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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

By RS NARA Date 10-19-01

# AIRGRAM

POL 12 AFG

Original to be Filed in \_\_\_\_\_ Decentralized Files.

FILE DESIGNATION

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A-33

HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

INFO : HONG KONG, ISLAMABAD, MOSCOW, NEW DELHI, TEHRAN

FROM : American Embassy KABUL

DATE: May 22, 1973

E.O. : 11652, GDS TAGS: PINT, AF

SUBJECT : THE AFGHAN LEFT

REF :

**Summary:** Although the Afghan Left remains small and fragmented, it has grown considerably over the years following the promulgation of Afghanistan's Constitution in 1964. Most observers accept the premise of a remark attributed to Sardar Abdul Wali, to the effect that if the mullahs were unleashed all leftists in the country would be dead within 24 hours. However, given this country's stormy history, and the memories of what happened here before when the populace took matters in its own hands, it is very doubtful that Abdul Wali or any member of the Royal Family would ever seriously consider such a move. At present, the Left probably has more nuisance value than anything else.

The better organized groups, however, have been successfully exploiting safe nationalistic issues (e.g., Pushtunistan, anti-Iranian sentiment) for some time now, and have developed a following of "fellow travellers" who manage to overlook the other issues involved. Significantly, no leftist party or grouping now publicly calls for revolution or directly insults the Islamic Religion (many in fact tout their religious orthodoxy) or the person of the King (the favorite veiled reference is to "reactionary authorities"). Leftist groups in Afghanistan also tend to be highly personalized, clustering around individual leaders and splintering over personal antagonisms more often than over purely doctrinal disputes. On major issues, especially those enjoying a wide popular base of support and the exploitation of which can be embarrassing to the Government, hatchets are temporarily buried to effect various "united fronts" of "progressive" elements. End Summary.

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FORM 10-64 DS-323

Date:

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Any roster of Afghan left of center political groupings and their membership is always subject to one unavoidable shortcoming, i.e., it will probably be out of date as it is written. There is, however, a solid core of organizations and individuals who have survived the test of time. This airgram will give a brief summary of each group involved, the main characters currently active in each, and some estimation of what the future prospects are for these groups. Of overall immediate importance is the basic fact that these groups are relatively well-organized (i.e., there is virtually no organization of moderate or rightist political persuasion in the country, except for ad hoc coalitions organized by activist mullahs, local village or provincial notables, and the combined forces of the Government and the Royal Family). With elections for the Lower House of Parliament (Wolesi Jirgah) scheduled for the fall of 1973, and given the current indications that the Political Parties Bill might be signed into law soon by the King (perhaps following the elections), the organization of the Left will be the main, although probably not the decisive, focus of Afghan politics in the near future.

#### MAJOR GROUPS

##### 1. Parcham (the Banner)

The foremost and probably best organized leftist group in existence, Parcham, represents the wing of the Afghan Communist Party (founded officially in 1965) loyal to the leadership of Babrak Karmal (currently Wolesi Jirgah Deputy from Kabul's 2nd Constituency) and Mir Akbar KHAIBAR (former police official and former editor of the Party newspaper Parcham). Parcham is pro-Soviet and follows the Moscow line on traditional issues (anti-Chinese revisionism, anti-Western imperialism). The other faction of the original ACP, known now as Khalq (the Masses), is still under the leadership of Nur Mohammad TARAKI who split with the Babrak/Akbar group in 1967 (see below). Other leaders within Parcham include Mohammad Sulaiman Layeq (former Director of Programs for Radio Afghanistan), Mohammad Hassan Bareq SHAFIAT (also a former RGA employee and one-time editor of the ACP newspaper) and Mrs. Anahita Nahida RATEBZADEH (former Wolesi Jirgah Deputy, who plans to run again in this year's elections, and long-rumored to be Babrak's mistress).

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While the above individuals constitute the old guard of the ACP, a number of younger Parcham leaders have emerged over recent years (although the growth of the Party itself, indeed of all older, more established leftist groups has been small when compared with the growth of the noisier, pro-Peking factions of the Sholai-Jaweid movement). Among those rumored to be rising steadily with Parcham are:

Mohammad Nader "Nuristani", son of Royal Afghan Army General Mohammad Isa, formerly a medical student at Kabul University (he apparently was on the Faculty briefly in 1971);

Basir Omerkhail, son of Wolesi Jirgah Deputy Abdul Karim Omerkhail (Laghman Province), presently employed by the Ministry of Commerce;

Mehr Chand, a Kabul merchant (Hindu) who has traditionally rounded up the Hindu vote for Babrak.

