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Neocolonialism in Cold War Afghanistan

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Neocolonial Activities Within Afghanistan During the Cold War

Contemporary scholars who study the effects of nationalism within Afghanistan affirm that “The modern perspective on (Afghanistan), its people and its culture in general not only resemble the mystifications of the colonial period, but is actually rooted in them.”¹ This prevailing sentiment towards Afghanistan is not just an echo of the colonial era because as we will see, policies and actions of colonial actors were perpetuated in the Cold War fury of ‘nation-building’ through neocolonialism. Neocolonialism began during the hegemonic power struggle to create favorable political and economic conditions for pro-U.S or Soviet ideologies in non-aligned actors such as Afghanistan.² In spite of constant interaction and interference within Afghan affairs, neocolonialism failed to create what the superpowers had hoped for: a nation. What neocolonial actors did not consider while attempting to build an Afghan national image was an already existing proto-nation within Afghanistan, a concept which will be further defined in this paper.

¹ Marcus Schadl, “The Man Outside: The Problem with the External Perception of Afghanistan in Historical Sources,” *Asien* 104, (July 2007): 102. Schadl is just one of many historians who are currently studying the concept of nationalism within Afghanistan. For further reading on the role of nationalism in Afghanistan consult M Jamil Hanifi, “Editing the past: Production of Hegemony Through the Loya Jega in Afghanistan,” *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 2 (June 2004), Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), and Benjamin Hopkins, *The Making of Modern Afghanistan*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

² *Hegemony* is a concept first defined by political theorist Antonio Gramsci as the domination of a country or social class in presenting their definition of reality. During the Cold War, the hegemonic discourse within Afghanistan was in constant flux between a U.S. hegemonic sphere in Southern Afghanistan and a Soviet hegemonic sphere in Northern Afghanistan. For more information on hegemonic theory, consult Adam Morton, *Unraveling Gramsci: Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

Neocolonialism and the Proto Nation

When exposed to theories by nationalist theorist Eric Hobsbawm found in his book, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, two facets arise regarding the issue of Afghan nationalism. Firstly, the modern discourse concerning Afghanistan as a nation is fabricated through Soviet Union and United States neocolonial perpetuations of ‘The Great Game,’ the title given to the British and Russian Imperial governments’ vying for influence in Central Asia³. The resulting effect of imperialist powers in Afghanistan for the past two centuries has led to the country containing hardly any of the qualities found in established nations.⁴

The second facet of Afghan nationalism is that there are elements of a ‘proto nation’ in Afghanistan, which is described by Hobsbawm in this manner: “ethnicity binds people together in large territories, even (when) in dispersion and lacking a polarity.”⁵ The concept of a proto nation is comparable to other pre-nation theories, such as Anthony Smith’s concept of an *ethnie*.⁶ Similarly to a proto nation, an *ethnie* exhibits “elements of shared culture, some link with a historic territory and some measure of solidarity, at least among their elites.”⁷ This idea of a proto-nation in Afghanistan was disregarded by neocolonial actors during their process of nation-building during the Cold War. This essay will analyze the negative effects of neocolonialism in Afghanistan primarily during the latter half of the Cold War and the resulting negative effect on Afghan proto-nationalism.

³ For a comprehensive history and analysis of the great game, consult Malcolm Yapp, “The Legend of the Great Game” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111, (January 2001): 179-198.

⁴ The qualities which define an established nation vary due to the abstract nature of the topic but, many renowned nationalist theorists have concluded that: 1) An established nation has a common historical narrative 2) an achievement of political sovereignty and 3) a sentiment that the nation supersedes the individual. For a further treatment of nationalist theories consult The Nationalism Project, “What is Nationalism?” Eric G.E. Zuelow, <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what.htm> (accessed April 16, 2013).

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 64.

⁶ Anthony Smith invoked the concept of an *ethnie* in numerous works on nationalism. A thorough treatment of the concept of an *ethnie* can be found in Anthony Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

⁷ Smith, 57.

It is important to understand the definitions of nation and neocolonialism that will be discussed in this paper. Hobsbawm defines nationalism as the principle which keeps the intention of politics in the state congruent with the constituents of the state.⁸ A nation's identity is in constant flux, the post-World War II nation is not built on national self-determination, but rather the three forces and decolonization, revolution, and the intervention of outside powers.⁹ When determining if nationalism is present, it is important to look at the state entity "from below," to see if ordinary people feel that a nation is present, for state ideologies and movements do not represent the identity of its constituents.

