# The Entanglement of Religion, Politics and *'Asabiyah* in Modern Afghanistan

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# THE ENTANGLEMENT OF RELIGION, POLITICS AND '*ASABIYAH* IN MODERN AFGHANISTAN

## Mohammad Omar Wardak[*]

**Abstract:** Religion and politics have always been entangled in Afghanistan. However, the relationship between '*asabiyah* (group feeling) and these two factors has not been analysed. The research described in this paper investigated the different levels of entanglement between religion, politics and '*asabiyah* throughout the modern history of Afghanistan. This article argues that successful leaders throughout Afghanistan's history have established a delicate balance between religion, politics and '*asabiyah*. For political success, Afghan leaders have often needed to rely on strong '*asabiyah*, or support, from their tribe or ethnic group. Those who were born and bred in the country have had far more support than those imported from abroad or supported by foreign powers. Successful leaders have also often needed to display religious legitimacy. This is, however, a difficult task because public religious acts of devotion could outwardly be seen as pretentious and not genuine.

**Keywords:** *politics*, *religion*, '*asabiyah*, *Afghanistan*, *history*, *war*

## INTRODUCTION

Religion and politics have always been entangled throughout Afghanistan's history.[1] At some points the entanglement was less explicit, while at other times the relationship came to the forefront.

Around 99% of the Afghan population is strictly Muslim, and religion is an important part of their daily life.[2] The clergy in Afghanistan are bestowed a degree of immunity from criticism, unmatched anywhere else in the world.[3] This situation makes it easier to legitimise one's leadership, by adhering to religious acts of devotion and making it public to influence popular opinions. Islam is not the only religion that has been used by politicians in societies. Other religions have also been used as political tools in seemingly liberal democratic countries.

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[1]     Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (London: Routledge.2013), 240.
[2]     Kaja Borchgrevink and Kristian Berg Harpviken, "Afghanistan's Religious Landscape: Politicizing the Sacred," *NOREF policy paper* (Oslo: NOREF, 2010), 2.
[3]     Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, "Tribalism, Islamism, Leadership and the Assabiyyas," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9 (2010): 136.

For example, Benne[4] writes about how different Christian denominations were strong influential forces behind the 2012 US election.

One factor that has been neglected by most studies is how the issue of loyalty to one's family, tribe or ethnic group is entangled with religion and politics. In this study, loyalty to one's tribe or ethnic group is analysed through Ibn Khaldun's (1332–1406) concept of "group feeling" or '*asabiyah*.[5] Ibn Khaldun was a North African Muslim historiographer and historian known for his book, the *Muqaddimah* [Introduction]. He is thought to have influenced modern sociology, demography, history and economics. '*Asabiyah* is defined as "the ability to defend oneself, to offer opposition, to protect oneself, and to press one's claims."[6] The rise and fall in '*asabiyah* can determine political success. According to Ibn Khaldun, history is a cyclical process; events of the past will therefore reoccur like patterns. In particular, the rise and decline of political dynasties will have particular patterns of events associated with them.[7]

This paper, using historical research methods, investigates the different levels of entanglement between religion, politics and '*asabiyah* in Afghanistan's modern history. It begins by recounting how '*asabiyah* became entangled with the local politics of the region. It describes how a delicate balance between '*asabiyah*, religion and politics was established and then broken by various leaders. The events in Afghanistan following the invasion of the Soviet Union as well as the September 11 attacks will be used as examples to describe the various ways of entanglement between religion, politics and '*asabiyah*. The conclusion provides an analytical perspective of the current situation and how a balance of religion, politics and '*asabiyah* in Afghanistan could pave the way for a successful transition to local sovereignty.

Ibn Khaldun's concept of "group feeling" or '*asabiyah*[8] is used to analyse the relationship between religion and politics in Afghanistan. Ibn Khaldun's view of history is cyclical, rather than a linear progression. In his view, the rise and decline of '*asabiyah* contributes to the success and failure of political dynasties.

The concept of '*asabiyah* is based on a sense of shared identity or solidarity among people. The main source of '*asabiyah* is the unity that arises from lineage or blood relations. However, Ibn Khaldun notes the sense of belonging can also result from living in the same location, as in a country for example or being in an alliance with specific tribes or people.[9] Where one lives requires constant protection and defence against outsiders who do not belong to the place or tribe, or are not in alliance with the people living in that place. Thus, '*asabiyah* is an important motivating factor for the defence of a country. Although Ibn Khaldun constrains '*asabiyah* to the Arab world, other groups around the world also use lineage to establish group

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[4]     Robert Benne, "How Should Religious Convictions be Expressed in Political Life?," *Dialog* 51 (2012): 105.
[5]     Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1967), 853.
[6]     Ibid., 189.
[7]     Ibid., 205.
[8]     Ibid., 853.
[9]     Ibid., 161.

solidarity.[10] In Afghanistan, for example, lineage is so important that tribal names are often used as second names, and belonging to a certain lineage is considered distinguished and worthy of pride.[11]

Leadership is also an important source of 'asabiyah. According to Ibn Khaldun, it results from the great respect and veneration that is generally bestowed upon the leaders, by the people who in turn depend on him for their own protection;[12] in this sense, every political system needs 'asabiyah.

Religious propaganda is dependent on 'asabiyah. This is because religious propaganda requires people to act collectively and thus needs some form of 'asabiyah to provide support for those behind the propaganda. In fact, religious propaganda without the backing of 'asabiyah often results in failure.[13]

This study employs the methods of historical research. Historical research is not a mere accumulation of facts and events from the past; rather, it is the critical evaluation of the relationship among issues that have influenced the past, have continued to influence the present and will certainly affect the future.[14]

In this study, in line with the historical research method, data was subjected to external and internal criticism. For external criticism, the researcher made sure, where possible, more than one source was identified that described the same event or issue. For internal criticism, the researcher ensured the data collected represented various viewpoints and came from diverse sources. For example, the data was sourced from books written by Afghans who had lived in the country as well as people looking at the Afghan situation from outside. For this reason, some sources referenced in this paper are in Dari-Persian language. In addition, the researcher was particular in selecting data from reliable sources such as journals and books. News articles were only selected if they were from reliable newspapers. No data was collected from social networks, forums or other places where authenticity could not be verified.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### *Importing 'Asabiyah 'from Saudi Arabia into Afghanistan*

Before Islam came to the land that is currently known as Afghanistan, the region was home to many different religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and others

