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9. KhAD as an Agency of Suppression pp. 153-168 (6450 words; first 2 parts 4700 words)

[1] Following the Soviet invasion, the Sovietization of the state structure was expedited. The security department, known in the Khalqi period first as AGSA (Department for Safeguarding the Interests of Afghanistan) and later as KAM (Workers' Intelligence Department) was changed to KhAD (State Information Services). Dissociating themselves from AGSA and KAM, the new rulers pledged that henceforth no official organization would strangle or torture persons. They also promised that KhAD would serve to protect democratic rights and neutralize plots hatched by enemies of the state. The constitution stated that "torture, persecution, and punishment contrary to human dignity are not permissible." Babrak Karmal and his senior officials told a delegation of Amnesty International that there "would be no more torture" in Afghanistan.[1] But the promises were only words, and the Kabul regime and its Soviet patrons simply ignored them. KhAD was not set up to protect human rights; rather, it operated on principles espoused by Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet Cheka (the predecessor of the KGB). In discussing how to combat counterrevolutionary activities and sabotage, Dzerzhinsky had told his fellow commisars in 1918, "Don't think that I seek forms of revolutionary justice; we are not now in need of justice. It is war now—face to face, a fight to the finish. Life or death."[2]

[2] The name KhAD was a misnomer, just as the names of its predecessors, AGSA and KAM, had been. The scope of KhAD's activities was wider than its name suggests. Besides intelligence gathering, it took part in military operations "with its own military-style division complete with tanks, armored personnel carriers and helicopters."[3] One of its twelve main directorates, KhAD Number Five, was commissioned to encounter the "rebels." KhAD was part of the triple armed forces, the others being the regular army (with militia) and the Sarindoy (police force). It was also charged with creating instability in Pakistan and combating foreign intelligence services. But its program of intelligence gathering in an effort to eliminate active as well as potential opponents and"counterrevolutionaries" was its main area of activity.

[3] To do its job, KhAD needed material means, persons with expertise, and power. These were provided. Providing money was easy, because Afghan bank notes were printed in the Soviet Union, which sent money directly to KhAD as well as the Sarindoy. KhAD had a budget of thirty billion afghanis, or one thousand times more than the budget of the precommunist Intelligence Department, which was thirty million afghanis.[4]

[4] Despite KhAD's unpopularity, it readily found recruits. Material incentive, exemption from military service, and employment attracted sufficient numbers. Ideology was important only for the dedicated members of the party who served as its leading officials. Among its junior officials were uprooted educated persons who had been driven from the rural areas. Deprived of their own sources of income, they entered KhAD, because as strangers in Kabul they found it difficult to cope with life in the inflationary situation. As an extreme example, forty-two persons from my own home village of Deva in Laghman found employment with KhAD. Officials from Kabul and the province of Parwan outnumbered others in KhAD. All KhAD's officials were Parchamis. Parchamis.

[5] Material incentives for KhAD's personnel were many. Professional officers, as distinct from those who did paperwork, received salaries double those that the regime paid to its other employees. As plainclothes secret police, KhAD's officials were given the status of military officers; this status entitled them to military pay, which the government had increased 100 percent in 1978. In addition, just because they were serving the KhAD, its officials were paid an extra 15 to 75 percent of their pay, depending on the nature of their jobs. The lowest rate was paid to those who worked in the

offices. Other concessions included residential apartments, excellent free medical treatment, and short trips for training and other purposes to the Soviet Union.

[6] The above were the official concessions. The illegal sources of income were many, such as searching a region following a military expedition, patrolling the city during the curfew hours, and searching the houses of those who had been, or were to be, arrested. Three examples will suffice to illustrate such activities. In 1981 a group of patrolling KhAD agents broke into the Pashtun Market in Kabul and took about eighty million afghanis (over $1 million) from the safes of businesses there. Similarly, during curfew hours Japanese articles and gadgets were looted from about forty small shops in the middle of the city; this time the looters were Soviet soldiers. In 1982, twelve bars of gold bullion were taken from the house of Haji Barat Bie in Kabul during a search.[5] KhAD's officials were required to have householders sign a form saying that nothing had been taken from their houses. But this form was meaningless, because during the search family members would be pushed inside a room, the house would be searched by armed men, and members of the family would be so terrified that they did not dare complain.