Neocolonialism is the multifaceted perpetuations of imperialism during the postcolonial period.¹⁰ Neocolonialism manifests itself economically through new imperial Cold War actors such as the United States and the Soviet Union in the form of aid programs. Nuclear parity between the neocolonial superpowers led to proxy wars such as the conflict between the U.S. backed *mujahedeen* resistance fighters and Soviet forces during their occupation of Afghanistan 1979 to 1989. An important aspect of neocolonialism is the subordination of a colonial polity's elite to the neocolonial power such as the Kabuli elite deferring to the superpowers' economic and political recommendations.¹¹ A foreshadowing of Soviet and U.S. neocolonial tendencies in Afghanistan can be found within Hobsbawm's argument: "the post 1945 world was bipolar, organized around two superpowers, which may just be describable as two jumbo sized nations, but certainly not as parts of an international state system of the 19th century type."¹² Though this period of history was heralded by global powers as an era of 'nation building', the incongruent

⁸Hobsbawm, 9.

⁹ Hobsbawm, 178.

¹⁰ The term "neocolonialism" was first used in a Marxist context within Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd, 1965).

¹¹ Leong Yew, "Political Discourse – Theories of Colonialism and Post colonialism," *Postcolonial Web*, <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/neocolonialism1.html>.

¹² Hobsbawm, 183.

action of foreign interference on states in attempt to align them to one polarity had created *rentier*¹³ pseudo colonies without public support for the government.

Afghanistan's geographic position as a colonial buffer between hegemonic czarist Russia and British India had led to it being an object of colonial contest during the 19th century, with this imperial completion being titled 'The Great Game'. Afghan domestic and foreign affairs were interfered with consistently by these colonial powers, such as Russia's hosting and support of Abdur Rahman before his ascension to Kabul Emirate.¹⁴ The British government in India kept tight control of Afghanistan's external affairs through 'forward policy' which entailed stipends and treaties such as the one signed in May of 1879 at Gandamak, in which Yakub Khan ceded all of Afghanistan's external affairs, forestalling advances in technology and global relations into the 20th century.¹⁵

Afghan – U.S. Cold War Relations

The fall of the British Raj after World War II created a power vacuum in South Asia, which the United States began to take interest in during the advent of the Cold War. The United States had only a scant, romanticized concept of Afghanistan due to the rarity of American interaction in the region.¹⁶ United States political engagement with Afghanistan began with

¹³ A *rentier* state relies on subsidies for the vast majority of its revenue, leaving them susceptible to foreign influence. See Hazem Beblawi, 'The Rentier State in the Arab World', in Giacomo Luciani (ed.), *The Arab State* (London: Routledge 1990).

¹⁴ Rahman was paid stipends by the czarist government to stay in Tashkent and was given 200 rifles before his 1880 arrival in Afghanistan, claiming the title of amir. From: Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 95.

¹⁵ Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

¹⁶ Lowell Thomas, an American writer known famously for *Lawrence of Arabia* gave an exoticized account of Afghanistan, elaborating the preexisting romanticized American perception of Afghan society. For more context consult Lowell Thomas, *Beyond Khyber Pass: Into Forbidden Afghanistan* (New York; Grosset and Dunlap, 1925).

diplomat Cornelius Van H. Engert's visit to the country on behalf of President Harding in 1922 during which he compiled the first U.S. government report on the country.¹⁷

The first U.S. mission to the country in a Cold War context was conducted by General Patrick Hurley in December of 1943 on the behalf of President Franklin Roosevelt attempted to establish two political motives. First and foremost, Hurley was to investigate the possibility of oil in the Afghanistan and secondly, he was to research a possible supply route to China for support of Chaing Kai Shek's nationalist forces¹⁸. Roosevelt's agenda for Hurley was strictly for military and capital interests, not an inquiry about a symbiotic global partnership as some contemporary U.S. scholarship will claim¹⁹. The formation of friendly US relations with the new state of Pakistan,²⁰ along with the CIA organized overthrow of Iran's government and installment of the pro-US Shah²¹ created a zone of friendly U.S. states between the Soviet Union and the gulf. The creation of Soviet satellite nations in central Asia, which Hobsbawm argues were a theoretical construct of Soviet intellectuals rather than deep sentiment of the native peoples to form a nation²², pre-Cold War economic ties with Afghanistan,²³ and geographic proximity padded Russia from U.S. diplomatic expansionism.

