperialism'" (1973KABUL01863_b).

Several large demonstrations were held in Kabul against the treaty and mass feelings of betrayal and suspicion were noted in the cables. "Demonstrations against [the] agreement were again held in Kabul March 11 and 12" (1973KABUL01680_b). On March 11, a Khalq meeting was forced to disperse by police after featured speaker, parliament member, Amin spoke against the agreement. On March 12, 1973, it is noted that crowds "perhaps numbered up to 10 000" protested in the streets against the coming visit of the Iranian Prime Minister to discuss the details of treaty (1973KABUL01680_b). Massive demonstrations were held against the agreement in the following two days as well. The second demonstration was held in front of a Kabul Municipality Building with police surveillance but no interruption. Parliament member Babrak protested against the "ruling reactionary authorities of Afghanistan" and "Iranian militarists" and asserted that the "government has no right to sell soil, air or water" (1973KABUL01680_b). He warned of the consequences of their agreement with the Iranian "imperialists and expansionists" and said the government would be responsible (ibid.). He also accused Iran of being a "creature" of American and British imperialists and asked them to stop "machinations

against Baluchis and Pashtuns” (ibid.). Though there was no public announcement regarding Hoveyda's visit, the cable notes that many protestors carried signs stating, “Hoveyda, go home”. The cable notes this second demonstration was the “largest seen in Kabul in recent months” (Ibid.).

On March 19, once again, 5000-7000 people protested against the Helmand Treaty in Kabul. Organized by the “United Front”, a collection of groups opposed to the treaty, including: Parcham, Afghan Millet, Mossawat, Khalq, Saday-I-Awam and Afghan Women's Organization (Parcham) (1973KABUL01680_b). Also in attendance were students and instructors from Kabul University and Polytechnique. Ex-Prime Minister Maiwandwal (Mossawat) stated that the government was not acting in the best interests of the people. He felt that because the cabinet was not complete – “several ministries [were] still vacant: justice, commerce, public health, tribal affairs department [and] three ministers [were] without portfolio, deputy PM positions [were] also vacant” – and parliament had not reached quorum, the government had “no right to conclude treaty” (1973KABUL01680_b). Bareq Shafayee (Parcham) declared that American led international imperialism does not scare the Afghan people and Parcham will defend “party policy about Helmand Treaty with every drop of our blood” ((1973KABUL01680_b)). Also present (and taken note of in the cables) were: Jalalzai (Afghan Millet), Zabibullah Esmati (student union), Dr. Haidar (Instructor's union), Hafizullah Amin (Khalq), Maroofa Esmati (Saday-I-Awam), Momina Basir (Afghan Women's Organization), Dr. Ehsan Taraki (Kabul University). The cable notes that Babrak Karmal (Parcham) was “present but did not speak”

(1973KABUL01680_b).

On March 26th, another large demonstration was held against the water treaty, organized by the Khalq political party. Cable 1973KABUL01998_b places the number of protestors at approximately 7000. Hafizullah Amin spoke at the demonstration, expressing his opposition to the treaty based on the “past 100 years [of] Afghan policy” and described the “treasonable” nature of the treaty (1973KABUL01998_b). He also criticized King Zahir Shah, noting that “even well known agent [of] British imperialism, Amir Habibullah Khan” was unwilling to negotiate over the Helmand River (ibid.).

These massive, non-violent protests not only represent the widespread unpopularity of the treaty – as opposed to being limited to a few “leftist” organizations, a characterization which is used several times within the cables and which will be discussed later in the chapter – and the frustrations of the Afghan people towards their government, they also challenge contemporary narratives of Afghans as incapable of upholding democratic values. These protests, along with the aforementioned student movement, represent a successful tradition of public dissent, one that has marked this time as the 'decade of democracy'.

Furthermore, the detailed observation and recording of these protests (and of specific individuals deemed politically important) in the embassy cables are significant markers of early US interest in and surveillance of the political landscape in Afghanistan, and in this context, a special interest in the passing of the Helmand Water Treaty. This interest becomes more evident in the cable reports of the treaty as it is introduced and

debated within Parliament, which is described below.

4.3 The Helmand Water Treaty in Parliament

Mirroring the protests on the streets, the water treaty was divisive and contentious within parliament as well. Cable 1973KABUL02998_b notes that a “reliable source says [Prime Minister Shafiq] [is] very up-tight and somewhat bitter over parliamentary difficulties on treaty”. The cables reveal the sensitivity of this issue and the care taken by Shafiq in his treatment of parliamentarians: “[the Prime Minister is] obviously treating Parliament with kid gloves since feeling against agreement is strong on part [of] many deputies” (1973KABUL01680_b).

As of March 27th, parliament was still unable to reach quorum and cable 1973KABUL01998_b notes that the number of parliamentary deputies required were indeed present in Kabul but a “significant number [were] avoiding parliament for 'various reasons'”. The cable also notes that a group consisting of 25 deputies were protesting the treaty by holding regular meetings in the hall outside in what embassy officials viewed as a “determined and so far successful effort [to] block quorum” (1973KABUL01998_b).

During the May 14 session in Parliament, speakers Hafizullah Amin and Babrak Karmal both “attacked [the] treaty as [a] sellout to Iran” (1973KABUL03585_b). The cables describe both men as “[reciting the] long history lesson of Afghanistan's victimization by imperialism in [the] region [citing the] Helmand Treaty as [the] latest chapter” (1973KABUL03585_b). They also spoke of American imperialism in the region

as proven through their involvement in the treaty and their commitment to supporting their "Iranian puppet" (ibid.).

The Lower House achieved quorum on April 1st 1973, during which Speaker Wardak introduced the treaty as the first item on the agenda but was met with significant opposition based on improper parliamentary procedure (1973KABUL02162_b). The cable emphasizes that "immediate objection [was] raised by leftist deputies" (Babrak, Amin and Omerkhail) but concedes that there was "sufficient support for proper parliamentary procedure" that forced the speaker to acquiesce "before pandemonium broke out" (1973KABUL02162_b).

The cables report that Parliament continued to have great difficulty reaching quorum to discuss and find resolutions to important items such as the Helmand Treaty and a contentious "language issue of civil servants law" (1973KABUL02325_b). Cable 1973KABUL02162 notes that on April 2nd, no quorum was achieved, but deputies proceeded forward anyway with committee member selection with approximately half of the committees complete.

4.4 Pressure on deputies

In addition to proceeding with committee member selection despite a lack of quorum, the ratification process of the treaty involved a considerable amount of pressure placed on deputies to conclude this process as quickly as possible, even at the expense of proper parliamentary procedures. In fact, cable 1973KABUL03585_b notes that the

“motion to initiate discussion [on the] treaty [was] introduced as [an] 'urgent proposal' from government”.

Furthermore, on May 20th, Prime Minister Shafiq confides in the American Ambassador that the ratification process of the Helmand treaty was “far longer and more difficult than he had anticipated” (1973KABUL03778_b). He complained that he was spending three hours a day with deputies (learning of their motivations) and going through great lengths to avoid offending Parliament, a process that was slowing everything down and “which would normally not have been necessary” (1973KABUL03778_b). He concluded that “any abnormal events, provocation, or arrest of a deputy could have unforeseeable consequences” (ibid.).