[7] Since the Parchamis were tyros in the field, since KhAD was organized along KGB lines, and since the KGB secret police controlled this "kingdom without a crown,"[6] Soviet advisers played a dominant role in reshaping it out of KAM of the Khalq period. However, the number of Soviet advisers cannot be determined. For nine months following the invasion, Soviet advisers controlled KhAD directly, maintaining the security of prisons with their own men. KhAD's officials were unable to conduct investigations without their permission. After that period, when they handed over control of prisons to KhAD's officials, Soviet advisers kept a low profile. But since KhAD was "the key to the political and state structure of the Soviet mission in Afghanistan,"[7] Soviet advisers were behind the decisions made in it. But care had been taken to ensure that the records did not show their role.

[8] Even Babrak Karmal could not influence the decisions of Soviet advisers in KhAD, as the following incidents show. After the arrest of a number of members of Afghan Millat in 1983, its leaders dissolved their organization and called on their followers to support the regime. Karmal issued instructions to KhAD that they be released without being tried in court; they would then cooperate with the government through the National Fatherland Front. They were, however, tried and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.[8] Relatives of two members of the imprisoned Afghan Millat got a letter from Karmal in which he ordered that the prisoners be released, but to no effect.[9] Also, for three months Karmal insisted on the release of five detained university professors, including the author, before they were to be tried in court, but to no effect.[10] Karmal's instructions were not obeyed in a department where he had placed his trusted followers. As already noted, if any official department was loyal to him, it was KhAD. It was his stronghold of power, even more than the Parcham faction was. Lauding it with warm words, he often visited KhAD, and KhAD's officials did their best to exalt him. There was thus no question that his own cronies in KhAD would have carried out his orders. But they were under the power of the Soviet advisers, who looked on KhAD as the promoter first of the interests of the Soviet Union.

[9] The Soviet interest was the prosecution of, in order of significance, Maoists, Islamic fundamentalists, and nationalists. Those who were accused of being agents of the CIA and other foreign intelligence services were also singled out for harsh treatment, but since they were not part of the organized resistance groups, they were not punished as severely as others. KhAD's most important program was to smash organized resistance groups with a view to drying up the breeding ground for "counterrevolutionaries." On this point no compromise was shown until the rise to power of Gorbachev in 1985. In this atmosphere every Afghan outside the regime was suspected of being a member of an organization opposed to the Soviet Union.

[10] To stamp out resistance, KhAD was organized to assert its mastery over Afghans: hence the dominance of KhAD over other government ministries, although it was nominally a department within the prime ministry. In addition to having a broader structure, access to more money, and more numerous personnel than any other ministry, it had the power not only to look into matters of public significance but also to intrude into the private domain of persons and families and to make arrests. Except for Karmal, no Afghan under the regime was beyond its reach. It had the power and the means to torture men and women to the point of death with impunity. Although by law the execution of a prisoner after his trial in court was the prerogative of the head of state, *KhAD determined the case one way or another.* In the few cases when the head of state commuted death sentences to terms of imprisonment, he did so only with KhAD's permission. KhAD was said to be a state within a state.[11] This was true, but only partly. If the Kabul regime may be called a state, then KhAD was an agency above the state.

[11] Under Najibullah, its president, KhAD's personnel rose from 120 during the constitutional period to 25,000, according to one source, and to 30,000, according to another.[12] With regard to KhAD's personnel, the following points should be borne in mind. The last two figures are for KhAD's staff, not for those who cooperated with it from the outside. These were regular and part-time informers whose number cannot be determined. All political and party organizations—in particular the Youth Organization, Workers' Union, and Women's Organization—were connected to it.[13] KhAD had established committees in all government departments as well as residential areas. A deputy of every ministry was a KhAD official. KhAD officials were also assigned to Afghan embassies and commercial houses.[14] Even the Khalqi-dominated Ministry of Home Affairs, after initial resistance, opened its doors to KhAD. Thus, the total number of persons serving KhAD in one capacity or another will never be known. More important, even the figures cited were disproportionately high for the number of people under the direct control of the regime, which was probably about 2.5 million. Consequently, among the people under the control of the regime, KhAD was ubiquitous. As one contemporary observation noted, "The Afghan regime and its Soviet allies maintain and enforce control in the cities through the fear of a terrorized population aware of the ever-present possibility of arbitrary arrest, torture, imprisonment and execution."[15]