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[10]   Jack Kalpakian, "Ibn Khaldun's Influence on Current International Relations Theory," *The Journal of North African Studies* 13 (2008): 366.
[11]   Bernt Glatzer, "The Pashtun Tribal System," in *Concept of Tribal Society*, ed. G. Pfeffer and D. K. Behera (New Dehli: Concept Publishers, 2002), 265.
[12]   Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 176.
[13]   Kalpakian, *International Relations Theory*, 365.
[14]   Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (USA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 296.

spread around the lands. This situation is best described by the Chinese born Xuanzang (pronounced Chen Hui or Chen Yi, c. 602–664) in his travel diaries through the Silk Road.[15]

Islam came to the region during the time of the second caliph of Islam, Omar Ibn Khattab (583–644 CE), after the Muslim army defeated the Sassanid Empire and followed the defeated emperor Yazdegerd III (the 38th and last king of the Sassanid Empire of Iran from 632 to 651) towards the eastern provinces of Khorasan. Khorasan is the historic region lying in the north-east of Persia, which includes parts of current Afghanistan. The Muslim armies conquered Khorasan from three different directions. The Muslim conquest of the region continued during the caliphate of the third and fourth caliphs of Islam.[16]

During the reign of the Amavid Dynasty (661–750 CE), the Muslim armies progressed through the north and south of the region. During this time, more than 50,000 Arab families were relocated to the region, who settled mainly in the northern plains of today's Afghanistan, near the Amu Darya.[17] The result of this emigration was a closer encounter of the people of the region with the Arab Muslims. This emigration had two main influences. The first was a closer integration with the Arab population and their way of practicing Islam. The second was the involuntary involvement of the people of the region with the imported Arab *'asabiyah*, which was mostly encouraged by the Amavids through their biased and prejudiced preference streaming through the government ranks and into the general population. The Arab emigrants became the new ruling class of the region; thus, the reason for the involvement of the local population with the imported *'asabiyah*. Inevitably, the local population became involved in the tribal feuds of the Arabs, and as a result, the main message of Islam was overshadowed by the Arab *'asabiyah.* The local population was mostly used as the foot soldiers in the tribal struggles for political power.[18] The tribal *'asabiyah* of the Arab governors often prevailed over their loyalty to the central governance of the Amavids. In addition, the rigid terrain of the region meant the power of the Amavids could not reach it as easily to subdue the uprisings; thus, most opponents of the Amavids took refuge here supported by the local population. The Amavids in return repeatedly sent armies to crush the uprisings, which resulted in continuing instabilities in the region. Towards the end of the Amavid Empire, the region we know as Afghanistan became a safe haven for all revolutionary movements including the Alawites, Kharijites, Shu'ubiya, and most importantly, the envoys of Abbasid Imams.[19]

The Abbasid Dynasty lasting from 750 to 1258 CE is considered the Islamic Golden Age. The Abbasids were more inclusive in their rule, relying on the *'asabiyah* to a lesser extent than their predecessors the Amavids. This more inclusive message resonated better with the people of Khorasan than the racially prejudiced Amavids.[20]

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[15]   Sally Wriggins, *The Silk Road Journey with Xuanzang* (USA: Westview Press, 2004).
[16]   Mir Gholam Mohammad Ghobar, *Afghanistan DarMasir E Tarikh* [Afghanistan in the Course of History] (Qum, Iran: Payam Muhajer, 1981), 66-69.
[17]   Ibid.,70.
[18]   Adbul Hayy Habibi, *Tarikh E Afghanistan Ba'd Az Islam* [The History of Afghanistan after Islam] (Tehran, Iran: Dunya e Kitab, 1988), 173-174.
[19]   Ibid., 298-371.
[20]   Ghobar, *Afghanistan Dar Masir E Tarikh*, 79.

The people of Khorasan played a major role in the toppling of the Amavid Empire. They united against the Amavids under the black banner of young Abu Muslim Khorasani (d. 755 CE), who marched on the Amavids crushing the empire and bestowing power on the Abbasid rulers. During the reign of the Abbasids, several regional dynasties were established in Khorasan. These dynasties, however, still ruled under the legitimacy bestowed to them by the Abbasids.[21]

The destruction of Khorasan instigated by Genghis Khan (1162–1227 CE) lasted about 150 years, during which much of the civilisation in the region was reduced to pasturage. With the gradual decline of the Mongol Empire, the Timurids from Central Asia came to the region. Timur (d. 1405), historically known as Tamerlane, the founder of the Timurid Empire, saw the opportunity and invaded the region, destroying much of what slowly had started to recover after the carnage of the Mongols. After the devastating bloodshed-filled epoch of Timur, his son Shahrukh Mirza (1377–1447 CE) started to heal the wounds inflicted by his father. He established the city of Herat in western Afghanistan as his capital, and revived civilisation that had been lost to the region for many years. The Timurid Empire lasted for over 100 years and started to decline after the long reign of Shahrukh Mirza. In the absence of a strong local *asabiyah*, the Timurid Empire collapsed and the region we know now as Afghanistan was divided among three powers – the Shaybanid Empire from the north, the Mughal Empire of India from the south, and the Safavid dynasty from the western regions. This colonial power struggle lasted for almost two centuries. During this time, the region was used as political bickering between the three powers, resulting in the obliteration of much of what was considered civilised, including culture, the arts, education and the economic system.[22]

### The Origins of the Entanglement

The very first nationalistic movement in modern Afghanistan, which was based on the *asabiyah* of the local population and entangled with the religion of Islam, was established in the city of Kandahar, in the south-west of Afghanistan. Under the leadership of Mirwais Hotak (1673–1715 CE), an influential local leader, the Hotak dynasty was established. Mirwais united the people of the region and stood against the despotic rule of the Safavid governor in Kandahar. He had the support of the various tribes, to whom he was related by marriage or blood. However, he also needed religious legitimacy, which he attained from the scholars of Mecca and Medina during his pilgrimage to Hajj. He established two grand assemblies (known as *loya jirga*) by inviting the leaders of different tribes and the local religious scholars to unite behind him. This was the first time in the history of the region when *asabiyah* was entangled with religious and tribal authority. The *loya jirga* included representatives of various tribes and embodied a semi-democratic establishment that was not entirely dependent on *asabiyah*.

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[21]    Ibid., 86-113.
[22]    Ibid., 281.