Cable 1973KABUL02998_b notes that the Afghan government was engaged in a lobbying effort to apply pressure on deputies to proceed quickly to a final vote in the plenary session in order to block other committees (such as the agriculture and legal committees) from having a “crack at [the] treaty”. Furthermore, the cables report that “several deputies cited major reason for lack [of] quorum [on] April 2 that king and [Prime Minister] meeting all day with selected MP's to 'remind' them [of the] necessity [of a] quick and positive parliamentary action on pending items” (1973KABUL02162_b). These underhanded tactics eventually led to resentments even among deputies who did not necessarily oppose the treaty, as is discussed in the following cable:

> “Speedy resolution [to the] long festering language problem has definite odor [of] massive government and palace intervention, which we also understand [is] continuing to be applied on Helmand Treaty issue. Some resentment [is] beginning [to] build up among deputies over what they see as Shafiq government resort to

traditional heavy-handed methods rather than earlier promises and emphasis on dialogue as equals with parliament. Shafiq consequently running serious risk of winning parliamentary battle but losing war through methods [that are] familiar and increasingly irritating to deputies. This could have far-reaching consequences for entire Shafiq program" (1973KABUL02325_b).

"A Historic Achievement"

On April 21st, the International Relations committee approved the treaty, with four deputies resigning from the committee as to not be "associated with [the] victory [of] pro-treaty forces" (1973KABUL02998_b). Ultimately, on May 22nd, the Lower House approved the treaty with 127 votes for, 11 votes against, and 15 abstentions. The treaty was then to be considered by senate, a process that the cables reveal was anticipated to have "early approval" (1973KABUL03781). Echoing the belief in a fast approval of the treaty, Senator Popal was noted to have told the American Deputy Chief of Mission that the senate had already received all necessary documents and he believed it would "act favorably" (1973KABUL03781). This expression of optimism regarding the passing of the treaty, despite the wave of street protests and tensions within Parliament, was a major theme in the cables and is further examined below.

Sinister Optimism

In several cables – 1973KABUL01653_b, 1973KABUL01727_b, 1973KABUL02254_b,1973KABUL03585_b,1973KABUL03778_b, 1973KABUL3781_b – a certain sinister optimism is expressed about the inevitability of the passage of the treaty despite the significant opposition to it both in the streets and in parliament. One cable notes,

“our sampling of deputies' views confirm [Prime Minister Shafiq's] reports: it will be difficult job, but parliament will probably approve” (1973KABUL01653_b). This is the first of a series of cables that notes that the opposition to the treaty is much stronger than Shafiq had anticipated. Interestingly, every time this is noted, it is accompanied with great confidence, and without much explanation, that it would be approved nonetheless. For example, cable 1973KABUL03778_b notes that despite the surprising level of difficulty, “[Shafiq is] still confident Helmand Treaty will be ratified but admitted his confidence was based on everything being normal” (1973KABUL03778_b). Furthermore, cable 1973KABUL01727 cites the following:

> “RGA officials, including Lower House secretary Mobin Shah, privately predicted parliamentary ratification of treaty this session, but anticipated some speeches against as well as negative press reaction from certain quarters, including former [Prime Minister] Maiwandwal. They believe parliament will approve by [a] 'comfortable margin'.” (1973KABUL01727_b).

And,

> “Negative notes have not yet surfaced; but obviously they will, especially when [the] text [of the] treaty [is] made public. There may also be anti-treaty demonstrations besides parliamentary and press objections. Nonetheless, all signs point toward [the] likelihood that [the] treaty will be formally ratified” (1973KABUL01727_b).

Information Control

The details of the treaty and its negotiation process, while outlined within the cables, were not made public at the time, continuing the aforementioned tradition of

information control used by the Afghan government. The meeting between Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda and Afghan Prime Minister Shafiq was not publicly announced, as noted in cable 1973KABUL01680: [during Shafiq's radio address regarding the Helmand Water Treaty draft on March 10th] “no mention was made of Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda's impending arrival to sign proposed treaty”.

Despite the lack of transparency regarding the treaty process, cable 1973KABUL01727 describes the “extensive public relations campaign mounted by [the] RGA” regarding the Helmand treaty, including a press conference, radio speech, roundtable discussion and several government-controlled news press editorials. Cable 1973KABUL01680_b also notes that newspapers, Islah and Anis carried supporting editorials, as well as the English Kabul Times. There were only two private press editorials (Saba and Afkare Nau), both of which “gave restrained approval” (ibid.). The cable makes note that, “surprisingly, Caravan [a critical weekly newspaper] has not commented editorially on agreement or on visit” (1973KABUL01727_b).

This exercise in creating positive publicity using government-controlled media was not limited to the treaty, but was a noted part of image-conscious Shafiq's term as Prime Minister:

> “His image as a man in charge is consciously fostered by government press and radio, which play up daily evidence of government's energy and decisiveness along with reports of prosecution of corrupt officials, underscoring Shafiq Cabinet's...” (1973KABUL02254_b).[13]

13 The rest of this passage was missing from the cable 1973KABUL02254.

These “extensive media relations campaign[s]” were used at a time when critical media sources were scarce and increasingly becoming more repressed. Cable 1973KABUL02148_b describes the relationship between the US embassy and local and foreign media in Kabul:

> “No foreign news correspondents are stationed regularly in Kabul and we have no indication that any will be here at time of DEPSEC visit. On previous similar visits where we have scheduled press conference, we have typically had maximum of 5 or 6 Afghan press preset, largely if not entirely representative of government media. Local stringers or visiting foreign correspondents for one or two wire services also often have appeared. Questions, especially from Afghan press, have been polite and easy to field, and have invariably dealt with US attitudes toward Afghanistan rather than US policies in other parts of the world” (1973KABUL02148_b).

Furthermore, as part of a six-month assessment of Shafiq's term, cable 1973KABUL05096_b notes the increasing government censorship and “neutralization” of critical press:

> “...increasingly stringent guidance to government papers in what amounts to [a] full-blown [public relations] campaign. In addition, several critical weekly newspapers have been closed or neutralized, either by strategy of appointing publisher to government post (Kushkaki, Caravan, Farand, Rozgar) or by voluntary or enforced suspension of several others. Both government and independent journalists in recent weeks have privately expressed deep concern for long-run implications [of] these moves which they feel will deprive government of constructive criticism” (1973KABUL05096_b).

Plan for annulling parliament

Prime Minister Shafiq was ultimately overthrown in a coup by Daoud, but the cables suggest that, at the conclusion of the passing of the Helmand Water Treaty, he was planning a coup of his own. Cable 1973KABUL05035_b discusses rumours that Shafiq had

planned to annul parliament and cancel or postpone the impending elections:

> “1. From [a] variety sources embassy has growing but still unconfirmed impression that [Prime Minister] Shafiq plans either to postpone or cancel elections constitutionally scheduled for September...elections may still be held on time after very abbreviated electoral campaign.
>
> 2. Since [the] passage [of the] June 14 Constitutional deadline for official announcement of electoral procedures, growing number Lower House MP's (who began campaigning early) have been lured back to Kabul to complete quorum and take action on three items pending legislation at 'urgent' request of government. These include (a) ten foreign loans...(b) authority for government to negotiate loans with bi-and multilateral donors for 47 development projects...and (c) RGA ordinary and development budgets for current fiscal year (debate currently underway).
>
> 3. Spectre of either postponed or canceled elections was obvious tool employed by Shafiq government to cajole deputies into returning Kabul; but whether government really intends to 'do away' with Parliament for a time remains as yet unanswerable question. Assuming budget passes within next week or so, [the] Shafiq government will have set [the] stage for possible rule without Parliament for at least a year. This development has also fed alternative speculation that government either intends (a) to hold elections on time but to severely curtail period of campaigning to enable government to get friendly candidates elected, or (b) to postpone elections and convene Loi Jirgah to review and perhaps amend 1964 constitution.
>
> 4...While latter option not yet considered strong possibility, it known that [Prime Minister] Shafiq is uncomfortable with Provisions Article 92 which permits Lower House in its next term to censure government by simple majority vote...Since constitutional deadline for announcement of elections now past, most observers agree royal decree required to clarify issue. With king scheduled to recuperate from eye treatment in Italy for another fortnight, it therefore unlikely anyone now in Kabul will soon resolve this currently favorite topic of Kabul social gatherings” (1973KABUL05035_b).