[12] The omnipresence of KhAD was an indication of the regime's need for it. "It reached the point where, without KhAD, the regime could not survive."[16] Of the regime's programs to survive, one was to neutralize its opponents by imprisoning them, but it required some reason or evidence for imprisoning anyone. During the Khalqi period the authorities viewed certain groups of people, such as feudals and the clergy, to be the irreconcilable enemies of the "revolution." So the government imprisoned many mullas and feudals simply because they were mullas and feudals. During the Parchami regime, however, some efforts were made to make arrests on the basis of "evidence," although KhAD also made arrests on the basis of mere suspicion. Those captured on the battlefield, those caught fleeing the country, and those who were members of organized antigovernment groups were considered opponents of the regime and imprisoned. Also among the imprisoned were those who did not want to cooperate with the regime, who were against the invasion and the war, or who were persons of reputation but not on the side of the regime. It was not difficult for KhAD to identify such people. The so-called Cartotic Division was made responsible for collecting the kind of information on suspected persons that would lead to their arrest. My interrogator told me that I had been under surveillance by that division for about two years before my arrest.

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Khad in Action

[1] KhAD was known to Afghans for house searches, arrests, torture, and execution. While leaving a detailed account of those activities for my prison memoirs, here I would like to describe each briefly.

[2] To imprison a person, armed personnel from the Department of Operation would go into action. For them it was like a hunting expedition, even if the accused was to be picked up from a government office. In a serious case the locality of the accused would be cordoned off, sometimes by armored vehicles. In such a situation KhAD would detain not only the person for whose arrest a warrant had been issued but also anyone who happened to be with the accused person at the time. Also, anyone coming toward the cordoned house would be arrested. Those who were arrested without warrants were detained on the assumption that they might be members of the group to which the accused was considered to belong. Speed was of the utmost significance, and KhAD provided its personnel the means to carry out its mission as quickly as possible. The houses of the accused were searched by personnel from the Departments of Interrogation, Prosecution, and Police. These personnel were at liberty to search the house for as long as they wished, regardless of whether the accused was present.

[3] The search of the apartment of Fahima Nassiry, a schoolteacher, was typical. "They cracked open the walls with the bayonets of their automatic rifles. They cut open all the mattresses. They broke the toilet. They poured out the cooking oil from the jars in her kitchen and tipped over bags of rice."[17] In a larger house search many more things were usually looked into. Anything that could incriminate the accused would be confiscated. Books—particularly the works of Sayyed Qutb and Mao—would be taken as proof of the accused person's "guilt." Under Khalqi and Parchami rule, private libraries were also confiscated. In most cases whole libraries were taken away; fortunately, my own library was spared. In 1973 the Parchami police had set the precedent of confiscating private libraries. At that time they confiscated the entire library of former Prime Minister Maiwandwal; among the works in the library were seven volumes in Maiwandwal's handwriting on Afghan history.[18]

[4] In contrast with the Khalqi period, when detainees were treated violently during their interrogations, in the Parchami period torture became "part of a scientific system of intelligence rather than just a form of sadistic punishment."[19] Interrogation and torture were prolonged with the intention of forcing the detainee to implicate others. In theory, the interrogators were not to break detainees physically but to hurt them psychologically, breaking their personalities so they would admit to the crimes of which they were accused. In practice, though, interrogators did not observe these limits, sometimes going so far as to kill detainees. Among those who lost their lives under torture was the famous poet and journalist Ghulam Shah Sarshar Shamali, who, while under interrogation in Sadarat in 1982, was kicked to death.

[5] In the city of Kabul detainees were taken to one of eight detention and torture centers, four of which were known as the KhAD-e-Sadarat (the Central Interrogation Office in the Prime Ministry), KhAD-e-Shashdarak (the KhAD Office in the Shashdarak district), KhAD-e-Panj (the KhAD Office Number Five in Darul Aman), and KhAD-e-Nezami (Military KhAD). These were the main detention centers. The remaining four were in two private houses near the Sadarat building, the Ahmad Shah Khan house, the Wazir Akbar Khan Maina, and the KhAD office in the Barikot district.[20] When a large number of people were detained, they were taken directly to the Pul-e-Charkhi concentration camp. Also, every provincial city had one or more detention and torture centers and a prison. The provincial prisons of Qunduz, Mazar, and Kandahar were the major ones. The Soviets also detained and tortured detainees in their army units before handing them over to KhAD. In Kabul the detainees were kept in the main detention centers until their interrogations were complete or almost complete.

[6] Investigations often took weeks or months before the detainees were taken to Pul-e-Charkhi and then to the courts. Our group of professors was detained for nine months in Sadarat. This phase of detention was agonizing, since everything imaginable was likely to happen to the detainee, especially in Shashdarak. Of those detained in Shashdarak, I have neither met nor heard of anyone who was not tortured. Pul-e-Charkhi was a haven by comparison. Almost every one was taken to Shashdarak at least once for different periods of time. I was detained there for only an hour before I was transferred to Sadarat. Even during this short time I saw the Soviets in droves.