During the two sessions of the *loya jirga* he presented the written authority he attained from Mecca to verify his religious legitimacy to stand against the Safavid rulers.[23]

It is important to mention some of the reasons for Mirwais' success in uniting the tribes. Mirwais had an impeccable character. He was wise, gentle and pious. He was a businessman and lived off his own earnings rather than being on the payroll of the foreign forces. He understood the mentality of the local tribe leaders and how internal rivalry made them susceptible to foreign influence. Contrary to most leaders of Khorasan who were foreigners belonging to an outside occupational force, Mirwais belonged to this region. Mirwais' son, Shah Mahmud Hotak (1697–1725 CE), succeeded in overthrowing the Safavid dynasty. However, he made the detrimental mistake of staying in Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid dynasty. The local *'asabiyah*, which was the source of his support, weakened when he removed himself from the land of his father. As a result, the Hotaki dynasty collapsed, overtaken by the local forces of Nader Afshar (1698–1747 CE), who successfully used the *'asabiyah* of his people to chase the foreign forces of the Hotaki away. Nader then marched on Kandahar, but faced brave resistance from the local people. After crushing Kandahar, impressed by the bravery and fighting techniques of the local people, he accepted them in his army during his campaign to take parts of India. The Afghan garrisons in his army became the trusted confidants of the king Nader. Nader's generals did not approve of his trust of foreigners and plotted his death.[24]

### The Delicate Balance of Religion and 'Asabiyah

As mentioned earlier, Mirwais successfully united the various tribes and groups of people against the foreign occupation of his land by striking a delicate balance of religion and *'asabiyah*. This delicate balance was then broken by his son Mahmud Hotak, as a result of which he lost the Hotaki dynasty. In the history of this region, there is also one more example where people from different tribes were successfully united to establish what could be deemed present day Afghanistan. This was when the young Ahmad Khan Saduzai (1722–1772 CE), belonging to the Abdali tribe of Pushtun took power in 1747. The Pushtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

After Nader Afshar was assassinated by his generals, the 25 year old Ahmad Khan, who was a prominent general in Nader's army, assembled a *loya jirga* to establish independence under an Afghan leadership.[25] The assembly was held near Kandahar at the shrine of Sher-i-Surkh (a Sufi saint) and comprised leaders from all influential tribes of the region. A series of eight assemblies was held, during which no one could agree on a leader since every tribe aspired to lead the nation.[26] Throughout the eight assemblies, Ahmad Khan kept quiet and did

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[23]    Mohammad Seddique Farhang, *Afghanistan Dar Panj Qarn-E-Akhir* [Afghanistan in the Last Five
        Centuries] (Qum, Iran: Ismailian Publishing, 1992), 42-49.
[24]    Ghobar, *Afghanistan Dar Masir E Tarikh*, 349-353.
[25]    Meredith L. Runion, *The History of Afghanistan* (USA: Greenwood Press, 2007), 64.
[26]    Razia Sultana, "The Rule of the Durranis at Peshawar (1747-1818)," *Journal of Asian Civilizations* 33
        (2010): 163.

not assert his opinion regarding the issue of leadership. Even though Ahmad Khan was leading a large army, he was the youngest among the leaders of the tribes in the assembly and his tribe was relatively weaker than others in the region. This may have been one of the reasons for his staying silent.

At the ninth assembly, the tribes' leaders agreed to choose an independent mediator to help them select a leader from among themselves. Sabir Shah, a Sufi, was selected to appoint a leader and he chose Ahmad Khan Saduzai as the king that would lead the tribes. The Sufis commanded great respect among the people and enjoyed enormous prestige as religious scholars and pious men,[27] thus his decision to select Ahmad Shah as the king was not directly opposed by the tribal leaders. Ahmad Shah was regarded as a religious and pious man. He was known to follow the Sufi saint of Chamkani.[28] Ahmad Khan, however, was reluctant to accept this immense responsibility, but Sabir Shah, as a symbolic gesture, took some strands of wheat and placed them on Ahmad Khan's turban.[29] He then gave him the title *Durr-i-Durran*, 'the pearl of pearls'[30] or in some accounts 'the pearl of all ages.'[31] Ahmad Khan was subsequently known as Ahmad Shah Durrani and his tribe as the Durranis.

Ahmad Shah intelligently approached those who were still not content with his selection by giving with riches that arrived with a caravan from India.[32] Another effective strategy for consolidating his power was by way of foreign conquests that turned attention from domestic affairs and affixed them to the outside.[33]

### The breaking of the Delicate Balance of Religion and 'Asabiyah

The delicate balance of religion and *'asabiyah* established by Ahmad Shah was broken by his son Timur Shah Durrani (1748–1793 CE). Timur Shah was based in the city of Herat in north-west Afghanistan. After Ahmad Shah died, Timur Shah gathered the leaders of the tribes and religious scholars at the shrine of Khajah Abdullah Ansari (1006–1088 CE), who was a famous Sufi and outstanding religious figure, and asked them to support him in replacing his father. Timur Shah, however, mostly relied on the support of minorities and tribes other than his father's. He married women from various tribes of Afghanistan as well as from Iran and India. He also moved his capital from Kandahar to Kabul. His support among the majority Pashtun tribes weakened as a result. His sons similarly did not have a solid backing from the various tribes and could not rely on *'asabiyah* to help them rule. They also did not have

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[27]    Senzil Nawid, "The State, the Clergy, and British Imperial Policy in Afghanistan During the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 584.

[28]    Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, eds., *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (USA: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 31.

[29]    Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826-1863)* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 15-16.

[30]    Sultana, *Rule of the Durranis*, 164.

[31]    Runion, *History of Afghanstan*, 69.

[32]    Sultana, *Rule of the Durranis*, 164.

[33]    Banuazizi and Weiner, *The State*, 30.

religious legitimacy. The infighting between his sons further weakened the Durrani dynasty. Several of Timur's sons ruled for short periods of time, adding to the instability.[34]

Finally, Timur's son Shah Shuja Durrani (1785–1842) succeeded him, who further weakened the 'asabiyah by establishing an alliance with the British Empire. Shah Shuja has been treated with contempt by historians as he was restored to power by the British after several misadventures and infightings in Afghanistan. His restoration triggered the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1838 to 1842. At its height, the Durrani Empire covered present day Afghanistan, parts of Turkmenistan, north-eastern Iran, large parts of Pakistan, Kashmir and some parts of north-western India.[35]

Following the collapse of the Durrani Empire, Dost Mohammad Khan (1793–1863), a prominent member of the Mohammadzai family, took power and established the Barakzai dynasty. They ruled Afghanistan from 1826, ending with Mohammad Zahir Shah (1914–2007), as the last king of Afghanistan, who was ousted by a coup in 1973. During this time, there were two further Anglo-Afghan wars fought. The second Anglo-Afghan war was fought from 1878 to 1880 and the third from May to August 1919.[36]