Cable 1973KABUL05148_b also discusses the growing rumours:

> “1. Usually reliable sources in Supreme Court and Parliament have told EMBOFFS in recent days that Parliamentary elections definitely will be held this Fall...Final arrangements for the elections, they said, would be clarified by royal decree (amending the electoral law) after the king returns to Kabul. The result would be only a slight delay of perhaps [a] week or so in holding elections.
>
> 2. Several Lower House MP's also have confirmed the above. One pro-government

> MP said the decree clarifying procedures and dates would not be made until about August 14, since the government desires to hold the Lower House in session as long as possible.
>
> 3...If the above correct, the campaigning period will be severely curtailed. One reason may be that the government will be able to limit the number of viable candidates competing for the 216 House and 28 Senate seats, thus ensuring the election of supporters and preventing unknowns from getting in. An RGA source told EMBOFF recently he believed government would support re-election of about seventy percent of current Lower House membership" (1973KABUL05148_b).

A secretive treaty, undemocratic practices and indirect US sponsorship

From the onset, the Helmand Water Treaty was conceived, negotiated and ultimately passed through a process that was characterized by secrecy, manipulation of media sources, the undermining of democratic practices and indirect US support. In contrast to the description of a liberal-minded and democracy-supporting Shafiq by Newell, Prime Minister Shafiq demonstrated a commitment to the appearance of democracy, while undermining it in practice. Throughout his term, he publicly expressed a recognition of and "careful treatment of Parliament as [an] equal partner of government with [the] authority to reject government's action" (1973KABUL01680_b). In addition to several speeches regarding the importance of Parliament, this was further expressed through the elevation of Shafiq's assistant to ministerial status (1973KABUL01831_b):

> "...[amendment to basic organization law] raises rank of [Prime Minister's] parliamentary liaison chief to minister...upgrading of [Prime Minister's] chief Parliamentary assistant is viewed as additional signal to parliament of esteem in which it is held by [Prime Minister]. (Not yet clear how Parliament views this action)" (1973KABUL01831_b).

Despite these gestures, Shafiq's government resorted to undemocratic practices to pass the Helmand Water Treaty including placing pressure on individual members of parliament in secret meetings to influence the voting outcomes; shortening the time allotted to debating the bill; and as discussed later in this chapter, exclusion of leftists, and manipulation of committees with access to the bill. Lastly, and arguably, most importantly, the cables suggest plans engineered by Shafiq to interfere with the impending elections and annul parliament as well.

Unlike the characterization of a treaty developed in the “spirit of self-reliance” given by Abidi, the passing of the Helmand Water Treaty involved a large degree of US mediation and support. The cables detail several interactions between US embassy officials and Afghan and Iranian officials regarding the treaty. Cable 1973KABUL01727_b describes the expressions of gratitude by Iranian and Afghan officials towards US officials for their role in passing the treaty:

> “[Prime Minister] Shafiq at both luncheon and dinner made [a] point in semi-public statement to ambassador of how much RGA owed us for our informal assistance behind the scenes to produce this happy conclusion of [a] vexing problem. Iranian ambassador and [Prime Minister] Hoveyda also stressed Iran's (and Shah's) appreciation of [US government's] role” (1973KABUL01727_b).

Furthermore, the following message for the US Secretary of State from Prime Minister Shafiq was received on March 27th, as noted in cable 1973KABUL01997_b:

> “Dear Mr. Secretary of State: I received your excellency's message on the signing of an agreement between the governments of Afghanistan and Iran on the Helmand Waters. In expressing my appreciation for the interest shown by your excellency, I take this opportunity to convey to you our sincere gratitude to the government of the

> United States of America for the effort deployed, the facilities accorded and goodwill shown at different periods to the government of Afghanistan aiming towards reaching a just solution of the Helmand Waters question. The recent agreement signed between Afghanistan and Iran has been submitted to parliament for consideration and it is our hope that the ratification of the treaty will yield a solution to a problem that has confronted Afghanistan and Iran for more than a century. Sincerely yours, Mohammad Moussa Shafiq" (1973KABUL01997_b).

In another example of US support for the treaty, cable 1973KABUL02148_b includes instructions sent by embassy officials for the visiting US Deputy of Security to express US support on the treaty:

> "DEPSEC visit provides welcome opportunity for public demonstration of continued US interest in and support for vigorous modernizing efforts being undertaken by Shafiq government...brief departure statement be read to press...mention major themes discussed with RGA during visit and reaffirm in general sympathetic support for government actions on Helmand Treaty, new legislation drafted and approved, and government reorganization" (1973KABUL02148_b) .

This theme of US involvement is not limited to the Helmand Water Treaty, however, and extends beyond this event to include a larger campaign to promote US foreign policy interests in Afghanistan. This is explored in the next section.

4.8 US involvement

In addition to the demonstrated US involvement in the passing of the Helmand Water Treaty, a broader investigation of the cables uncovers further evidence of US interests and influence in Afghanistan during Prime Minister Shafiq's term. This theme of

US influence is presented here through the relationship between Prime Minister Shafiq and American Ambassador Neumann; the US investment in an anti-narcotics trafficking campaign; US attitudes towards Afghans; the surveillance, vilification and exclusion of the Afghan "Left"; and a general look at US interests as outlined by US officials themselves.

"A different breed": US views of Shafiq

Generally, US officials regarded Shafiq's government as one that "compares favorably with its predecessors as concerns accomplishments" (1973KABUL03780_b) and Shafiq, himself, as a "different breed [of] prime minister than Afghans [have been] accustomed to" and a "man of decisive action" (1973KABUL02254_b). They credit him with "vigorously pushing reforms at home and better relations with foreign neighbours" and place the signing of the Helmand Waters Treaty as the single most important achievement of his government (ibid.). Shafiq had pushed for the treaty while he was foreign minister as well and his success as prime minister had, according to the Americans, "[set the] stage for far-reaching rapprochement with Iran and some reorientation of economy toward West to balance over-dependence on Pakistan" (ibid.).

The US relationship with Shafiq

The cables reveal a particularly close relationship between Prime Minister Shafiq and American Ambassador Neumann, in which the Ambassador "calls on" Shafiq several times during his term to either admonish him for failing to do something or to receive

updates on various political events. Cable 1973KABUL03780_b recounts such an interaction on May 20th, during which Shafiq "commented at length on all things he had wanted to do in this period that had been postponed because of [the] long Helmand Treaty Debate". Shafiq expressed his "belief [that] he had done his duty in signing treaty and that there was no [longer] 'crisis atmosphere'..." (1973KABUL03780_b). During this conversation, the Ambassador also cautions Shafiq against "running [a] one-man show", making him "inaccessible for long periods even to his closest collaborators" (ibid.). The Ambassador asks Shafiq if the king was providing him with the necessary support and "putting himself out in front", to which Shafiq replied that "his majesty was indeed supportive; but he implied that king was perhaps not putting himself out in front..." (ibid.).