[7] Some detainees were held in a small cell in a group of a few each, while others were herded into rooms where they could hardly move or sleep because of overcrowding and the swarms of lice. Some were held in solitary confinement, each in a cell of two and one-half meters square. Mohammad Osman Rustar, a member of our group of professors, was detained in such a cell for six weeks. He was transferred there as a punitive measure, apparently because he complained to the information officer, Rajab Ali Saighani, about the insufficiency of food. From the time prisoners detained, they were no longer their own masters. The authorities controlled everything they needed as human beings. The one exception was the air they breathed. Indeed, prisoners were deprived of fresh air, since, except when they were taken to the interrogation cells or to the washroom (three times in twenty-four hours), they were always confined. They were given rich, greasy, salty food, usually in insufficient quantities. Good medical treatment was available. The idea was to keep the inmates fit to stand up to the exacting conditions so that the interrogators could extract confessions. Detainees were cut off from contact with the outside world. Not only were they not allowed any visitors, but they were also denied access to means of communication, such as pens, books, and paper. Only when a prisoner's family sent clothes was he or she given a short pencil for a brief time to write down what had been received. When the detainees made beads from dried cooked rice or dried loaves of bread, or when they made playing cards from cigarette boxes, these items were confiscated if detected. Inmates were permitted nothing with which to pass the time. They were, however, given plenty of time to stare and brood. Guards were charged with not letting inmates laugh or talk loudly, although it was impossible for them to enforce this order completely. Powerful light bulbs were left on day and night. This almost total isolation made the detainee all of a sudden seem like a special person, regardless of his or her social status. This was because KhAD treated each detainee as if he or she were a missing link in the chain of an enemy organization.

[8] The inmate's real ordeal started when he or she was interrogated, which commenced following arrest. First an attempt was made to make the prisoners feel overawed. In the interrogation cell the detainees were alone in the presence of one or more interrogators and a few other strong men. Soviet advisers also took part in the interrogation. According to Amnesty International, "There are consistent accounts of the complicity of Soviet personnel through their presence during interrogation under torture."[21] They did not participate in all cases. However, whether present or not, they directed the interrogation. The Afghan interrogators brought written queries with them, presumably dictated by the Soviets. Only rarely did they compose written queries in the presence of the detainee.

[9] The queries were directed to make detainees admit not only to the crimes for which they were accused but also to specify their accomplices and the organizations to which they allegedly belonged. The detainees were compelled to do so, as two examples show. Qari Mohammad Sharief, a native of Badakhshan, who was an imam in Shakardara in Kohdaman near Kabul, listed more than two hundred persons as his associates in the Islamic Association. Qazi Bismillah Zarif, a native of Panjsher, listed about four hundred persons as his accomplices. The latter had been tortured so much that he listed anyone whose name he knew. He was said to have organized a resistance group in Panjsher. It was not in the interest of the interrogator to establish the true state of affairs. The establishment of the truth, which was likely to lead to the acquittal of the detainee, would deprive the interrogator of the rewards (promotion, cash, trips to the Soviet Union) that he was granted

when he made the detainee confess to the crime of which he or she was accused. It was in his interest to make the detainee guilty. Since KhAD intended to suppress the opposition, the arrests were viewed necessary for the establishment of the regime. The detainees then had to be punished, and for this they had to admit to the crimes of which they were accused. This was why only a negligible number of those arrested were acquitted, and the greater number were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment or were executed.

[10] The detainees were charged not for opposition to the invasion but for acts that were considered crimes in the criminal code, the most repressive code there ever was in Afghanistan. This code had been promulgated in 1977 for the suppression of the communists. Now the communists who abrogated the main laws of the period not only did not annul this code but enforced it fully. I was not charged for my attitudes and actions: specifically, that I opposed the invasion and the violation of the basic rights of individuals; that I and others monitored the academic rights of professors and students; and that I maintained a critical attitude toward the regime. Of the twelve charges actually brought against me, the main ones were that I was a founding member of the Rihayee, a Maoist group, and of the nationalistic group Afghan Millat. Two of the charges carried the death penalty. Although it was impossible for my interrogator, Asad Rahmani, to substantiate any of the charges, he persisted, hoping that he might detect some contradictions in my responses that would incriminate me. KhAD did not physically torture me to extract a confession. Had Amnesty International not taken my case (together with those of other professors), KhAD probably would have accorded me more serious punishment than eight years of imprisonment. But more than 90 percent of the detainees were not as lucky as I was.