Parcham has since 1967 followed a predominantly Parliamentary route of political activity. Its leadership has skillfully exploited nationalistic issues, especially "Pushtunistan", to improve its public relations and to increase its following. Although the Pushtunistan issue was never opposed or even ignored by Babrak prior to the most recent Indo-Pakistani War, it was only toward the beginning of that conflict that Pushtunistan became one of his constant themes. This has led to some speculation that the Parcham group received direct orders from Moscow to adopt this line. Babrak has personally come a long way from his early days in Parliament (where he and other leftists were physically beaten in the Wolesi Jirgah hall in 1966); he is now a permanent if not accepted fixture on the Afghan political scene. He remains an excellent speaker and seizes every possible opportunity to harangue the crowd and keep himself in the limelight (e.g. recent demonstrations against the Afghan-Iranian Helmand Waters Treaty and the grand farewell to Abdul Ghafur Khan at Jalalabad). If Babrak, and by consequence the entire Parcham group, have any liability on their own side of the political fence, it is that they suffer from occasionally being referred to as the "Royal Afghan Communist Party" - implying everything from simple tolerance on the part of the authorities to being in the actual employ of the King. This "royal connection" cannot be entirely discounted, and a number of reliable sources have indicated in the past that the monarchy supports Babrak (at least as an individual) in order to have a "lightning rod" for dissent.

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Nevertheless, we also have reports that a number of the party's other leaders regularly receive direct material support from the Soviet Embassy.

The present membership of Parcham is estimated as not exceeding a few hundred, which probably less than 50 constitute the hard core leadership. There is no identifiable ethnic bias within the organization in spite of the predominance of Pushtuns among the leaders. In spite of the Party's espousal of popular causes, its growth rate will probably not be impressive in the years to come. Parcham appears to be regarded as too established, old-fashioned and not sufficiently revolutionary by the growing number of young Afghan leftists. Its traditional identification with the Soviet Union is another element which limits its prospects for growth, both among young and older potential converts who generally regard the colossus to the North with healthy suspicion.

## 2. Khalq (the Masses)

This ACP faction, which split with Parcham in 1967, is still under the leadership of Nur Mohammad Taraki. Khalq's most eloquent and frequent spokesman is Molesi Jirgah Deputy Hafizullah Amin (Paghman), whose public remarks over the past year have been virtual carbon copies of Babrak's (or vice-versa). Amin's voice has been heard most vociferously recently in denunciation of the Helmand Waters Treaty; in a large "united front" demonstration in March of this year he offered a detailed article by article criticism of the Treaty. Others among Khalq's leadership include Mohammad Zirai (still in jail for his activities in the 1969 elections) and Dr. Saleh Zirai (for a time at odds with Taraki over personal and doctrinal problems, but reunited since December, 1970).

Khalq has only within the past few years begun to show genuine interest in parliamentary activity. Unlike Parcham, it appears to enjoy an increasing membership, especially in some provincial capitals (viz., Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Ghazni, Gardez and Khost). The reason most commonly cited for this provincial growth is the RGA decision in 1970 to transfer a number of troublesome leftist teachers (most of whom happened to be Khalqis) to the provinces in an effort to cool down the increasingly tense situation in Kabul. The net result has been quite the opposite of what the Government

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intended. Khalq is most visible on well-enshrined leftist holidays like the Third of Aqrab, commemorating the "massacre" of Kabul University students in 1965). We have received reports that Khalq has been very active among the Turcomen, Uzbek and Panjshiri ethnic minorities -- although no specific assessment of its strength within these groups is currently available.

The group's membership is currently around several hundred, but its growth has most likely begun to slow. Even Khalq's most modest and otherwise innocent shows of strength in the provinces have produced a strong reaction from the devastatingly superior conservative forces which dominate Afghanistan. Following this past year's Third of Aqrab festivities, for example, Kabul buzzed with rumors of mullah-led lynch mobs active in the provinces and of cases where local authorities intervened, albeit delicately, to save the lives of young Khalqis cornered by crowds.