Cable 1973KABUL02120_b describes a meeting between Ambassador Neumann and Prime Minister Shafiq on March 27th, 1973 at the request of Neumann, in which they discussed "three economic assistance subjects": the Afghan Fertilizer Company, the provincial development program and "Operation Help Cum Disaster Preparedness Organization". In this conversation, the relationship between the ambassador and Shafiq is clear, with the former infantalizing the latter by lecturing him on obvious matters and emphasizing the importance of foreign aid and private business interests. To that end, the ambassador discusses the "urgency of the RGA [on] meeting its commitment to [the Afghan Fertilizer Company] (and AID) of [a] cash contribution [of] 95 million Afghanis (plus 33 million Afghanis in [Pakistani] Rupees)" and the requirement of the Afghan government, under the conditions of the loan "to notify [the Afghan Fertilizer Company] of

[an] increase in wholesale price of urea and dap for all seasons by approximately 50 [Afghanis] per bag" (1973KABUL02120_b). He reminded Shafiq that this must be done before April 15 "in order permit tenders and delivery of fertilizer by August 15" (ibid.). Furthermore, he "cited [the] failure thus far [of the] RGA [to] complete [the] turn over to [the Afghan Fertilizer Company] of stocks of fertilizer and warehouses as [the] RGA committed to do" (ibid.).

In the same conversation, the ambassador emphasizes the importance of accommodating Peace Corps volunteers:

> "Peace Corps volunteers specially recruited and trained for provincial development have been here for several months without work because [of] PDD operation suspended pending reorganization, [the prime minister] assured me and asked that I assure Peace Corps that volunteers have very special place in his mind and heart. In former years, he gave orientation lectures to [the Peace Corps.] He said they should be assured that their talents will be used. I acknowledged his remarks and reiterated need for clear-cut establishment of meaningful priorities with regard to Food for Work and PDD. Shafiq said he will inform himself further on general problem and will be speaking with me later" (1973KABUL02120_b).

Furthermore, the ambassador discusses the need for "emergency preparedness" with the prime minister:

> "I then raised existence of confusion regarding precise role of new office of emergency preparedness. I pointed out that appointment of Dr. Kayumi was fine, but there appears to be a lack of clarity between responsibilities of new office emergency preparedness for follow-on to operation help, and longer range rural development programs. Confusion has serious consequences, because there may again be developing emergency in central highlands and this office should be acting to meet it. I noted that great deal of publicity had been given to movement of wheat and other supplies to help these people before winter came. It is now essential to find out if those people need further emergency help at this time and mobilize to provide it in order that they not starve this spring. One should ascertain whether they require rehabilitation to overcome results of last year's problems rather than

> emergency feeding. PM again said he would review situation and discuss further with me" (1973KABUL02120_b).

In an April 11th cable, Ambassador Neumann makes a request on behalf of the Minister of Interior for $28 000 of funding from Washington towards an order of 200 bullet-proof vests for Afghan police to use in "riot control and other duties" (1973KABUL02385_b). Though the request by the Minister was made in early 1972, Neumann argues that it is important for the US Government to fulfill now as a diplomatic gesture to show appreciation for the Ministry of Interior's US-inspired anti-terrorism campaign. The timing is especially important given that the Americans had resolved to not include the Ministry of Interior in further assistance through the substantial narcotics program. Instead, the narcotics program will provide large-scale assistance to the Ministry of Justice.

Cable 1973KABUL03777_b reveals that during a May 20th discussion with the American Ambassador, Shafiq expressed his concern after reading the current foreign policy report issued by the Secretary of State regarding its reference to the poor development of Afghanistan rather than its political significance. Ambassador Neumann reassures Shafiq that these kinds of unclassified reports would not contain sensitive material, especially "in view of country's delicately balanced position" (1973KABUL03777_b). Neumann concludes that:

> "...true appreciation [the US government] has for [the] political situation here [is] clearly reflected in [the] rather substantial assistance program which [the US government] has in Afghanistan, going well beyond what might normally be

expected for [a] country of Afghanistan's size and remoteness" (1973KABUL03777).

Cable 1973KABUL02396_b contains drafts of the arrival and departure speeches written for visiting Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth Rush. These speeches emphasize American support for Prime Minister Shafiq's government, whom they credit for taking actions in hopes of "[accelerating] the pace of Afghanistan's development" (1973KABUL02396_b). The speeches also praise the success of the Helmand Waters Treaty (which has not been passed at this time) in concluding "the ancient Helmand Waters problem" and describe it as an "historic achievement for Afghan statesmanship" (ibid.). The speeches also outline American interests in "[forwarding Afghanistan's modernization and economic growth" and is encouraged by the measures taken by Shafiq's government to "mobilize more of [Afghanistan's] own resources for development programs" (ibid.).

Cable 1973KABUL01833_b, one of the few secret cables in the data, reveals a secret meeting in which Ambassador Neumann "calls on" Deputy Foreign Minister Farhadi before a scheduled diplomatic trip to Tripoli for a meeting with other Islamic Foreign Ministers. In the cable, Neumann writes, "Farhadi said he fully understood serious character of information and said he would attempt [to] play a useful role in Libya" (1973KABUL01833_b). Moreover, Farhadi then reveals to the Ambassador that Palestinian political party, Fatah, had attempted to establish an office in Kabul (given the government's official pro-Palestine position), but was "turned away with [the] usual ingenious Afghan explanations" (ibid.). Prime Minister Shafiq also joins this meeting to endorse Farhadi's

views. The cable includes a note for the American embassy in Tripoli:

> "Farhadi is [an] exceptionally astute observer and has been very friendly with [the] US mission [in] Kabul. Although RGA invariably pro-Arab in [Middle East] question, its attitude has been generally moderate. Recently under more vigorous leadership of new [prime minister] Shafiq, RGA has cautiously searched for a more active foreign policy role especially in [Middle East] and [South Asia]. Shafiq and Farhadi have indicated their desire [for] discreet contacts with US mission at meetings of this kind. We recommend follow-up if in your judgement, conditions propitious" (1973KABUL01833_b).

Narcotics Trafficking

Another major theme of US involvement is described as the "international crusade against narcotics traffic", under which a multilateral program led by the United Nations was being established in Afghanistan. This program was one in which the US was heavily invested and considered a leader. Cable 1973KABUL03073 describes Shafiq's cooperation in this program:

> "Reacting to strong, steady US pressure, Shafiq has committed RGA to cooperate in worldwide fight against narcotics trafficking. UN-led negotiations for a comprehensive control program will begin later this spring, in Hallah" (1973KABUL03073)

Within the context of this campaign, cable 1973KABUL03073_b contains a very detailed account of US and UN involvement in the creation of laws and national budget organization for the country. The cable describes that while UN coordinator M. C. Manby's expresses his appreciation for a new police law that enforces anti-narcotics policies as illustrative of the Afghan commitment to the anti-narcotics crusade, he is very displeased with a draft of a new narcotics law. Specifically, he takes issue with the fact that the law

permits “some licit production and controlled commercial activity in [the] production of opium products which is completely contrary to UN and other's views” (1973KABUL03073_b). Ambassador Neumann explains that the draft law, “despite its total unacceptability”, offered an opportunity to work with a “concrete document” rather than just insisting that the government “do something” (ibid.). Nonetheless, as a “result [of] Manby and [Noll's] dismay, RGA has gladly and with alacrity agreed to Noll's rewriting [of the] entire law” (ibid.).