[11] The unlucky majority were accorded standard punishment. The accused were to confess to the charges brought against them and reveal the names of their accomplices and the organizations to which they allegedly belonged. KhAD also arrested a few foreign journalists who were covering the war, charging them with being counterrevolutionaries "in the service of imperialism…[who have] come to Afghanistan to gather military intelligence on behalf of the diabolical international spy organizations."[22] The accused would be told that the authorities knew all the things they had done, but that they would receive kinder treatment if they themselves confessed their crimes. When the accused, as was natural, refused to respond positively, then the interrogators would resort to torture. Psychological torture, which had begun with the detention, was common, but that was in the background and was usually insufficient to extract a confession. What was needed was effective, direct physical torture. All types of tortures previously applied in Afghanistan were used, as well as innovations on them, and new Soviet-style tortures were also introduced.

[12] Fariduddin's description of his torture is typical, though incomplete. "They started cursing me," he says, "with foul language, then beating me with their fists and clubs. Then they kicked me. Then came the electric shocks. They [tied] wires to my feet, and they strapped my hands and legs to a chair and gave me electric shocks." Electric shocks were given even to the most sensitive parts of the body: "They also give you electric shocks in your ears, on your head, your mouth and the private parts of your body." The intensity of the torture was such that not many people could stand up to it. Again in the words of Fariduddin, "No matter how strong you are, you must confess. The only way to stop them is to say, 'Yes, yes, I am what you say I am. I did what you say I did." ' Naturally, Fariduddin's view of the interrogators is unfavorable: "No matter how much you scream and no matter how much you plead, they do not listen. They are savage human beings. They are worse than wild beasts. Even animals are not that cruel."[23] The Italian journalist Fausto Bilolavo has vividly described the condition of the victims of torture in his cell: "I was surrounded by human wreckage: people with their backs smashed to pieces, dislocated jaws, twisted nasal septa, their bodies covered with scars of every description and bearing the hallmarks of cigarettes [snuffed] out against their skins."[24]

[13] Other tortures were applied when the lesser ones did not lead to a confession. Among the main ones were those intended to rob the accused of dignity. Men were threatened with having glass Fanta soft drink bottles forced into their rectums, while women were threatened with having hot eggs forced into their vaginas. Worse still was the situation in which accused males were threatened with having their wives or female relatives sexually assaulted in their presence. It was then that even the strongest of the accused would plead guilty to the charges brought against them. These methods were applied or threatened in more serious cases. In such cases Fariduddin is right in saying that "no matter how strong you are, you must confess."

[14] The accused were, of course, deprived of a lawyer. If they were illiterate, the interrogator also wrote their responses to written queries. The accused were required only to place their thumbprints on the papers of inquiry. That was not all. Before the file of the accused was sent to the Special Revolutionary Tribunals, KhAD reviewed it. The tribunals were set up following the Soviet invasion. Staffed by party members trained in the Soviet Union, they were not impartial bodies but legalized instruments for suppressing the "counterrevolutionaries" in an effort to vindicate the "revolution," as Felix Dzerzhinsky had suggested.[25]

[15] When KhAD reviewed the case of the accused for the last time, the role of the Soviet adviser was decisive. It was he who "advised" the type of punishment to be accorded to the accused. Before the actual trial, the adviser penciled in the term of the sentence in the file; another adviser in the tribunal was to see that the sentence was carried out and the penciled recommendation erased. In the Special Revolutionary Tribunal—which, except for certain cases, was held behind closed doors—the appearances of legal procedures were observed. A few days before appearing in the tribunal, defendants were handed an official statement from the state attorney, charging them with the crimes that they had allegedly committed. Again, they had access neither to a lawyer nor the law on the basis of which they had been charged. They were thus denied the basic rights of defense. Illiterate defendants were lucky if someone in their cells could write their defense for them. But condemnation in the tribunal had already been fixed, no matter how convincing the prisoner's statement of defense and no matter how convincing the defendant was in protesting the charges and the tortures he or she had gone through. The file, which was already determined, was paramount.