¹⁷ Fredrik T. Hiebert, Curtis N. Sandberg, Christopher P. Thornton, "Remembering the Past: The Early Years of U.S.- Afghan Relations", Meridian International Center, Washington D.C.,: <http://www.meridian.org/in-small-things-remembered/about-the-exhibition/remembering-the-past-the-early-years-of-u-s-afghan-relations> (accessed October 16, 2012).

¹⁸ Kurt Lohbeck, *Holy War, Unholy Victory: Eyewitness to the CIA's Secret War in Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C. Regnery Gateway, 1993), 23.

¹⁹ An online research presentation curated by the Meridian International Center and funded by the U.S. State department titled "In Small Things Remembered," depicts an amiable and romanticized diplomatic history between the United States and Afghan governments that glosses over the failures of United States nation building projects in Afghanistan. The Meridian project can be found at: <http://www.meridian.org/in-small-things-remembered/>.

²⁰ In 1960, after leaving the U.S. air base in Peshawar, CIA contract pilot Gary Powers was shot down while conducting reconnaissance in Russian airspace. Close U.S. Pakistani relations are the indirect result for this incident, since the permission of Pakistani officials to use Peshawar as a base further enabled the U.S. to wage an intelligence war against the Soviet Union. Lohbeck, 43.

²¹ Andrew Hartman, "The Red Template in Afghanistan" *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2002): 470.

²² Hobsbawm, 166.

At the outset of the Cold War, it was clear to U.S. policy makers that Afghanistan was too close to the Soviet Union to incorporate into the pro-U.S. bloc bordering the Persian Gulf States. Instead, U.S. aid agencies began an economic war within Afghanistan to lessen Soviet influence in the Southern half of the country, maintaining Afghanistan's non alignment. One means of fighting this economic war was United States supervision of the Helmand Valley project in 1946, which infamously became emblematic of failed U.S. attempts to create a nation.²⁴ The project, which lasted roughly thirty five years, was an attempt to irrigate the Helmand valley in Southeastern Afghanistan through a series of large dams in order to introduce modern mass agriculture. In addition, mass agriculture was a guise which attempted to settle the region's nomadic populations, allowing for easy monitoring by the Afghan state.

Through the Helmand Valley project the royal Afghan family and Kabuli elites, notably the technocratic Mohammed Daoud, aspired to alleviate their perception of Afghanistan as backwards, advance the Mohammadzai concept of what was the Afghan-Pashtun state,²⁵ and attempt to control the nomadic tribes which were perceived as a "continuous political threat to the government even (if) they were Pashtun."²⁶ With the Kabul government convinced that the United States was building a nation for Royal Afghan intentions, the U.S. was able to wage a 136.5 million dollar economic war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Helmand Project's seemingly benign act of aid, along with the patronizing of the monarchy was a

²³ Amalendu Guha, "The Rise of Capitalistic Enterprises in Afghanistan 1929-45," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1, no. 2 (1963): 154.

²⁴ Nick Calluther, "Damming Afghanistan, Modernization in a Buffer State," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (Sep. 2002): 515.

²⁵ British colonial authorities utilized the Mohammadzai clan, the clan of King Zahir Shah and Mohammed Daoud, as a subaltern proxy force on the Afghan side of the Durrand line, insuring quick pro-British interference for any newly appointed ruler in Kabul that did not suit British interests. Calluther, 517.

²⁶ U.S. Agency for International Development, "The Helmand Valley Project in Afghanistan", December 1983, *Digital National Security Archive, Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy 1973-1990*, 8.

neocolonial ploy in which national issues became secondary.²⁷ Some of the projects within the Helmand Valley Authority emanate the analysis in a 1952 CIA document titled “Vulnerability of the Soviet Bloc to economic warfare.” The document discusses the weakness of the Soviet Bloc air network, which included flight to Afghanistan. If Western civil air services could compete with these Eastern Bloc flights, the result “would have many non-commercial disadvantages”²⁸ for the Soviets, implying it could potentially undermine Soviet regional maneuverability during wartime. The United States manifested this concept through the Helmand Valley Authority with a program to help establish the Afghan national airline, Ariana.²⁹