Lastly, cable 1973KABUL03779_b describes an interaction between the Prime Minister and US ambassador, in which Ambassador Neumann presses Shafiq for information regarding “the existence of certain narcotics 'installations'...which were currently untouchable by Afghan enforcement machinery because they were under the protection of powerful personalities, including members of parliament” (1973KABUL03779_b). The Ambassador made it clear that foreign assistance will be terminated to any country that does not “take all possible efforts to suppress narcotics traffic” as stipulated by US laws concerning foreign aid (ibid.). Shafiq assured Neumann that while he views the crusade against narcotics as a “sacred mission”, he could not “[take] action against parliamentary deputies until the ratification of the Helmand Waters Treaty was accomplished” (ibid).

4.9 US attitudes towards Afghans

> *"...we must constantly struggle here not only with poppies but also with airline schedules which regrettably reflect the backward state of this country" (1973KABUL01827_b).*

In their constant praise of PM Shafiq as a man the likes of which the country has never seen, US attitudes about Afghans in general can be deduced, as the image of Shafiq is implicitly contrasted against an image of a *typical Afghan politician*. The term "breed", a term normally reserved to describe animals, is used to describe how Shafiq stands above his countrymen (1973KABUL02254_b). Shafiq's energy is contrasted with the typical Afghan's lethargy (1973KABUL05096_b) and the "venal" (1973KABUL05096_b) bureaucracy's "inefficiency", "slowness", and "corruption" (1973KABUL03780_b). His charisma is contrasted with the typical Afghan's lack of personality (1973KABUL02254_b). His cleverness is contrasted with the typical Afghan's dullness (1973KABUL05096_b). Furthermore, Afghans are described as "still not prepared to go ahead on their own and more effective delegation of authority is necessary" (1973KABUL03780_b).

Democratic or even left, class-based opposition is reduced to the rantings of "blindly anti-Iranian Pushtun reactionaries" (1973KABUL02254_b), which implicitly denies the possibility of political agency to parliamentarians, protesters, and Afghans in general. In this view, opposition must be ethnic, religious, or a sign of backwardness. This

view continues to permeate the Western discourse about Afghanistan, in which history begins in the late 1970s focusing on the Soviet invasion and the mujaheddin wars that followed. This kind of selective narrative protects the forces that subverted democracy before the invasions from historical scrutiny, and denies their victims of anti-democratic sabotage an accurate accounting of history.

4.10 Surveillance, vilification, and exclusion of the "Left"

Another common theme in the conversations between Ambassador Neumann and Prime Minister Shafiq is a passionate anti-left sentiment, usually unaccompanied by explanation. Any individuals or groups opposed to the passing of the Helmand Water Treaty, including students, faculty, politicians of varying political orientations, communists and Maoists, are categorized as "leftists" and described in negative terms, such as "rabid" (1973KABUL02325_b).

In Parliament, the greatest opposition to the treaty came from what the cables continuously refer to as "leftist" deputies (including Hafizullah Amin and Babrak Karmal, both belonging to communist parties) whose involvement in the process was closely surveilled and purposely limited. They are described as creating "pandemonium" in parliament (1973KABUL02162_b) when they insist on proper procedure; and are also accused of inciting "reactionary" elements of society because they "realized the great stabilizing potential of the treaty" (1973KABUL02254_b). Additionally, these 'leftist deputies', according to the ambassador, engaged in "verbal pyrotechnics"

(1973KABUL03585_b) and are "mercurial" (1973KABUL03778_b).

Surveillance of the activities of these deputies is evident throughout the 1973 cables, an example of which details the process of committee formation. During an April 1st Parliament meeting, it was decided that members would be selected for house committees through meetings with "deputies from each province" (1973KABUL02162_b). The cable report concludes that "such [a] procedure will probably guarantee that Babrak and Amin will be on international relations or agriculture committee, both of which will consider [the] Helmand Treaty" (ibid.).

In addition to this surveillance, the cables describe the exclusion of these same deputies from certain parliamentary procedures, including a May 15th session that was "ended early and abruptly by speaker Wardak as [a] number [of] leftist deputies attempted [to] introduce [a] resolution calling on [Prime Minister] Shafiq to appear for questioning on treaty" (1973KABUL03585_b).

While Neumann and Shafiq admit that some deputies are corrupt or involved in drug trafficking, these affiliations are accorded less importance than the orientation of deputies as "leftist" or "left-leaning". No mention is made of "rightist", "centrist", or "right-leaning" deputies. In the cables, the ambassador laments that "currently only leftist groups [are] organized and their impact will probably remain negative" (1973KABUL03075_b). Furthermore, the cables express a fear that labour unions, should they become legal, will have a "leftist political coloration" (1973KABUL05096_b).

In this context, the protests on the street, the debates in parliament, the demands of

the previous and ongoing student movements were all symbolic of what was perceived as a "leftist trend", sometimes characterized as "creeping Daoudism" (1973KABUL05096_b).[14] Former Prime Ministers Daoud and Maiwandwal also experienced such disapproval. Neither of these individuals were part of any left party or formation, and differed greatly in politics from one another.

In contrast, US backed agendas are described as in positive terms, including as a "crusade","sacred mission", and "fight for enlightenment and progress for [the] nation as a whole" (in the context of the campaign against narcotics) (1973KABUL3779_b). Furthermore, Shafiq is described as having "done his duty" to ensure that there is "no longer a "crisis atmosphere" (in regards to the Helmand Water Treaty) (1973KABUL03780_b). Additionally, the US supported Peace Corps are described as having a "special place in [Prime Minister Shafiq's] mind and heart" (1973KABUL02120_b). These contrasting frames parallel the aforementioned narratives and imagery used to describe a "clash of civilizations" – as discussed by Cloud and Jiwani, in their analysis of post 9/11 discourses – and the contrasts between the democratic West and the backwards and irrational East.

There are two stages to the process of the exclusion of "leftists". First, those who oppose Shafiq and US supported policies (including the Helmand Water Treaty) are characterized as "leftist". Next, leftists are characterized, as "rabid", "mercurial", "reactionary", and ultimately enemies of modernization. This process justifies the use of

14 The "Daoudism" refers to Mohammad Daoud Khan, former prime minister, cousin of the king and future president.

undemocratic methods against such groups and individuals such as extensive surveillance; exclusion from legislative committees; preventing relevant legislation from going before these committees; and using tactics such as shortening parliament sessions in order to prevent question period (1973KABUL03585_b). Most importantly, before Shafiq is overthrown in a coup by Daoud, the US cables nervously discuss rumours (from what they consider to be credible sources) of Shafiq postponing or cancelling the upcoming elections and annulling parliament for a year (1973KABUL05035_b).

Part of US nervousness with Shafiq's plans for doing away with Parliament could be attributed to the importance in US Cold War campaigning as presenting the West as champions of democracy and freedom and the "left" as undemocratic and totalitarian. US cables report, even before these plans, that Shafiq – who had initially presented himself as an equal partner with parliament – had begun to reveal the "heavy-handed" presence of the monarch behind his power (1973KABUL02325_b). These undemocratic procedures and the general warning that opposition from the Parliament would be overridden by royal decrees resulted in growing resentments, even among his supporters in parliament.