The Mohammadzai family tried to strengthen its grip on power by distributing Afghanistan's provinces between its family members, reinforcing its 'asabiyah. Thus, it did as Ibn Khaldun stated: "a ruler can achieve power only with the help of his own people. They are his group and his helpers in his enterprise. He uses them to fight against those who revolt against his dynasty. It is they with whom he fills the administrative offices, whom he appoints as wazirs and tax collectors."[37] However, the family realised it also needed religious legitimacy to portray itself as the rightful rulers of Afghanistan. For this reason, Dost Mohammad Khan announced his plans for jihad (holy struggle) against the Sikhs of India. "On the basis of the notion that martyrdom and its heavenly rewards could only be attained if jihad was fought under the leadership of a lawful king, Dost Muhammad assumed the title Amir ul-Mu'mineen, 'commander of the faithful'"[38] and thus attained his legitimacy to power. He furthermore re-enacted the coronation of Ahmad Shah Durrani, including the placement of strands of wheat in his turban by a religious scholar (the son of Mir Wa'iz who was a prominent clergyman).[39] Nevertheless, the attempt to reinforce 'asabiyah, the attainment of religious legitimacy through jihad, and the symbolic re-enactment of Ahmad Shah's coronation did not provide him with the support that Ahmad Shah received because Dost Muhammad was supported by the colonial British authority occupying India.

Amanullah Khan (1892–1960), another amir of the Barakzai dynasty, although having succeeded in gaining independence for Afghanistan after the third Anglo-Afghan war, made

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[34]   Jamal ul-Din Afghan, *Tatimmat Al-Bayan Fi Tarikh Al-Afghan* [A Statement on the History of Afghan], trans. Mohammad Amin Khogyani (Peshawar, Pakistan: Saba Publishing, 1994), 50-52.
[35]   Ibid., 71-74.
[36]   Farhang, *Afghanistan*, 234, 237.
[37]   Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 244.
[38]   Noelle, *Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan*, 15.
[39]   Ibid., 16.

the detrimental decision to disregard religion altogether.[40] By attempting to modernise Afghanistan and adopting Western values, Amanullah Khan broke the delicate balance of 'asabiyah and religion needed for successful rule in Afghanistan. As a result, he was forced to abdicate as he went to British India and then to Europe in exile. He was soon replaced by his brother Inayatullah Khan Seraj (1888–1946) who was in power from 14 to 17 January 1929. The religious scholars, unhappy with Amanullah Khan for disregarding religion, supported Habibullah Kalakani (1891–1929) to power. However, Habibullah was a commoner from a minority tribe and did not have the support of a strong 'asabiyah. He was in power for nine months and soon replaced by Mohammed Nadir Khan (1883–1933). Mohammed Nadir Khan was in power from 1929 to 1933 when he was assassinated.[41] His son Mohammad Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, ruled for 40 years until ousted by the coup of 1973. During these last decades, religion increasingly became less important in politics as religious scholars were put on display to demonstrate adherence to religion rather than them having any real influence. This situation prepared the way for the onset of communism in Afghanistan.[42]

## DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ENTANGLEMENT

### Departure from Religion and 'Asabiyah – The Invasion of the Soviet Union

The roots of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan can be traced back to the Russian revolution of 1917, which brought the promise of equality and fairness to a region rapt in totalitarianism. The young generation of Afghanistan, disenchanted with the monarchy and its authoritarian system, were inspired by this message of egalitarianism.[43] Marxism offered the youth of Afghanistan a voice of reason against irrational clerics, backward-thinking mullahs (clergymen) and abrasive uncompromising religious men who would resort to violence as a consequence of a lack of knowledge to refute opposing ideas. In addition, it offered a level of freedom unparalleled in the historically closed highly traditional Afghan society. Young women were promised equality with men, something they had not aspired to before. In addition to vast amounts of funding, the Soviet Union provided the youth of Afghanistan with books and free reading materials, which further strengthened Marxist ideas in the country. These ideas dissuaded the youth from relying on 'asabiyah.

King Amanullah Khan, in opposition to the British influence, commenced closer economic and military relationships with the newly established Soviet Union. The situation was ripe for a change in Afghanistan, but it was during the time of King Mohammad Zahir Shah when relative political freedom established the grounds for the formation of the Peoples'

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[40]     Olesen, *Islam and Politics*, 111-137.
[41]     Zafar Hasan Aiabak, *Memos of Zafar Hasan Aiabak: Afghanistan for the Kingdom of Amir HabibUllah Khan to the Era of Prime Minister Sardar Md. Hashim khan*, trans. Fazlurrahman Fazil (Kabul, Afghanistan: The Centre for Strategic Studies, Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan, 2009), 348-349.
[42]     Farhang, *Afghanistan*, 492.
[43]     Olesen, *Islam and Politics*, 116-119.

Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965. The PDPA was ideologically under the influence of the Soviet Union, and was economically and logistically supported by them.[44]

The ideas propagated by the Soviet Union were based on Proletarian internationalism, which is contrary to the value of lineage or blood relations in ʾasabiyah. However, ʿasabiyah was stronger in Afghanistan, so the PDPA was later divided into several sects based on ethnic groups. Two of the largest sects were Khalq and the Parchams. Khalq mostly comprised the Pushtun ethnic group from rural areas of Afghanistan, while the Parchams were majority Dari-Persian speaking people who resided in cities and urban areas of the country.

In 1973, the PDPA helped overthrow King Mohammad Zahir Shah and bring into power his cousin and former prime minister of Afghanistan Mohammed Daoud Khan (1909–1978), establishing the Republic of Afghanistan. Daoud Khan became the first president of Afghanistan, but was soon assassinated by the PDPA with most of his family members in 1978. The PDPA had a considerable following among the middle and lower ranks of the Afghan army due to it being trained by the Soviet Union. In 1978, with the help of the army, the PDPA seized power after the assassination of Daoud Khan in a coup known as the Saur Revolution. This was when the Soviet-supported Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was established.[45]

The invasion or direct intervention by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan began with the government of Babrak Karmal (1929–1996), the leader of the Parcham sect of the PDPA. On 27 December 1979, the Soviet Union attacked the presidential palace and killed Hafizullah Amin (1929–1979) with his entire family and entourage. One of the reasons for this direct intervention was the fact Hafizullah Amin was lenient towards his ʿasabiyah rather than being a faithful and obedient servant like Babrak Karmal.