[16] The rationale for ruining the life of a person and his or her family and disturbing the community of which they were an organic part could be traced to the view that the "guilty" person was a "counterrevolutionary" who had committed a crime against society and the state that the PDPA claimed to represent. Translating that view into actuality was made possible by the state structure, in which the departments of secret police, public attorney, and special tribunals, dominated apparently by the official party but in fact by the Soviet Union, worked toward the same goal: to realize the domination of the state over individuals. Persistence in such an effort was bound to intensify the existing tension to the point of rocking the society from its foundation.

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Prisoners of Pul-e-Charkhi

[1] Nearly 100 inmates were left in Pul-e-Charkhi after the Parcham regime in January 1980 released 2,700 inmates of the Khalqi period. But after the February uprisings the new regime started arresting people. The number was on the increase, and the increase was an indication of opposition to the regime. At the time of my transfer in January 1983, Pul-e-Charkhi had the highest number of prisoners, about thirty thousand, held at any one time.[26] In the new Pul-e-Charkhi prison, before all the cellblocks were ready for use, about 250 inmates were accommodated in each main hall. Each hall was about 320 square meters in space. Between 180 and 200 inmates were quartered in two-level wooden beds in a hall. Probably more than ten thousand additional prisoners were held in

detention centers outside Pul-e-Charkhi in Kabul and provincial capitals. The total figure—forty thousand—is terribly excessive for a regime that, as noted, had about 2.5 million people under its direct control. The upkeep of so many persons under strict conditions was bound to be troublesome.

[12] Of the Pul-e-Charkhi inmates, the majority were from the Kabul province. Among them were also members of the official party who had committed nonpolitical crimes. Women inmates were confined in part of cellblock number three and in the detention centers in Sadarat and Shashdarak. Their total number is unknown, but they must have been a sizable number to go on a hunger strike in 1982.[27] The Pul-e-Charkhi inmates ranged in age from twelve to eighty-six years old. Some were blind. Inmates suffering from various illnesses, even tuberculosis, lived with the others. During the two years of 1980 and 1981 alone from hall number 248, in which 250 inmates had been placed, 4 died of tuberculosis.[28] An inmate with leprosy also lived with the others in cellblock number three in 1984. Some inmates were considered mad because "they were indifferent to food and water; many among them would always laugh while others sometimes would weep, and would have waste material in their trousers." In 1981, in one hall containing 250 inmates, 12 such inmates were officially listed as "mad" but were not released.[29] Pul-e-Charkhi had two clinics, but until 1983 the one in cellblock number two was in reality a resting place for imprisoned party culprits or for inmates who had paid bribes to stay there.

[3] Inmates faced a painful situation regarding the basic necessities of life—food and toilets. While criminal inmates in cellblock number four were allowed to provide their own food, an important concession, political prisoners were dependent on the authorities. There were, however, canteens in almost every block where out-of-date cans of fish from the Soviet Union and a few other basic items of food were sold. This was because the food in the Pul-e-Charkhi was much poorer and more insufficient than the food given to the inmates in the detention centers in Kabul. This in itself would not have been a problem had the food been given purely as food. It was not. The inside of the thick bread baked in the Russian-made bakery was unbaked, but its outer skin had plenty of dust and sand. The cooked rice had plenty of sand, and the watery soup sometimes had pieces of cooked mice and always many flies. Although the food improved as a result of a hunger strike in 1982, in 1983 I saw a piece of cooked mouse in a soup pot. More agonizing was an incident before the hunger strike when some substance was mingled with the food to cause diarrhea. The inmates, who lacked antidiarrhea medication, were permitted to use the toilets—few in number anyway—outside their halls only at fixed times. The inmates thus had to use plastic bags as toilets in their living quarters. This situation—which deteriorated still further after the execution of inmates—resulted on 1 May 1982 in a prisoners' strike, the greatest in the history of Afghanistan.

[4] The hunger strike was triggered when a teapot of hot water was given to a sick inmate by a friend who worked in the only workshop set up in cellblock number two. A guard beat both of the prisoners—standard punishment for minor infractions. Scuffles followed, but this time the enraged fellow inmates of the sick inmate drove the guard away from their hall and began a hunger strike. By evening, inmates of the whole cellblock number two had joined the strike and locked the iron gates of their halls. No amount of pleading by the authorities—something the officials had never done before—could soften the attitude of the inmates, who issued a statement demanding that their conditions be improved to meet international standards. But the authorities rejected the demands as "illegal." By then Soviet advisers were in command, and the army had encircled the cellblock. On the fourth day of the strike (24 May 1982), the inmates were overcome by commandos, who cut through the iron bars on the windows. By then, because of hunger, most inmates had grown weak. While most discontinued the strike, others persisted in it for two weeks, despite threats from the authorities. Three inmates—Mohammad Osman, Mohammad Qaseem, and Abdul Rahman—died. Various types of punishment were accorded to the striking inmates throughout the year. For instance, about 600 inmates were forced into a hall in cellblock number 3 where formerly 250 had been quartered.[30]