4.11 Balancing US interests

On April 27th, 1973, Ambassador Neumann sent a cable outlining the following sections of Afghan civil society and the weights assigned to them as per the interests of the US mission in Kabul (1973KABUL03075_b):

1. Young political leaders: 20 percent
2. Young military: 10 percent
3. Young bureaucrats (all ministries): 20 percent
4. Media: 5 percent
5. Church: 5 percent
6. Business: 5 percent
7. Education: 10 percent
8. University faculties (especially agriculture, engineering, education and university administration): 15 percent
9. Artistic/fine arts community: 5 percent
10. Royal family: 5 percent

Within this scheme, education and university faculties are assigned high value, and as Ambassador Neumann explains in the cable, the University of Kabul is a "high priority" because it acts as a "source [of the] vast majority [of] upcoming elite" and the "most promising potential leaders" (ibid.). It is noted that as a major contributor to the education system, the US hopes to gain a unique advantage in this area.

In the same cable (1973KABUL03075_b), Ambassador Neumann outlines a series of tasks to accompany US interests in the country, again with different weights assigned to each one:

1. Assure access to future leadership: 10 percent
2. Develop influential relationships: 15 percent
3. Favorable attitudes towards US: 5 percent
4. Understanding of US goals: 5 percent
5. Attitudes on specific US interests: 10 percent
6. Bilateral trade and investments: 10 percent
7. Strengthen moderate groups: 5 percent
8. Economic and social development: 5 percent
9. Commitment to democratic processes: 5 percent
10. Encourage pragmatic approaches: 5 percent
11. Counter forces hostile to US: 5 percent
12. Understand political and social trends: 20 percent

Neumann describes the reasoning behind some of the assigned values, notably regarding (3) and (4):

> "Lower weights (5 percent) assigned areas where larger investment [of] mission resources either unnecessary or unlikely [to] produce positive results in near future. Thus [3 and 4] require less resources due [to] existing base [having] generally favorable attitudes towards US among majority [of] Afghan elite" (1973KABUL03075_b).

Additionally, he explains task 7 through 10:

> "7 through 10 reflect range of limitations from political inadvisability of high profile within delicate internal political system (7 and 9), aggressively conservative nature predominately rural Afghan society (8), existing inclination, Afghan elite to opt for non-ideological approaches (10)" (1973KABUL03075_b).

On the topic of labor unions, as mentioned in chapter 3, the cables reveal an anticipation of growing political activity and continued desire for democracy in the country, and thus, the ambassador predicts the legalization of associations and labour unions in the short term, however, with limitations. It is noted that the early establishment of unions will involve "heavy surveillance", especially because of the "sensitivities" the Afghan government has towards the "organization [of the] political left" (ibid.). Where US interests are concerned, Neumann is confident that:

> "...Most likely when trade union movement emerges, its development will have generally favourable impact [on] US interests. [The] situation made somewhat easier by present lack [of] direct US business interests here which obviates any problems of unfavourable comparisons being drawn by hostile elements between US theory and practice" (1973KABUL03075_b).

In their assessment of the current Afghan government's efforts to improve the country's "economic stagnation resulting in large measure from bureaucratic lethargy", the

Americans conclude that Shafiq has made some progress in the previous four months through:

> “legislation on petroleum and minerals, proposed revitalization of the planning process, the creation of new ministries and organizations to deal with labor, essential commodity distribution, higher education, and provincial development” (1973KABUL02254_b).

They predict that the Helmand Waters Agreement will result in significant economic development, “financed primarily by the Asian Development Bank” (ibid.). Unfortunately, this particular cable is missing information beyond that last quote elaborating on the specific investment opportunities that the water treaty would afford the US and other organizations.

US economic investment in the country at this time is also changing to match the changes made in the country through Shafiq's government. Smith et al writes:

> “The Cold War economic competition in Afghanistan between the United States and the Soviet Union, which over the previous twenty years had provided most of the motive power for economic development there, was apparently running down. In the case of the United States at least, there was indication of a sizable reduction in economic assistance to Afghanistan” (Smith et al, p.xxiv).

While the cables do indicate a decrease in US funding for specific ministries and programs, they also indicate increased US funding for other projects that suit their interest, such as enforcement against narcotics trafficking and anti-terrorism projects.

4.12 Early neoliberalism in Afghanistan

The Helmand water treaty was a case study in democratic opposition, in the elite struggle against this democratic upsurge with US patronage, and ultimately, the early introduction of neoliberal economic policies. It is traditionally thought that neoliberalism was introduced to Afghanistan as part of the rebuilding project after the US occupation began in 2001. This thesis asserts that neoliberalism was a central directive of US intervention in Afghanistan in 1973. As was mentioned previously, Afghanistan's nominal nonalignment was belied by Shafiq's alignment with Western powers (namely the US). De facto alignment with the West meant the adoption of neoliberal policy through privatization, exploitation of natural resources for private profit and an emphasis on foreign investment.

Within academic scholarship, this historical period of neoliberalism is often associated with the 1973 US-supported coup in Chile by Augusto Pinochet, regarding which Alejandro Colas, Professor of International Relations (Birkbeck University of London) writes:

> “In the 1970s Pinochet's Chile demonstrated the possibilities of combining a free economy with a repressive state. By opening its economy to foreign capital, reorienting domestic production toward the export market, privatizing state-owned companies, rolling back social expenditure and employment rights, abolishing taxes on wealth and capital gains, and embarking upon the systematic repression of the labour movement, Chile served as a source of inspiration for later neoliberal 'counter-revolutions' which also emerged out of deep socio-economic and political crises (Colas, 2005, p. 76).

Furthermore, Colas describes the significance of these "counter-revolutions" in the rise of a "New Right" in the West:

> "Thatcher's election as British prime minister in 1979 and Ronald Reagan's victory in the US presidential contest of 1980 signalled the rise of the 'New Right' as the alternative to crisis-ridden welfare capitalism and the heightened class antagonism in the capitalist heartlands" (Colas, 2005, p. 76).

In this new context of a global movement towards a "New Right" ideology and neoliberal policy, the political developments in 1973 Afghanistan can be understood through a broader analysis of the characteristics of this new global phenomenon. To this end, Colas describes three "international dimensions" of this "rightward turn in politics": the rise of an elite group of "opinion formers and practitioners"; global "left-wing defeats"; and the prominence of international financial institutions (Colas, 2005, p. 76-77). On the rise of an elite group of neoliberal advocates, Colas writes,

> "The first of these might more properly be called the 'transnational' dimension of neoliberalism. This refers to the emergence on both sides of the North Atlantic during the 1970s and 1980s of an elite of opinion formers and practitioners who have self-consciously advocated the so-called 'Washington consensus' on economic policy involving fiscal discipline, financial and trade liberalization, privatization and opening up to FDI [Foreign Direct Investment]" (Colas, 2005, p. 76).

In terms of the significance of the country's elite in implementing neoliberalism, US officials were explicit about their recruitment of elite students from Kabul University and the Polytechnique. In previously discussed cable 1973KABUL3075_b – in which different sections of Afghanistan's population are assigned different percentages of importance – the

Afghan elite is given massive importance, while the attitudes of the country at large to the US is assigned an importance of 5%. The US ambassador explains that this is because there is a “generally favorable attitude towards US among the majority of the Afghan elite” (1973KABUL03075_b).