The construction of a national airline attempted to create a more coherent vision of an Afghan nation via Western concepts of technological and cultural modernity. The U.S. state department enlisted the premier American airline, Pam Am, to implement aeronautical nation building, setting the predicate foreshadowing a pre-Halliburton U.S. legacy of relying on the private capitalistic apparatus in order establish a neocolonial agenda.³⁰ Upon Pan Am buying roughly half of Ariana’s stock in 1957, a widespread modernization program began, updating Ariana as a weapon of prestige against Soviet nation building through sleek new aircraft and the construction a new Kandahar air terminal to headquarter the airline. Kandahar’s new air terminal particularly highlights the neocolonial nature³¹ of Pan Am’s undertaking of Ariana; the design of the terminal mimics Washington D.C.’s Dulles airport and construction of the terminal was completed by Morrison Knudson, the firm which implemented and profited from the doomed

²⁷ Hobsbawm, 183.

²⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “Vulnerability of the Soviet Bloc to Economic Warfare”, February 1951, *CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room*, 7.

²⁹ Calluther, 514.

³⁰ Jenifer Van Vleck, “An Airline at the Crossroads of the World: Ariana Afghan Airlines, modernization, and the global Cold War,” *History and Technology* 25, no. 1 (March 2009): 7.

³¹ It is to be noted that during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. and NATO forces, the Kandahar air terminal was used as central base for supplying and implementing the occupation.

Helmand Valley Project.³² Ariana also attempted to facilitate the change of Afghan cultural norms to promote the modern notion of a nation. The spouses of Pam Am agents stationed in Afghanistan attempted to amalgamate Afghan women into the fabrication of a modern nation through sewing classes, Western themed fashion shows, and the encouraging the abandonment of the *chadri*.³³

Ultimately the Helmand Valley Project failed at administering land reforms.³⁴ The efforts to foster ‘nation building’ failed due to the lack of congruency between the populace and the royal administration in Afghanistan. When U.S. agents attempted to reform land, they theoretically organized the land in a grid fashion to foster mechanized farming with disregard to considering preexisting Afghan units of space such as the *juis* system.³⁵ The Helmand River Authority attempted to re-grid farmland after their first attempt failed, leading to violent resistance by farmers settled.³⁶

The United States obtained two neocolonial objectives through the failed Helmand Valley project. Firstly, the United States policy of ‘containment’ of Soviet influence to just the Northern region of the country was successful.³⁷ Secondly, a 20 million dollar contract was given by the Afghan government to the aforementioned giant American construction

³² Van Vleck, 12.

³³ Van Vleck, 15. The abolishment of the *chardi* and *burqa* would also be the focus of Western discourse about Afghan women’s rights following the 2001 U.S. invasion. For further discussion on this topic consult Jennifer Fluri, “Rallying Public Opinion and Other Misuses of Feminism: How U.S. Militarism in Afghanistan is Gendered through Congressional Discourse,” In R. Riley, C. Mohanty, and M. Pratt (Eds.) *Feminism and War* (New York: Zed Books).

³⁴ When U.S. administrators re-distributed land, they organized land in a grid fashion with disregard to preexisting units of space such as the *Manteqa* (Nigel Allan, “Defining Place and People in Afghanistan”, *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 42, no. 8 (2001): 554), as well as the fact that the Helmand River Authority had already once recalculated land distribution, attempting to uproot farmers which had recently settled.

³⁵ The *juis* system used tree lined, weaving canals known as *juis* to create farm boundaries. Calluther, 534.

³⁶ Farmer’s met the Helmand Valley Authority’s bulldozers with rifles when officials attempted to reallocate the *juis* system. Calluther, 534.

³⁷ The Soviet Union constructed dams in the Northern half of Afghanistan in a similar fashion to the Helmand Valley project, such as the Daruanta Dam, located 7 kilometers west of Jalalabad.

conglomerate, Morrison Knudsen, advancing U.S. capitalist interests overseas. This contract, which in 1946 Morrison Knudsen employee salaries were equal to the amount of total Afghan exports,³⁸ siphoned the majority of the Afghan state's revenue, in turn preventing the state from having any capitalistic power.³⁹