The Soviets replaced Karmal with Mohammad Najibullah (1947–1996), whose views were more suited to the Soviet leaders at the time. During the government of Najibullah, the Soviet Union began to withdraw its forces after decades of heavy causalities in the battles fought with the Afghan insurgents, namely the Mujahideen. Najibullah, however, received monetary and logistical support from the Soviet Union until it slowly diminished in 1992.[46]

### Attempted Restoration of ʿAsabiyah and Religion by the PDPA

When the signs of weakness in the Soviet Union were becoming increasingly visible, the PDPA attempted a number of measures to gain the public's approval.[47] For example, non-party members were allowed to take high ranking government positions and independent organisations were allowed to operate. The PDPA decided to improve relationships with the clergy and allowed the building of mosques. Furthermore, female television hosts of the only

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[44]    Farhang, *Afghanistan*, 496-499.
[45]    Dastagir Panjsheri, *Zuhur Wa Zawal-E Hezb-E Demokratik-E Khalq-E Afghanistan* [The Rise and Fall of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan] (Peshawar, Pakistan: Fazl Publishing Centre, 1999), 208.
[46]    Ibid., 210.
[47]    Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2000), 39-40.

state run station were allowed to cover their hair. The party leaders began to show their Islamic credentials by attending mosques and invoking Islam on national television.[48]

In 1986, with the real prospect of soon having no direct assistance or Soviet troops on the ground, Najibullah attempted to reconcile with the Mujahideen under a program of National Reconciliation. He then called for a ceasefire and negotiations between the opposing groups and the government. The program failed, but Najibullah kept trying. Najibullah was attempting to show his return to traditional ways of governing by re-establishing a *jirga*, which was a traditional assembly of elders throughout the history of Afghanistan.[49]

In 1990, the socialist standing of the PDPA was denied blatantly when Tahir Enayat, head of Kabul University, declared that Marxism had been abandoned and all party members were Muslims.[50] As Giustozzi writes, "In 1987 Islam was finally proclaimed the state religion"[51] with the establishment of the Ministry for Islamic Affairs and Religious Interests. In 1990, Najibullah even changed the name of the party from the PDPA to the Homeland Party.

One of the mistakes made by Najibullah was that he placed his trust in tribes other than his own Pashtun sect. He created splinter groups in the army based on different tribal and ethnic sects. This weakened the central unity of the army. In addition, he widened the rift between the Khalqs and Parchams.

### *The Religious Movement of the Mujahideen*

Similar to the establishment of the PDPA and the Soviet invasion, the roots of the Mujahideen can be traced to the time of King Mohammad Zahir Shah, when the relative political freedom gave way to the creation of political parties.[52] The Mujahideen were initially an ideological reaction to the rise of the influence of communism and in particular the establishment of the PDPA. The proponents of this movement were university lecturers who were educated at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Therefore, in the same way the PDPA was influenced by ideas imported from outside of the country, the Soviet Union, the Mujahideen too were influenced by outsiders from Egypt. However, while the PDPA received direct assistance from the Soviet Union, the Mujahideen at this early stage were only inspired by Islamic religious ideas propagated by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The lack of unity and support among the Mujahideen caused it to suffer defeat at the hands of the government and the communist PDPA, which forced it to scatter to neighbouring countries, Iran and Pakistan.

The Mujahideen in Pakistan created a Seven Party Mujahideen Alliance, also known as the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujahideen. These groups were supported by the United

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[48]  Ibid., 63.
[49]  Panjsheri, *Zuhur Wa Zawal-E Hezb-E Demokratik-E Kalq-E Afghanistan*, 211-214.
[50]  Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, 155.
[51]  Ibid., 58.
[52]  Olesen, *Islam and Politics*, 214.

States and Saudi Arabian governments. The Mujahideen in Pakistan mostly comprised Sunni Muslims, while a similar alliance of eight Shia factions was created in Iran.[53]

While the communist-backed PDPA was slowly getting weaker as support from the Soviet Union dwindled, the Mujahideen received huge amounts of money and weapons, as well as military training and support from the United States. Afghanistan suddenly became the new frontier for a long Cold War between the two great powers of the world: the United States and the Soviet Union. The seven parties of the Mujahideen, blinded to this bigger picture, also started to fight among themselves.[54]

By 1991, the communist-backed government in Kabul led by Najibullah began to tremble under the pressure of constant attacks from the Mujahideen, but also through internal problems and fractures. Furthermore, the communist regime of the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving Najibullah's government to fend for itself. Najibullah lacked the support of the Pashtuns and relied mostly on the groups he created from smaller ethnic sects in the army. This situation is best described by Ibn Khaldun when he stated "At the end of their power, dynasties eventually resort to employing strangers and accepting them as followers."[55] Najibullah paid a heavy price for this when three leading ethnic groups positioned in the north of the country began to revolt against the government in Kabul. The Northern Alliance comprised Abdul Rashid Dostum (b. 1954), an ethnic Uzbek warlord; Ahmad Shah Massoud (1953–2001), an ethnic Tajik Mujahideen commander; and Abdul Ali Mazari (1947–1995), an ethnic Hazara Mujahideen leader.[56]

In 1992, the Soviet Union ended its support of Najibullah's government, resulting in grave effects such as the grounding of the Air Force due to a lack of fuel for its planes, which made it easier for the Mujahideen to take over several provinces. The government in Kabul collapsed and Najibullah resigned. The Mujahideen and other political and militant groups agreed to share power as part of the Peshawar Accord, which created the Islamic State of Afghanistan by appointing an interim government to be followed by elections.[57] This success, however, was short lived as the power struggle between the different groups destroyed most of the city of Kabul.

The situation during this time in Kabul was described by the Human Rights Watch[58] as one of its darkest eras. The atrocities committed in Kabul and other parts of the country were reminiscent of Genghis Khan's devastation discharged over the region. The civilians bore the brunt of the devastation with kidnappings, assaults, murders and looting of homes targeting the

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[53]   Sher Ahmas Nasri Haqshenas, *Tahawolate Siasy Jihade Afghanistan* [Political Developments in the Afghan Jihad] (Ballimaran, Delhi: Jayyed Press, 1998), 128, 299.

[54]   Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia* (London: Random House, 2011), 193.

[55]   Rosenthal, *Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun*, 247.

[56]   M. Halim Tanwir, *Afghanistan: History, Diplomacy and Journalism* (USA: Xlibris Corporation LLC, 2013), 471-472.

[57]   Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 210.

[58]   Human Rights Watch, "Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's Legacy of Impunity," accessed 24 July 2016, https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/07/06/blood-stained-hands/past-atrocities-kabul-and-afghanistans-legacy-impunity.

weak and vulnerable.[59] The Mujahideen's failure prompted Pakistan to come up with a new surrogate force in the form of the Taliban.[60]

### *Religious Symbolism of the Oath in the Kaba*

At this stage, a short analysis of how the Mujahideen attempted to use religion to influence public opinion will be presented. This case is an example of the entanglement of religion and politics over the border in Pakistan.