Moreover, the “Washington consensus” regarding economic policies that promote fiscal discipline, market liberalization, privatization and foreign direct investment are the most obvious markers of neoliberalism within the context of Afghanistan in 1973. The trend towards privatization is illustrated through cable 1973KABUL03780_b, in which Ambassador Neumann asks Shafiq “whether [the] shift of chairmanship of [the] investment committee from Ministry of Commerce to Ministry of Mines and Industries should be interpreted as [the] strengthening [of the] government industry sector”, to which Shafiq “responded absolutely not, especially as Minister Azizi strongly favored private enterprise wherever possible” (1973KABUL03780_b).

Further examples of resource exploitation, privatization and foreign direct investment are illustrated in cable 1973KABUL03780_b when Shafiq claimed he needed help from US officials:

> “...in connection with oil exploration noting that petroleum and mineral codes are in final stages of preparation and, if parliament cannot find time to adopt them, they might be promulgated by royal decree. In addition, regulations would be published empowering RGA to invite exploration by foreign companies with RGA obligation to repay them their expenses if, after having found oil or minerals, they were not given necessary concessions. He viewed this as largely measure of reassuring private companies and causing them to move ahead before completion of lengthy work still necessary on petroleum and mineral codes” (1973KABUL03780_b).

Further in the cable, Ambassador Neumann writes,

> "[Shafiq] indicated need for our help in talking to some American experts, whether presently available in Afghanistan or to be brought in, on how to develop certain labor-extensive projects which would 'make a difference' in a relatively short time... He also said he wanted advice on how to encourage private investments even further, especially investments from America. I reviewed with him some obstacles to investments; and zeroed in particularly on [the] inefficiency and slowness of bureaucracy, corruption, and uncertain and capricious taxation...He then said important beginning was already being made in [Ministry of Finance] particularly" (1973KABUL03780_b).

The themes of market liberalization, privatization, and resource exploitation are also evident in the case study of the Helmand Water Treaty itself. In presenting the treaty to the public in a radio speech, Prime Minister Shafiq discussed the possibility of future agricultural development and "foreign exchange earnings" in the Helmand Valley and it's "green gold" (1973KABUL01680_b). The Ambassador also notes the importance of the treaty in opening opportunities for Iranian investment in the country and furthermore economic cooperation (1973KABUL01727_b). The treaty also inspired the desire for "formal economic relations" through iron ore exploration and a steel mill project as a joint venture by Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Northwest Frontier (1973KABUL02227_b).

On the rise of a "New Right" and global defeat of left-wing politics, Colas writes,

> "A second international aspect to the globalisation of neoliberalism resides in the political decline of the Left in the North and the crisis of non-capitalist forms of development in the South, particularly those inspired and supported by the Soviet bloc. For the globalization of neoliberalism was not just the result of 'New Right' victories, but also the consequence of left-wing defeats" (Colas, 2005, p. 76-77).

This second component in the global implementation of neoliberalism has had a significant impact on Afghanistan's socio-political landscape since the coups of the late 1970s, however, during the period of study, the decline of the Left and rise of the "New Right" was not yet a reality. As mentioned before, Afghanistan in 1973 was one of the most important sites of the ideological struggle between non-capitalist forms of development and the new era of neoliberal policy. It was a struggle that had lasting implications, not just for the country's future, but for the world at large. The outcome of this struggle – a succession of coups, foreign invasion and occupation, and civil war – has been widely documented within journalism and academic scholarship.

Lastly, the third "international dimension" in this new era of neoliberalism is described by Colas as a rise in international financial institutions and Structural Adjustment Programmes:

> "For the weaker states and economies in the international system, neoliberalism arrived as an even more ostensibly external force, principally in the shape of international financial institutions (IFIs). This third international dimension to the spread of neoliberalism has mainly played itself out through the mechanism of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s (known today as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers), which were implemented as a condition for receiving loans from IFIs" (Colas, Alejandro, 2005, p. 77).

In this regard, while the influence of Structural Adjustment Programs was not observed until the 1980s, and therefore, of little relevance in 1973 Afghanistan, the influence of international financial institutions at that time is very evident. As discussed

previously, along with a substantial amount of international aid received from countries such as the Soviet Union, Germany, China and the US, Afghanistan was the recipient of a series of loans from IFIs such as the Asian Development Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Eximbank.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: What happened to Afghanistan?

On July 10th 1973, one of the last cables produced during Shafiq's term in office described a crisis in which Shafiq was “uncomfortable” with a constitutional provision that permitted censure of the government by a simple majority vote in parliament (1973KABUL05035_b). Would Shafiq postpone elections, or even do away with parliament for a year? The cable notes that “no one, either in government or parliament claims to know for certain what [the] next step will be” (ibid.). With King Zahir Shah recovering from an eye treatment in Italy, the cable concluded that it was “unlikely anyone now in Kabul will soon resolve this currently favorite topic of Kabul social gatherings” (ibid.).

The topic was resolved by Daoud, who initiated a coup against the monarch on July 17, 1973 and became the country's first president. Subsequent cables are available on the coup and on Daoud's administration, subjected to the same US intelligence apparatus as was Shafiq's. Daoud was ultimately overthrown in a PDPA coup, led by Taraki and Amin (part of the Khalq faction of the party), whose government is discussed by Male. The government formed by Taraki and Amin was then overthrown by Karmal (part of the Parcham faction of the PDPA), marking the beginning of the nearly decade-long Soviet occupation in December of 1979. Daoud's time in office, as well as the governments of the various PDPA factions that followed, are extensively discussed in numerous secondary sources (Isby, Warnock, and many others). Additionally, a comparatively giant body of

literature, scholarly, journalistic, and foreign aid-related, is dedicated to the Afghanistan of the Taliban and the ongoing post-Taliban period.

By the time of the coups, Afghanistan's democratic opening had been closed. It was becoming more and more difficult to imagine an Afghanistan with a thriving parliament, a spectrum of political parties debating and contesting elections, and grassroots movements treated with respect for civil liberties. This ideal was never achieved in Afghanistan but the potential for it existed, and was lost, in the early 1970s, as this thesis showed. About Afghanistan's potential for reform, Thomas Ruttig wrote:

> "It is significant that the slower reform process between 1929 and 1973 met almost no violent resistance. Modernization was only violently resisted when it came in the context of outside military intervention, as between 1978 and 1989 (by the Soviets) and after 2001 (by the US-led alliance), and its opponents were able to label it as a threat to 'Afghan culture' and religion and to politically mobilize significant parts of the Afghan population against it" (Ruttig, 2013, p. 13).

The erasure of the successes of Afghanistan's "decade of democracy" – and the subversion of these fragile democratic attempts from history has meant that younger generations of Afghans, especially in the diaspora, are taught a version of history that serves only those that are in power now, those who were sought after by the US then – the same traditional elites who opposed progress. This act of blurring Afghan history has shaped the political self-image of Afghans today. The orientalist discourses of Afghans as *uncivilizable*, *unconquerable*, and *ungovernable* have become an accepted part of what Afghans believe about themselves. To return to Foucault's concept of "Truth and Power",

the regime of power imposed in the 1970s has produced a regime of truth about the country, one that is difficult to dislodge, because “the problem is not changing people's consciousness – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (Foucault, 2000, p. 43).

