

The Truth About Afghanistan

On April 29, tanks rolled down the main street of Kabul, capital of the world's poorest nation, Afghanistan, and ousted the government of President Mohammad Daud from power. This was the end of the centuries-long rule of the Afghan royal family, and the new government, backed by young military officers, proclaimed the coming of a revolution bringing land reform and economic development to a nation that has yet to enter the 20th century.

For weeks newspapers published in London labeled this coup d'etat the Soviet Union's most strategic power play yet in a regional gameplan embracing the Near, Middle, and Far East. Drew Middleton of the *New York Times* reported in his column, "The Great Game is over and the Russians have won it." The "Great Game" refers to Rudyard Kipling's account of the contest of espionage and diplomatic intrigue in Kabul between Czarist Russia and the British Empire.

Why the brouhaha over Afghanistan?

Knowledgeable analysts of the region suggested that the small regional shift threw a monkey wrench into a process of realignment beginning in the Persian Gulf and extending into the Indian subcontinent. Shi'ite intelligence networks, Chinese, certain forces in the SAVAK of Iran, and certain Anglo-American circles had organized, for months, "anti-Soviet" outbursts as regional flashpoints to put the United States and the Soviet Union on a course of confrontation. The Afghan coup aborted that process.

What Happened in Afghanistan

In 1973, Mohammad Daud, the Afghan leader just deposed and killed, came to power as a cousin and brother-in-law of the deposed king when a group of young left-oriented officers ousted King Mohammad Zahir Shah. Among the officers was Abdul Qadir, the current regime's defense minister.

The promise extended by Daud and the coup-makers had been concrete: major land reforms and modernization policies for Afghanistan's largely tribal and nomadic population, including relocation to industrial centers. Rich in natural resources, Afghanistan is abominably poor in skilled or even literate labor.

Daud failed in these urgent tasks. He chose instead to court the Muslim Brotherhood reactionaries (Ikhwanul Musalmeen) and even Maoist tendencies in the country. Acute shortages of essential goods and foodstuffs were answered by repression of demonstrators and demotions of the forces that brought him to power. Progressively from 1973, Daud became a captive of British Colonial forces of various nationalities, and maintained Afghanistan as a backward shepherding state, a mere way station for international intrigue.

Throughout Daud's repression, two factions of the Afghan Democratic Party maintained an organizing presence across the country. In retaliation, the respected

communist trade unionist, Amir Hyder Khyber, was assassinated in March 1978 by SAVAK-linked networks, and the men who last April became the country's new President and Vice-President were arrested and had been condemned to die, along with Kabul's small handful of intellectuals.

But at Hyder's funeral, the bell tolled for the royal family.

Who is Tarakki?

Noor Mohammad Tarakki, the new leader of Afghanistan, is neither a "subversive" nor a "Soviet puppet" as various Western press have portrayed him.

Tarakki was educated by the most "secular" of "tribal" leaders, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as the "Frontier Mahatma Gandhi." Cognizant of Afghanistan's strategic geographic location — neighboring Iran, China, the Soviet Union, and Pakistan — Tarakki has repeatedly stated that he is a friend of both the Soviet Union and the U.S. and in no circumstance party to tribalist subversion of neighbors. The 40 or more trade accords his new government has signed with socialist nations are an expression of his goals. Afghanistan will accept aid from *all* quarters that offer. So far, only the Soviet Union has come forth.

What Next for Pakistan?

Kabul's steady pursuit of national goals has left neighboring Pakistan in a most delicate situation. Prior to the April 29 coup in Afghanistan, the Pakistani military junta had pressured a terrified jury to deliver a death sentence against former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the nation's ousted but still most popular leader. After April 29, the Chinese-backed Pakistani leader, General Ziaul Haque, is not so sure what the result of hanging Bhutto will be.

Pakistan's dilemma was summarized in a guest editorial in the *New York Times* by British Tory Hugh Trevor-Roper. Trevor-Roper, who had repeatedly criticized Bhutto when the latter was in power, turned around and delivered a most devastating denunciation of the current "Frankenstein" regime in Pakistan:

"Murdering politicians is a game at which two can play, and a revolution in Afghanistan has not only shown how usurping military rulers may be removed, it also directly threatens Pakistan. By reviving the ambitions of a greater Afghanistan," Trevor-Roper warned, "The Communist regime in Kabul can recreate the same threat of disintegration . . . And this time the threat may be backed by a great power, Communist Russia.

"In that case he (General Haque — ed.) must apprehend the fate of General Mohammad Daud in Kabul. Sooner or later," Trevor-Roper laments, "he and his purblind regime will perish in the ruin of their state and another western ally will go the way of Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Afghanistan."

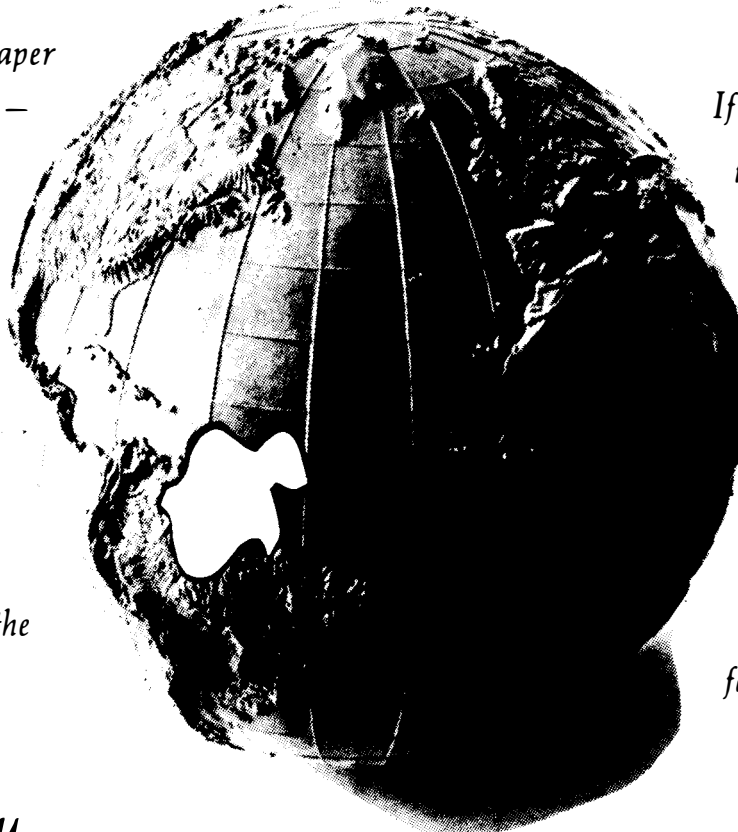
— Leela Narayan

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