In 1982, in an effort to bring the different factions of the Mujahideen together and end the fighting between them, the government of Saudi Arabia invited the leader of each group to Mecca for negotiations. Only a few resources could be found to describe this occasion. Keeling briefly mentions the Saudi Arabian king invited the Mujahideen to Mecca, the holiest city in Islam, to take an oath that they will not fight among each other.[61] Sajjad similarly concludes this important event in one sentence.[62] Although Tanwir has dedicated a few pages to the implications of the taking, and subsequent breaking, of the oath, he does not give details of the event.[63] Robert Lacey is the only one providing a more detailed account of the event, as follows.[64]

Ahmed Badeeb, chief of staff to Prince Turki Al-Faisal who was the director of *Istikhbarat* or the General Intelligence Department, recalled the event. Badeeb stated:

> There seemed no way that we could stop them fighting. They were all as bad as each other. We cut off the payments we had been making to them, but they just went on feuding. I remember that we once made a really major effort. We put all the leaders on a plane and flew them to Mecca for a peace conference. We actually opened up the Kaaba and took them inside so they could swear reconciliation to each other – right in the very heart of Islam. It was a truly exceptional gesture, very moving, with lots of embracing and tears. Then, as they were coming back out down the ladder – before their feet had even touched down on the floor of the mosque – I got a call saying that one of them must have given orders to shell Kabul because the electricity station had just been hit.[65]

From a religious perspective, this event was enormous. The house of Kaba in Mecca is the holiest site in Islam. The sanctity of the Kaba fosters a significant communal bond between Muslims.[66] As such, an oath taking at this sacred place is far more significant, and adherence to it is expected.

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59    Ibid.
60    Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 222.
61    Phillip C. Keeling, *Two Mountains to Climb* (Oklahoma, USA: Tate Pub & Enterprises Llc, 2010).
62    Tazreena Sajjad, *Transitional Justice in South Asia: A Study of Afghanistan and Nepal* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 28-29.
63    Tanwir, *History, Diplomacy and Journalism*, 430-431.
64    Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom*, 193.
65    Ibid.
66    Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "Religion and Place Attachment: A Study of Sacred Places," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 24 (2004): 389.

When this event is analysed through Ibn Khaldun's concept of '*asabiyah,*[67] it can be said the attempt to reconcile the different groups was destined to fail. One of the reasons was that each group mostly comprised members belonging to a single tribe or (*Qaum*). Among each group, the '*asabiyah* was strongest and they all bestowed great respect and honour on their own leaders. As such, the Mujahideen were more devoted to their group leaders than to the country, for which they were assumedly fighting. The Saudis assumed the bond of religious brotherhood was enough to convince the Mujahideen to come together and stop fighting. They did not take into account the strong '*asabiyah* that was responsible for keeping the group members together and loyal to their own leaders.

### The Religious Movement of the Taliban

The word *taliban* is the plural form of *talib*, which translates as 'students.' The Taliban movement in Afghanistan began in 1994 and established a government in 1996, which formally ended in 2001.

Marsden compares the Taliban movement in Afghanistan to that of the puritanical Protestant movement in Europe established in response to the growing corruption within the Catholic church.[68] There are certainly parallels between the two movements as both were in reaction to chaos in the society in order to bring justice and peace. The Taliban were the children of war. They were mostly orphans of the Mujahideen who were martyred during the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan. They grew up in refugee camps in Pakistan and attended the local *madrasa* or religious schools.[69]

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States withdrew its support from the Mujahideen and, celebrating its success over its old foe, left Afghanistan in turmoil. The economy collapsed, law and order did not exist, and a new wave of refugees stormed the neighbouring countries. In the power struggle between the various groups of the Mujahideen and other militant groups, gruesome crimes against the defenceless civilians were committed.[70] The situation was ripe for yet another change.

In 1994, the Taliban began its military campaign, storming through Kandahar in the south and quickly spreading to other provinces of Afghanistan. Its leader was Mullah Mohammed Omar (d. 23 April 2013), a former member of the Mujahideen. The Taliban spread quickly through the country and in 1996 established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban implemented harsh religious rules, such as public stoning of adulterers, amputation for theft and public flogging. Women in particular were barred from stepping outside their homes unless covered from top to toe and accompanied by a male relative.

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[67]     Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun*, 5.
[68]     Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan* (London, UK: Zed Books, 1998), 58.
[69]     Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: the Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London, UK: Pan Macmillan, 2001), 32.
[70]     Human Rights Watch, "Blood-Stained Hands."

The Taliban comprised simple villagers and lacked the ability to lead a country in the current complex international world. When the Taliban occupied Kabul, it ignored the diplomatic immunity of the United Nations and kidnapped Najibullah from the UN headquarters. The Taliban then "beat Najibullah and his brother senseless, castrated both men, dragged their bodies behind a jeep, then hanged them by wire nooses from lamp posts."[71] The international community thus did not recognise the legitimacy of the Taliban government.

The Taliban was strongly condemned by the international society, yet enjoyed considerable support in Afghanistan. There were several reasons for this support by the people. The first was that the people of Afghanistan were weary of the internal war between the different political groups and thus welcomed the Taliban. The Taliban was mostly from the Pashtun tribe, which contributed to its fast progress through the Pashtun tribal southern and western parts of the country.[72] Unlike the Mujahideen, the Taliban followed one leader, thus there was no obvious division among them. At a time when the country was ruled by various warlords and militant groups, this was a welcoming concept of unity. The Taliban came with a message of peace, justice and unity. Members were furiously loyal to their leader and would not hesitate in giving their life for their belief or taking that of another. The Taliban was also the only source of income for most people. It was supported by the government of Saudi Arabia, who poured an unprecedented amount of money into the country.[73]

The Taliban had a certain level of religious legitimacy to power since members were raised in religious institutions and strictly followed the rules set out in the Qur'ān. In spite of this, the Taliban felt it needed stronger religious authority and thus staged a religious symbolic event, which is described next.