[5] What most disturbed the inmates and society was the execution of prisoners. The actual number executed in the Khalqi and Parchami periods will never be known. Execution was related to the degree of opposition to the regime. In the Parchami period the inmates sentenced to death were not told of the decision of the court. Those inmates who were sentenced to death were not executed immediately but after a long time. KhAD persuaded a number of such inmates to spy for it, insinuating that their lives might thus be spared, but they were still executed. Periodically, inmates sentenced to death were taken out at night, apparently for purposes other than execution. During the years 1983 and 1984, each week between six hundred and seven hundred inmates would be taken from cellblocks number two and one. Some would be transferred to the cellblocks controlled by Sarindoy, a number would be taken back to the headquarters of KhAD, and the rest would be executed.[31] The cellblocks were soon to be filled with new inmates. The biggest execution operation was the one carried out on 23 December 1983, when from 350 to 400 inmates were picked up for execution from half past five in the evening until one o'clock the next morning, mainly from cellblock number 1, where I had been held. In a little over four years (until May 1984), between 16,500 and 17,000 inmates were taken out for execution to places in Dasht-e-Chamtala beyond Khair Khana to the north of the city.[32]

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Inmates' Responses

[1] How the inmates responded to the strict prison conditions and how they behaved among themselves is a fruitful field for study. Here, though, I can examine only its barest essentials. As noted, during the first phase of detention, prisoners were kept under strictly supervised conditions with the possibility at any moment of physical injury and torture; in addition, inmates depended on the authorities for the necessities of life. Yet among inmates the tendency to defiance was strong. Some despaired and submitted, but the majority stood up for themselves, demonstrating their honor by defying a tyrannical agency that they considered an instrument of an untenable puppet regime. Likewise, the solidarity among inmates of the opposition groups (excluding the Parchamis and Khalqis) was also remarkable despite the differences that existed among the organizations to which they belonged. What hurt the inmates most was the degree of isolation. The greater the isolation and the longer the duration, the stronger the pangs of inner pain. Here, too, inmates battled despair by clinging to hope and the feeling of righteousness in their cause. Inmates felt strong in the company of others, even if they belonged to hostile groups. Even the voices of KhAD's staff was a source of strength. Their distant voices linked the inmates with a humanity at large with whom they felt unity.

[2] Under the changed conditions of Pul-e-Charkhi, however, the inmates behaved differently. In the overcrowded warrens of that prison, discord and divisiveness gradually took the place of the original solidarity. The inmates quarreled over space and food, since the latter was given to representatives of groups who distributed it among themselves alone. In the matter of food, the educated inmates were generally more conscious about their own health and less concerned about others, while the majority were concerned for others, sharing their meager rations in a spirit of hospitality and community. One wonders whether the opposition to the invasion would have been as strong as it was if the more educated and self-centered Afghans had predominated. A factor of considerable significance in creating the atmosphere of divisiveness was the crystallization of group behavior, particularly ideological behavior. The stricter the party, the more rigid its followers. Inmates with no attachment to a party were more open in their behavior toward others. But KhAD played a big role in creating an atmosphere of suspicion.

[3] To forestall disturbances and to collect intelligence, KhAD directed a network of spies. For this purpose it also planted police officers in the guise of prisoners. The appointed heads (*bashi*s), with their many covert and overt assistants and collaborators, worked for the same purpose. In return for

concessions in food and scores of other favors, they not only collected intelligence but also played a role in defaming and intimidating others as well as distributing varieties of homemade narcotics and committing homosexual acts. Teenaged inmates were the special target of homosexual acts, perpetrated not only by them but also by others, including some educated inmates.[33] The strict conditions of prison life as well as these other factors adversely affected all groups of inmates. Not a single group of inmates remained as solid as before, but split into rival or hostile subgroups. Scuffles and quarrels among them became common. More common was the recitation of the Quran, when leaders of prayers ended with a plea to God: "So make us victorious over the infidels."