American Intelligentsia and Afghanistan

One of the more curious endeavors found in Afghan Cold War policy was the desire to create an autonomous Pashtun state dubbed Pashtunistan. Concerning the Pashtunistan issue and Afghanistan as a whole, the United States government had a contingent of diplomatic intelligentsia conducting research on Afghanistan. Pashtunistan was a proposed geographic entity first conceived by Abdul Gaffar Khan, a Pashtun popular leader at the time of British decolonization⁴⁰. Advocating for an autonomous Pashtun nation, Pashtunistan was supposedly to be carved out from the Afghan border and Pakistan's Northwest frontier province. The concept of Pashtunistan is derived from works of British Colonial authorities such as Mountstuart Elphinstone, Henry George Raverty and Sir Olaf Caroe. American academics studied and transformed the colonial research paradigm of the 19th century into 20th century neocolonial studies, further rationalizing U.S. policy in this region.⁴¹

Like the previous British authorities, American intelligentsia saw the Pashtun tribe as a problematic lynchpin for Afghan proto-nationalism. Intellectuals such as Leo Poullada, a former

³⁸ Calluther, 525.

³⁹ State revenues have been handicapped by economic endeavors in the past, such as the *karakul* trade during the Great Depression and World War Two. Consult Amelendu Guha, "The Rise of Capitalistic Enterprises in Afghanistan, 1929-45," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1, No. 2 (1963): 146-147.

⁴⁰ Khan was the founder and leader of the Khundai Khidmatgar (Servant of God or Red Shirt) movement, which advocated for the nonviolent creation of Pashtunistan. Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Question of Pashtun Nationalism?," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, No.1 (March 2010): 5- 17.

⁴¹ For a further study into the relation of 19th and 20th British and American colonial studies consult: Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, "Quandries of the Afghan Nation" in *Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands*, ed. Shahzad Bashir & Robert D. Crews, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) 83-101.

U.S. diplomat to Afghanistan who wrote about the Pashtuns for the Asia Society and Ivy League universities, fixated on the contradictory idea of Pashtun domination in the Afghan government while at the same time adhering to the concept of Pashtuns rejecting any form of government.⁴² There are attempts of Poullada to distance himself from previous works conducted by British academics such as Elphinstone, Raverty, and Caroe on the subject,⁴³ but he still characterizes Pashtuns with amateur and brash descriptions, such as using the characterization of Pashtun territory as a “land of insolence” and dubbing their society as “ingrown.”⁴⁴ Poullada furthers this primitive perspective of Pashtuns by stating “loot is one of the motive powers of a Pashtun tribesman’s existence. He attempts to illustrate seemingly backwards customs “all conflicts revolve around zar, zan, and zamin, i.e. gold women and land” and the historical Pashtun resistance to organized governments, “whether Mughal, Afghan or British learned through experience” that this is the “touchstone of diplomacy.”⁴⁵ Neocolonial analysis such as Poullada’s do not take into account the geographic distance of Afghanistan from the colonial metropole (first Calcutta under the British and now Washington) which was considerable, and that any promotion of a colonial agenda out of reach of military intervention required financial stimulation.

The exertion of United States influence on Pashtunistan policy is evident in a chapter in Poullada’s book *Afghanistan in the 1970’s*. In the chapter “Pashtunistan: Afghan Domestic Politics and Relations with Pakistan” Poullada includes a passage sounding more like a Pakistani

⁴²Leon Poullada, “Pashtun Role in the Afghan Political System,” Asia Society Occasional Papers, (New York: 1970), 4.

⁴³ See Shah Mahmood Hanifi, “Henry George Raverty and the Marketing of Pahsto” in *Knowing India: Colonial and Modern Constructions of the Past* ed. Cynthia Talbot, (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2011) for a more detailed approach on these scholars’ approach to Pashto.

⁴⁴ Leon Poullada “Pashtunistan: Afghan Domestic Politics and Relations with Pakistan”, *Afghanistan in the 1970s*, (New York: Praeger, 1975), 129, 132.