### Religious Symbolism of the Cloak of the Prophet

After occupying most of southern, central and western regions of Afghanistan, the Taliban was at the gate of Kabul. The siege of Kabul, however, lasted ten months, causing cracks to appear in the Taliban ranks.[74]

On 4 April 1996, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar staged an event for 1,200 invited Pashtun religious leaders and scholars in Kandahar. During this event, Mullah Omar took out a cloak said to have belonged to Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and paraded it in front of the chanting delegates.[75] This was a significant religious symbolic act. The sacred cloak is only ever brought out at a time of emergency. The last time the cloak was taken out was 60 years prior to this event during a cholera epidemic. Mullah Omar then declared a new *jihad* against the Mujahideen government in Kabul and declared himself *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* (leader of the

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[71]   Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom*, 200.
[72]   Rashid, *Afghan Warlords*, 187.
[73]   Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom*, 200.
[74]   Rashid, *Afghan Warlords*, 41.
[75]   James Fergusson, *Taliban: The True Story of the World's Most Feared Guerrilla Fighters* (London: Bantam Press, 2010), 25-27; Kareem Kamel, "Understanding Taliban Resurgence: Ethno-Symbolism and Revolutionary Mobilization," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15 (2015): 77; Rashid, *Afghan Warlords*, 42.

faithful). By this act of outward religious devotion, Mullah Omar associated himself directly with Prophet Mohammad,[76] but also with his Pashtun ancestors. The shrine where the cloak is kept is next to the mausoleum of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the founding father of Afghanistan. It was Ahmad Shah who acquired the cloak from the Amir of Bukhara in 1768.[77] Furthermore, the title *Amir ul-Mu'mineen* was adopted in Afghanistan only by Dost Mohammad Khan, who then announced his plans for *jihad* against the Sikhs.

In this manner, Mullah Omar attempted to attain religious authority as well as appeal to the '*asabiyah* of his Pashtun people. Lacey writes that, by the *Wahhabi* (ultraconservative religious movement) standards of Saudi Arabia, this parade of a religious relic was undoubtedly un-Islamic, yet the Saudi government turned a blind eye to it.[78] The Saudis were more tolerant of this heresy and allowed the cloak to be used as part of a political theatre because it excited and energised the simple-minded followers of Mullah Omar at a time when motivation was needed to end the siege of Kabul.

## THE ENTANGLEMENT CONTINUES

### *Global Jihadism and the American War in Afghanistan*

The roots of the American invasion of Afghanistan were sown during the time of the invasion of the Soviet Union. When the Mujahideen, with the support of the local '*asabiyah* and religious scholars, stood against the superpower of the time, the Soviet Union, it received praise and admiration from much of the world. As donations and monetary support flooded in to support the Mujahideen, so did global fighters. This included sympathisers with the Mujahideen's cause, believers in a holy war against the Soviet infidels, adventurers and opportunists, as well as those who were disenchanted with their own governments and the global hegemony by superpowers in general. The Mujahideen, and the Taliban after them, created a safe haven in Afghanistan for disenchanted Muslims from around the world.[79]

During this time, in 1979, Usama bin Laden (1957–2011), who belonged to a prominent wealthy family of Saudi Arabia, came to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Mujahideen. He helped the Mujahideen by supplying them with money, fighters and weapons. In 1988, he established an organisation called al-Qaeda, under the banner of which he initiated a series of attacks against the United States. He was banished from his home country Saudi Arabia in 1992, when he shifted his base to Sudan. Under pressure in Sudan, he relocated to Afghanistan in 1996.

After the September 11 attacks in 2001 in New York, Usama bin Laden became the most wanted man on the United States' list of fugitives. The United States demanded the Taliban hand over Usama bin Laden, but the Taliban declined this request asking for convincing

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[76]   Kamel, *Taliban Resurgence*, 77.
[77]   Fergusson, *Taliban: The True Story*, 26.
[78]   Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom*, 193-203.
[79]   Tanwir, *History, Diplomacy and Journalism*, 464.

evidence for his involvement in the September 11 attacks. The request was dismissed by the United States, who launched the invasion of Afghanistan on 7 October 2001 in alliance with the United Kingdom and later joined by other NATO countries. In the meantime, despite its brutal record of human rights abuse,[80] the Central Intelligence Agency provided large amounts of cash to the Northern Alliance and persuaded it to stand against the Taliban.[81]

The United States and its alliance bombed Afghanistan to an extent never seen before. This operation, however, only forced the Taliban underground. The United Sates called its operations the "War on Terror" and convinced the world that the Taliban and those it supported were a serious threat to global security.[82]

In December 2001, under the authority of the United Nations, Afghan delegates, which included the leaders of the Mujahideen, the Northern Alliance and other warlords, met at Bonn, Germany. They agreed on a six-month interim government followed by democratic elections and a new constitution, which was required to recognise the role of women in the new government. The only party missing from this occasion was the Taliban representative.[83]

The Bonn conference selected Hamid Karzai to lead as the chairman of the six-month interim administration. Karzai belonged to a strong Pashtun tribe and was deemed to have strong 'asabiyah and support from the Mujahideen groups owing to his past affiliation with them. He was then selected president of a two year interim government by a loya jirga that was held in Kabul. Karzai was a former member of the Mujahideen and belonged to the Popalzai family of the Durrani tribe. The selection of Karzai was endorsed by Pakistan as well as the Northern Alliance.[84] Karzai subsequently was declared the winner of two presidential elections in 2004 and again in 2009. His term ended in September 2014 when Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (b. 1949) was selected as the president. Ashraf Ghani is an anthropologist who previously worked with the World Bank as well as serving as the finance minister during the Karzai government.

Although Ashraf Ghani is from the dominant Pashtun ethnic group, he is married to American Rula Ghani who was born Rula Saade in 1948 to a Lebanese Christian family in Lebanon. He had to renounce his American citizenship before becoming the president and has had to become accustomed to Afghan traditional dress and customs.[85] This could be one of the reasons for the lack of support for Ghani among the Pashtun ethnic groups. Ghani does not have the backing of a strong 'asabiyah and it has to be seen how he navigates the ethnic landscape of Afghan politics.

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[80]    BBC News, "Afghan Opposition's 'Record of Brutality," accessed 26 July 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1608504.stm.
[81]    Gary Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2005), 25-30.
[82]    Ibid., 11-19.
[83]    Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey Through a Turbulent World* (USA: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 103-110.
[84]    Ibid.
[85]    Brieana Marticorena, "Afghanistan's Elections: Ghani vs Abdullah," *The Strategist*, August 9, 2014, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/afghanistans-elections-ghani-vs-abdullah/.

### Religious Symbolism of the Hajj

A main theme in the post-September 2001 era in Afghanistan politics has been religious Hajj trips to Saudi Arabia by political leaders.