Notes

1. Amnesty International, *Afghanistan,* 2, 6. [BACK]

2. Quoted in Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin,* 59. [BACK]

3. Mackenzie, "Brutal Force," 15. [BACK]

4. Sharq, *Memoirs,* 230. [BACK]

5. Rasul Bie, son of Haji Barat Bie, personal communication, Pul-e-Charkhi, 1983. Rasul Bie said that his efforts to get the gold back failed because the Soviet advisers had a share in it. For details about KhAD, see Kakar, *Afghans in the Spring of 1987,* 55-64. [BACK]

6. Sharq, *Memoirs,* 230. [BACK]

7. B. Rubin, quoted in Mackenzie, "Brutal Force," 10. [BACK]

8. KhAD officials had told the imprisoned members of Afghan Millat that on Karmal's order they were going to be released. For a list of the names of members of the imprisoned Afghan Millat, see Amnesty International, *Democratic Republic of Afghanistan,* 8. [BACK]

9. Personal communication, Pul-e-Charkhi prison, 1985. [BACK]

10. M. Nabi, formerly director of interrogation, personal communication, Pul-e-Charkhi prison, 1986. About twenty elders from Laghman Province, led by Abdul Aziz Kakar, twice met Najibullah as well as Prime Minister Kishtmand to discuss my release. But the officials declined their request, stating that Kakar did not want to budge from his opposition to the Soviets. If they could have released me, they probably would have done so to make the elders grateful. [BACK]

11. Mackenzie, "Brutal Force," 14. According to Yves Heller from the Agence France Presse, "KhAD has become not just a state within a state, but the state itself" (quoted in Laber and Rubin, *A Nation Is Dying,* 77). [BACK]

12. Mackenzie, "Brutal Force," 14; Rustar, *Pul-e-Charkhi Prison,* 9. [BACK]

13. Sharq, *Memoirs,* 230. [BACK]

14. Ibid. [BACK]

15. Laber and Rubin, *A Nation Is Dying,* 77. [BACK]

16. K. Matiuddin, quoted in Mackenzie, "Brutal Force," 14. [BACK]

17. Fahima, quoted in Mackenzie, “Brutal Force,” 9. [BACK]

18. M. Rasuli, personal communication, San Diego, 1991. [BACK]

19. Barnet Rubin, quoted in Mackenzie, “Brutal Force,” 15. [BACK]

20. “Torture in Afghanistan,” *Amnesty International Newsletter* (London), December 1983, 1. [BACK]

21. Amnesty International, *Afghanistan,* 1. [BACK]

22. Bilolavo, “One Man’s Sentence,” 13. [BACK]

23. Mackenzie, “Brutal Force,” 15. [BACK]

24. Bilolavo, “One Man’s Sentence,” 12. [BACK]

25. Sharq, *Memoirs,* 231. [BACK]

26. I arrived at the approximate figure of thirty thousand with the help of inmates who had been to all the cellblocks in Pul-e-Charkhi. It is satisfying to note that another inmate, Mohammad Jan Werr, formerly press director in Baghlan Province, had arrived at almost the same figure by a separate approximation. The difference between our figures was 400, the number of criminal inmates in cellblock number 4. Shafi Ayyar notes that the number of inmates for the cellblocks number 1, 2, and 3 alone was 20,000. Shafi Ayyar was also a prisoner; see Ayyar, *Bloody Fists,* 7. [BACK]

27. In the Sadarat detention center, women were confined to separate cells in a separate block, adjacent to the block where I had been. Women with babies were also imprisoned. Once the authorities punished them for tying the names of cabinet ministers to the tails of mice—a form of insult. Saliha and Tajwar Kakar were known inmates in 1982. T. Kakar, personal communication, Peshawar, 1988. [BACK]

28. Ayyar, *Bloody Fists,* 12. [BACK]

29. Ibid., 16. [BACK]

30. Ibid., 20-43. Ayyar had also taken part in the hunger strike. [BACK]

31. A *bashi,* or head, of cellblock number two, personal communication, Pul-e-Charkhi prison, February 1987. [BACK]

32. A former director of operation of KhAD number five, quoted by an inmate, Pul-e-Charkhi prison, February 1987. [BACK]

33. Homosexuality is, of course, viewed differently in different cultures. Although it is practised among the Afghans, they condemn it on moral and religious grounds. The act is liable to punishment and viewed seriously when it becomes a scandal. For how KhAD abused this ruling and blackmailed a former junior university professor in prison to spy for it, see Rustar *Pul-e-Charkhi Prison,* 96. Conversely, KhAD condoned the homosexual activity of one of its former agents, who also worked for it in the prison. On homosexual acts in the Pul-e-Charkhi prison, see Ayyar, *Bloody Fists,* 13, 23. [BACK]