The history of democratic struggle, and the identification of leftist politics with the struggle for democracy, has been lost. The history of leftism in Afghanistan has been reduced to a caricature of coups, violence, and the violation of the country's sovereignty, only because that history begins in 1978. Even popular images contrasting today's Afghanistan of burqas to an idealistic Afghanistan of miniskirts and schoolgirls ignores the history of Afghanistan as a site of street protests of 10,000 people, of successful mass student movements, of a movement for women's emancipation, and changing cultural ideals.

Today's Afghanistan is written about in ways that are remote from the Afghanistan of 1973. The real grassroots movements, those of the 1970s, are gone from the record.

The movements sponsored by the US to fight violently against all reforms (Warnock, 2013, p. 52), against the growing “leftist trends” and the “decade of democracy” first, and then against the Soviet Union, are referred to as “grassroots movements” by writers like William Maley, Director of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy (The Australian National University):

> “The Afghan resistance at its outset was basically a grassroots movement. This is frequently overlooked, especially by those whose focus of interest is skewed

> towards radical groups supported indirectly by the United States which have returned to haunt America in the post-communist era" (Maley, 2009, p. 50).

The early Islamists, who became Maley's fictional "grassroots" mujaheddin, were supported by the US before the Soviet invasion, even by Maley's own admission. Maley cites Brzezinski who claims US assistance started six months before the Soviet invasion, when in fact it began decades before: "Brzezinski stated that US support for the Mujahideen had begun six months before the Soviet invasion" (Maley, 2009, p. 65). Their alliance eventually coalesced on university campuses in the 1970s in reaction to the progress made by the democratic movement (Ali, 2009, p. 55).

Conversely, the assessment of contemporary observers was that the communist government was more popular than is normally understood, and the mujaheddin in the 1980s were less popular than widely reported. Eqbal Ahmad, Professor of Political Science (Hampshire College), wrote in 1988, that:

> "It is widely believed in Washington that the Communist regime cannot survive the departure of the Soviet troops. That is probably true, although the Mujahideen are politically weaker and the government is stronger than is generally assumed in Washington" (Ahmad, 2004, p. 192).

Ahmad believed that the left, even after all of the violations of the 1980s, remained an important force until their final destruction in the 1990s:

> "According to Selig Harrison, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who visited Kabul most recently in 1984, there is a hard core of Communist activists, about forty-five thousand strong, who still believe that despite its unhappy history the Party is the only vehicle for modernizing their country. That is not an insignificant force in a country as divided as Afghanistan and in a society in which a

> politically committed individual can count on the loyalty of many family and tribal members. Moreover, many people in the middle class, though they are strongly anti-Communist, fear the fundamentalists almost as much as they loathe the Russians" (Ahmad, 2004, p. 193).

Those fears were to be realized in 1992, when the mujaheddin finally took Kabul and ushered in the most destructive period of Afghanistan's history. The final collapse into the type of warlordism described by scholar and Afghanistan expert, Antonio Giustozzi (2009), and the kind of drug economy described by author David MacDonald (2007), occurred in this period.

Today, journalists like Ahmed Rashid argue that, "Afghanistan is once again staring down the abyss of state collapse, despite billions of dollars in aid, forty-five thousand Western troops, and the deaths of thousands of people" (Rashid, 2008, p. xxxviii). According to Rashid, the current crisis of "state collapse" is the result of a squandered opportunity by the international community to *fix* Afghanistan after 2001. He writes that "the international community had an extended window of opportunity for several years to help the Afghan people – they failed to take advantage of it" (Rashid, 2008, p. Xxxviii). Furthermore, Rashid offers this advice to Afghan elites:

> "Members of the Afghan elite need to appreciate the opportunity to be born again as a nation, a chance they were given by foreign intervention in 2001 and international aid since then – even though the results and commitment of both have been at best halfhearted. The Afghans need to evolve a system of governance capable of delivering services to the people and relatively free of tribalism, sectarianism, and corruption. They need to tackle the drug problem themselves and show the world, first, that they are worthy of help and aid, and second, that they will assume responsibility for their nation in the quickest possible time" (Rashid, 2008, p. 403).

In this context, Rashid argues that if Afghans could simply take responsibility for themselves and "show the world... that they are worthy of help and aid", things might improve. This discourse regarding the generosity of the international community and the opportunities for rebuilding Afghanistan afforded by the NATO occupation, once again place the blame for the current socio-political crises of the country on the Afghans themselves, while decontextualizing the history of the subversion of democracy in pursuit of Western neoliberal policies and interests. Rashid, unfortunately, is not alone, and is far from unsympathetic to Afghanistan, despite this type of writing.

This thesis has argued that the betrayal of Afghanistan began with the excesses of international interference, presented as "aid". They should have done less, not more. Neoliberalism, as the embassy cables have illustrated, was present in Afghanistan decades before NATO. But so too was a political dynamism that could have evolved into an organic polity far from the warlords and occupations that have blighted the country since. The choices made by the US were made because of interests, but also because of ideology revealed in the way they discuss Afghans, especially those Afghans that opposed their agendas. Such ideology is therefore implicated in all of the tragedies that have befallen Afghanistan, and why this period of history was important to study.

Glossary

RGA: Royal Government of Afghanistan

PDPA: People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

EMBOFF: Embassy official

DEPSEC: Deputy Secretary of State

PM: Prime Minister

MP: Member of Parliament

Cusecs: Cubic feet per second

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Appendix: Timeline of Events

March 10th, 1973: cable reads, “while no public announcement has been made, we are informally aware PM Hoveyda arriving Kabul Mar 12” (1973KABUL01653_b).

March 10th: Radio address of Shafiq to outline steps taken to resolve Helmand waters issue. Draft treaty agreed upon by both, soon submitted to parliament for consideration (1973KABUL01680_b).

March 11th & 12th: Demonstrations held in Kabul against agreement (1973KABUL01680_b).

March 12 to 14th: Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda visited Kabul to discuss the details of and sign the Helmand Water Treaty (1973KABUL01727_b).

March 13th: The agreement was signed by Shafiq and Hoveyda, and a cable discussing the luncheon held in Hoveyda's honour described it as a “virtual paean of praise” on both parts with Shafiq even emphasizing the “common culture” between the two countries (1973KABUL01707_b).

March 14th: Cabinet meeting, water agreement approved, subsequently presented to

Parliament. Cabinet meeting March 14, water agreement approved, subsequently presented to Parliament (1973KABUL01769_b).

March 14th: "Radio Afghanistan announced that Iran would receive 26 cusecs of water (22 in accordance 1951 arbitration award and 4 representing Afghan 'good will')" (1973KABUL01769_b).

March 19th: Large demonstration held against treaty in Kabul (1973KABUL01863_b).

March 27th: Parliament still unable to reach quorum as of this date (1973KABUL01998_b).

March 27th: Large demonstration held (1973KABUL01998_b).

April 1st: Lower House reached quorum, debate ensues in Parliament after treaty is presented as first agenda item (1973KABUL02162_b).

April 21st: Lower House International Relations Committee approved treaty and protocols (1973KABUL02998_b).

May 13th: Parliament began discussions on treaty (1973KABUL03585_b).

May 14th: Deputies Hafizullah Amin and Babrak Karmal presented case against treaty to parliament (1973KABUL03585_b).

May 15th: Parliament session mostly taken up by deputies speaking in favour of treaty (1973KABUL03585_b).

May 22nd: Parliament approves treaty, 127 for, 11 against, 15 abstentions. Treaty will now be considered by senate (1973KABUL03781_b).