In January 2002, Hamid Karzai went for pilgrimage to Mecca. This was his first official trip abroad. Once again, this trip, being mostly broadcast by local news, did not gain any scholarly analytical attention. Few websites in the English language chose to report the news. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* reported the story in a four sentence report stating Karzai will also meet with Saudi King Fahd in Riyadh. President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani similarly chose to go on a pilgrimage to the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina as his first official trip.[86] During this trip, he also was reported to have met with Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the King of Saudi Arabia. Both presidents, Karzai and Ghani, tried to display public acts of religious devotion as a way to influence the public opinion. In particular, Ghani was reported to have prayed for the people of Afghanistan during his trip.[87] Ghani is also often perceived to be performing a "shtick" for the reporters, which includes running his fingers through a string of prayer beads[88] and taking time off during interviews to conduct his prayers.[89]

### Appealing to 'Asabiyah by Re-enactment of Ancestral Symbolic Actions

An effective strategy seen throughout the recent history of Afghanistan involves appealing to the people's emotions by reanimating historical events.

President Hamid Karzai was elected as the interim government's leader in 2001 by the appointed members of the *loya jirga*. After the inauguration, President Karzai re-enacted the coronation of Ahmad Shah Durrani at the same location, the shrine of Sher-i-Surkh near Kandahar. During the coronation, Karzai invited the leaders of different tribes, including the descendent of Sabir Shah. As mentioned earlier, Sabir Shah was the Sufi who inaugurated Ahmad Shah in 1747 at the shrine of Sher-i-Surkh and gave him the title of *Durr-i-Durran*.

This event seems to be an important symbolic act by the elected President Karzai. It is interesting then that this event has not received the attention it deserves. There are only a few websites, such as MedLibrary.org[90] and a study guide by the International Business Publications,[91] that mention this event. These sources seem to reference the origins of this story to a news article titled "Karzai's coronation at Sher-i-Surkh" by reporter Amy Waldman. The article published 8 January 2002 in the *The New York Times* does not exist anymore on the

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[86]    Zabihullah Moosakhail, "President Ghani Performed Umrah, Prayed for Afghanistan," *Khaama Press Afghanistan*, March 15, 2015.

[87]    Ibid.

[88]    Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Ashraf Ghani's Struggle: The Iconoclastic Anthropologist Is Taking over Afghanistan's Presidency with High Hopes and Big Ideas," *The Foreign Policy Group*, September 29, 2014.

[89]    Susanne Koelbl, "Interview with Afghan President Ghani: 'I Have to Hold our Country Together'," *SPIEGEL Online*, December 2, 2015.

[90]    MedLibrary, "Hamid Karzai," accessed July 8, 2016, http://medlibrary.org/medwiki/Hamid_Karzai.

[91]    IBP, *Afghanistan Country Study Guide: Strategic Information and Developments* (Washington, USA: International Business Publications, 2013).

internet; however, another article by Waldman states the elders at the coronation placed strands of wheat on Karzai's turban.[92] Waldman quotes Saed Abdul Zahed, an elder from Kandahar, stating "I myself put the grass on Mr. Karzai's head, and also some flowers." This is a clear replication of the coronation of Ahmad Shah Durrani. Karzai selected the same location, invited the descendent of Sabir Shah, and imitated the symbolic gesture of placing the strands of wheat on his turban.

A deeper analysis of this event illustrates how Karzai attempted to appeal to people's emotions by re-enacting a historic event that is considered an important foundation for the establishment of Afghanistan as we know it today. Ahmad Shah Durrani is considered the founding father of the nation, thus Karzai attempted to establish himself as fulfilling his ancestor's role by bringing together the different tribes of Afghanistan and re-establishing the nation. However, Karzai failed to realise that Ahmad Shah was considered the saviour of the nation by his people, while Karzai came to power with the support of the United States.[93] Karzai is seen as a puppet president and has never enjoyed the support of his people[94] as Ahmad Shah Durrani did. Often, a show of opulence has worked against leaders who have accumulated wealth in a poor country such as Afghanistan. Ahmad Shah Durrani led a simple life and was accessible to his people.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated how religion and ʿasabiyah have been used for gaining political power throughout the history of Afghanistan. The entanglement of religion and ʿasabiyah in the politics of Afghanistan can only be described as complex. Throughout the history of modern Afghanistan, there have been very few examples of when all three factors, religion, ʿasabiyah and politics, came into a balance. When they did, it resulted in success stories such as the rule of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was transformed into an almost mythical character among the people of Afghanistan.

This research found several ways of interaction or entanglement between the three mentioned factors. Those who came by force were feared but never supported or accepted by the people. Successful leaders have been those who are born and bred in the country, such as Mirwais Khan and Ahmad Shah. They also need to belong to large ethnic groups rather than minorities. In relation to ʿasabiyah, marriage seems to be a contributing factor as well. For example when Timur Shah married numerous women from various tribes, and even neighbouring countries, he weakened his ʿasabiyah because he lost the support of his own tribe. Physical location also seems to be an important factor in keeping ʿasabiyah strong. When Timur Shah Durrani relocated his capital from Kandahar to Kabul, he lost the close proximity

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[92]    Amy Waldman, "A Nation Challenged: Politics; in Rite of Past, Afghans See Way to Forge Future," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2002.

[93]    Julian Glover, "Hamid Karzai Crowned King - but What Price the Coronation?" *Guardian News and Media Limited*, November 20, 2009.

[94]    Nick Mills, *Karzai: The Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan* (NJ, USA: Wiley, 2007), 21-42.

to his people and weakened the bond of his '*asabiyah*. The people of Afghanistan seem to be mostly loyal to their own tribes and ethnic groups. In other words, their '*asabiyah* is strongest in their inner circles of family and then tribe. However, when they are called against a common outside enemy, they can form a larger circle of '*asabiyah*, which can grow as large as the entire country.

All these factors seem important for political power; however, religious legitimacy is also an important factor. Religion is an important element in the lives of the Afghan people, and they rarely tolerate the rule of those who are openly against Islam. Most political leaders have recognised this fact and tried to gain religious legitimacy either through genuine acts of religious devotion or staged ones. The use of religion to gain political power has only worked if the leaders, and his supporting party, are considered genuinely pious and religious.

Adhering to religious and ancestral symbolism is a theme observed throughout the recent history of Afghanistan. For example Dost Mohammad Khan and Hamid Karzai re-enacted the coronation of Ahmad Shah Durrani in an attempt to reanimate the emotions associated with the original event. Karzai even went to the trouble of finding the descendent of Sabir Shah, who crowned Ahmad Shah Durrani, in an effort to claim legitimacy. The Mujahideen attempted to use religion for their political power when they took the oath in the Kaba. The Taliban similarly took the Prophet's cloak out for a show. Karzai and Ghani went on a Hajj pilgrimage during their first formal foreign trips.

The entanglement of '*asabiyah*, religion and politics in Afghanistan continues through a cyclical process similar to that described by Ibn Khaldun. Only through a perfect balance of the three can there be success. We hope to learn from the past in order to understand and deal with our present so we can build a better future.

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