⁴⁵Poullada, 13.

government memorandum rather than an academic study on the issue, strongly asserting Pakistani claims east of the Durrand line⁴⁶. The concept of Pashtun dominance hosted by Poullada is manifested through the Orientalist concept that ethnic groups are a mono linguistic, unchanging entity. Nigel Allan states, “International...heads of state simply cannot countenance the idea that Afghanistan has 45 ethnic groups quarreling for recognition.”⁴⁷ Nor could facets of American intelligentsia, epitomized by the Asia Society, consider a stance later proposed by Hobsbawm: “‘tribal ethnicity’ not merely resisted the imposition of the modern state, but commonly any state, such as the Pashto speakers of in and around Afghanistan.”⁴⁸

U.S. academic theorists, along with the coordinated sentiment of the Afghan Royal Government, fabricated the neocolonial nation-concept of Pashtunistan. What was not considered among them was that a proto-nation of Pashto speakers could potentially exist without modernistic and regimented Cold War concepts of a nation. The amount of geography that Pashto speakers inhabit aligns with the criteria of Hobsbawm’s proto-nation or Smith’s idea of an *ethnie*. Failure to recognize preexisting organized units in Afghanistan organized through language or other ethnic properties were ignored by Cold War policy makers in their attempts to bolster the Afghan nation. These misconceptions are currently being echoed by U.S. policy makers in their contemporary attempts to define Afghan nationalism.

U.S. failures at development in the Helmand Valley, as well as American neocolonial academic studies retaining the thought of a militant Pashtun majority which influenced U.S. policies such as regarding the mujahedeen as a viable option for ‘containment’ during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In addition to previous experiences in the country, U.S. fears of Soviet

⁴⁶ The Durrand Line was an agreement in 1893 between Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and British official Mortimer Durrand settling Afghan – British Raj border disputes from the Second Anglo Afghan War.

⁴⁷ Allan, 554.

⁴⁸ Hobsbawm, 64.

expansion into the Persian Gulf, which Andrew Hartman calls the 'Red Template', fueled the decision to supply millions of dollars of weapons to any militants fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ This was the point when nation building ceased and the United States pursued a policy to bring the "demise of the (Soviet) regime, despite whatever setbacks this might mean for the future social and economic reforms in Afghanistan."⁵⁰ One notorious U.S. policy was the donation of hundreds of state of the art Stinger surface to air missiles to the *mujahedeen* through the CIA and Pakistani Intelligence Services.⁵¹ These armaments are the epitome of U.S. neocolonial action in Afghanistan; supplying weapons symbolizing the pinnacle of U.S. military industrial complex to a 'failed state' in a vain attempt to promote U.S. regional interests. This policy was recognized by the Afghan *mujahedeen*, and when a CIA official inquired about the sale of Stingers, a *mujahedeen* member responded, "We do sell some of your weapons. We are doing it for the day when your country decides to abandon us, just as you abandoned Vietnam and everyone else you deal with."⁵²

Soviet Neocolonial Influence and the Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet Union waged their own form of economic war leading up to their invasion of the country in 1979. In 1954, the Soviet Union facilitated the construction of grain silos and bakeries in Afghanistan through a 3.5 million loan. Other Soviet nation building projects in Afghanistan during the Cold War included the construction of the Darunta damn 7 kilometers West of Jalalabad. Afghanistan was the top priority for the 1955 Soviet 'economic offensive',

⁴⁹ Hartman, 467.

⁵⁰ Hartman, 483.

⁵¹ Alan Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 2 (Summer 1999).

⁵² Kuperman, 232.

leading to a proportion of Afghan military units supplied and trained by the Soviet Union.⁵³ This enabled the Mohammadzai⁵⁴ to exert their control over the country such as using modern tanks and assault aircraft to quell an uprising in Kandahar in 1959.⁵⁵ The Soviet Union also reinforced Afghan infrastructure in the country. With the construction of dams, factories, and a highway from the Soviet Border to Kabul,⁵⁶ which enabled quick Soviet insertion into the country in 1979. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Economically, Soviet Union also maintained the rentier⁵⁷ status of Afghanistan through the export of Afghan gas to pay back Soviet credits owed for ‘nation building’.⁵⁸

Besides economic warfare, the Soviets exhibited neocolonialism through the visible specter of invasion. The Kremlin’s decision to intervene was twofold; firstly to attempt to preserve their own ‘nation building’ investments in Afghanistan and secondly to foster the incubation of the Afghan communist regime, even though in 1979 the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan only consisted of 50,000 members in contrast to the estimated 13 million inhabitants of the county.⁵⁹ The imposition of communist ideology within the government, as in most countries with communist ‘revolutions’, attempted to muffle the cultural nuances in Afghanistan. This led to further alienation of the majority constituency in the country, leading to

⁵³ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. and Taurus Co Ltd, 2004), 124.

⁵⁴ The Mohammadzai is a historically powerful political clique from which came many of Afghanistan’s 20th political and intellectual leaders such as Mahmud Tarzi and Abdu Gaffar Khan. See Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

⁵⁵ Calluther, 528.

⁵⁶ Calluther, 530.

⁵⁷ Political scientist and Afghan analyst Barnett Rubin discusses the rentier state in the context of Afghanistan in *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁵⁸ Artemy Kalinovsky, “Blind Leading the Blind: Soviet Advisors, Counter Insurgency, and Nation-Building in Afghanistan,” Cold War International History Project Working Paper Series, www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/WP60_Web_Final.pdf, 19.

⁵⁹ Kuldip Nayar “Kuldip Nayar article series on Afghanistan,” *Digital National Security Archive, Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy 1973-199*, 9.

wide support of the Islamic fundamentalist movement⁶⁰. Soviet advisors, who had a “generally imperial attitude”, fostered neocolonial perceptions of the regime, in addition to undermining any perceived legitimacy of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, creating “the worst sort of colonial politics.”⁶¹ Soviet ambassador to the country, Fiakrat Tabeev, began to act as a de facto governor general, emblematic of the hegemonic power Soviet advisors permeated throughout the PDPA.

Neocolonial action was also present in the intellectual facets of the regime. Soviet advisors in charge of furnishing a national library in Afghanistan requested it be filled entirely with communist works, without a single request for any books pertaining to Afghan history and culture.⁶² There was also little attempt on behalf of the Soviet government to train advisors before their endeavor with the ‘nation building’ mission ended. In the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, “well trained advisors were hard to come by,”⁶³ and out of the hundreds of advisors involved during the occupation, only a handful in the upper echelons had knowledge in Dari or Pashto, and only a total of three advisors were trained orientalists.⁶⁴

The concept of nationalism within Afghanistan throughout the Cold War was propagated by neocolonial assertions, creating the present day debate surrounding the country’s legitimacy. Neocolonial actors’ attempted nation building projects neglected key properties definitive of nations such as the fluid nature of culture and ethnicity, popular public support for the ruling government, and sentiment from the populace that they indeed belong to a ‘nation’. U.S. and Soviet aid projects were only ardently supported by a small group of elites centered around

⁶⁰ See Oliver Roy’s article, “Islam in the Afghan Resistance” (Found in: *Digital National Security Archive, Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy 1973-1990*) for more information on this subject.

⁶¹ Kalinovsky, 28.

⁶² Kalinovsky, 30.

⁶³ Kalinovsky, 17.

⁶⁴ A select few KGB and GRU officials had 2 years of study of Dari and Pashto.

Kabul and did not represent the sentiment of the millions of other inhabitants and cultural entities populating the geographic unit known as Afghanistan.

Historian of Afghanistan Robert Nichols stresses the “importance of striving to recognize regional histories that have been shaped less by ‘national’ characteristics”⁶⁵ when applying nationalism to Afghanistan. Hobsbawms’ earlier mentioned theory of a ‘proto-nation’ is evident in Nichol’s theory on Afghan nationalism. Like the royal Afghan government pandering to neocolonial projects and subsidies, ethnic groups in Afghanistan have received a multitude of financial incentives from external actors throughout history. Soviet and United States incentives fostered the perpetuation of a proto-nation through complex interactions between ethnic groups. The underpinnings of an existing Afghan proto-nationalism need to be further studied, as Anila Dualatzai has noted,” important aspects of social life and experience in Afghanistan are largely unknown and desperately need to be studied.”⁶⁶

In regards to the discourse concerning the legitimacy of the present U.S./NATO nation building efforts in Afghanistan, the regurgitation of neocolonial Cold War policies is apparent. The ill-fated gestures of “good will” by the U.S. and Soviet Union to bolster the Afghan nation during the Cold War have led to the regression and disillusionment in the present concept of a nation within Afghanistan. The concept of nationalism within the social and cultural parameters of Afghanistan needs to be further studied by valid academic sources in order to alter the misinformed discoursal legacy left by Cold War neocolonial actors.

⁶⁵ Robert Nichols, “Afghan Historiography: Classical Study, Conventional Narrative, National Polemic,” *History Compass* 3, (2005): 13.

⁶⁶Anila Dualatzai, “Acknowledging Afghanistan: Notes and Queries on an Occupation,” *Cultural Dynamics* 18, (2006): 305.

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