### 3. Sholai-Jaweid (the Eternal Flame)

One could say that, at least in theory, that Sholai-Jaweid has been in existence since the late 1940's when its founder, the late Dr. Abdul Rahman Mahmudi, first landed in jail for attacking the King in a speech. As the group now known as Sholai-Jaweid emerged it was in fact largely a Mahmudi family organization. At present, however, the group is divided into four factions: A) one still headed by the Mahmudi family, (Mohammad Rahim Mahmudi, brother of Abdul Rahman; Hadi Mahmudi, son of Abdul Rahman's sister; Abdullah Mahmudi, son of Hadi; and Attayi Mahmudi, Abdul Rahman's son-in-law); B) another loyal to former Kabul University Professor Engineer Mohammad Osman Landay (although moribund, since Osman is still in jail); and C) a third known as Jaghori, almost wholly Hazara in its membership; very active on the University campus, and under the leadership of a certain Siddiq Ali Yari (formerly a professor in the Faculty of Medicine, Kabul University); and D) a fourth group representing the personal following of Ayeen Ali Bunyad (formerly a professor of physiology at KU, Hazara from Kabul, who began his political life as a member of Parcham). All factions share a pro-peking radicalism of varying shades, a distaste for parliamentary activity (anything that smells of "social democratic" revisionism arouses that special wrath reserved for traitors as opposed to class enemies), a willingness to spill blood on appropriate occasions, and great appeal to the increasing numbers of

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radical youth. Sholai has made a determined effort to appeal to members of the Shia religious minority in Afghanistan, and apparently has had some success with its more militant elements. Sholai as a whole is also the only leftist group in the country which has endorsed terrorism as an acceptable political tactic, and it appears likely that some elements of Sholai will eventually put this theory into practice.

At almost any demonstration Sholai-Jaweid can be expected to turn out large numbers of militants, especially female militants, (probably the only leftist group to have a large female membership and to exploit it fully). At the University a Miss Kawkaba Anwari is currently the most outstanding female Sholai organizer; she has been active in every major demonstration since the beginning of the 1971/72 student problems. Although it is still difficult to separate fashion from commitment, Sholai-Jaweid's strength (all factions) appears to be growing steadily in the high schools, the provinces, and at the University. This group was very assiduously cultivated the obviously most discriminated against minority in the country, the Hazaras. Sholai support in Kabul is greatest in the Chandewal section, dominated by Hazaras ethnically and by Shia Muslims religiously. One of the group's most powerful leaders in the capital is Wolesi Jirgah Deputy Mohammad Yusuf Binesh, a mullah and reportedly the leader of Kabul's Shia community.

No figures are available on overall Sholai membership, the bulk of which are probably youthful supporters. Of all leftist groups Sholai-Jaweid probably has the greatest growth potential because of its increasing reputation for radicalism, youthful character, identification with oppressed minorities and contribution of "martyrs" to the cause (although exact figures are unavailable, Sholai appears to have taken the brunt of retaliation by conservative zealots - especially the knife-wielding members of various Moslem Youth groups).

#### MINOR GROUPS

#### 4. Setam-i-Melli (Oppressed Nation)

After emerging in 1970 (see Kabul A-116, November 11, 1970), this group appears to have fallen upon hard days. One of its two

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main leaders, Taher Badakshi (a Tajik), has reportedly been in jail for the past year and a half; the other, a former KU theology student known only as Ba'ea, has dropped from sight. Setam's initial appeal seemed to be direct toward the non-Pushtun minorities, and its initial membership was predominantly ex-Sholai-Jaweid and Khalq. It appears likely that most of its members have drifted back to these other two groups, although occasional references in the leftist press mention Setam as still viable. Of some interest is the fact that Setam did not appear among the anti-Helmand Treaty "united front" demonstrators in March, 1973, when virtually every leftist organization with enough members to hold a banner were out in force.

5. Sada-i-Awam (the Voice of the Masses)

Small, ineffective, although ever ready to share a soap box with Parcham or Khalq, the Sada-i-Awam is actually the personal following of Mrs. Masooma Esmati and her brother Mr. Zabiullah Esmati. As with others on the left, they are fiercely nationalistic. Sada has never really chosen sides in the Moscow-Peking contest, and its leftist policies and credentials are almost as vague as its public speakers are inarticulate.

6. Tolan-Pal Woleswak (Afghan Social Democratic Party)

Newly founded (March, 1973); this group has only had time to issue its policy statement. The leadership is in fact the Afghan Mellat group; Oudratullah Haddad, Yusuf Farhad and former Finance Minister Rahimzai (the latter being still in jail) are the organizers. Among the ASDP's stated principles are: A) the usual fuzzy rumblings against imperialism, bureaucracy, corruption and reactionary authorities, B) increased support for the now "neglected" (sic) cause of greater-Pushtunistan, C) greater public support for the study and advancement of the Pushtu language, and D) maintenance of Islam (Hanafi doctrine specifically, in deference to the Constitution) as the state religion. The ASDP will bear close watching, especially since its appearance is being welcomed in varying degrees by other members of the rabid Pushtun press, and since it has openly declared itself a political party.

7. Afghan Mellat (the Afghan Nation)

A small, but influential (among Pushtun super-patriots) group centered around the newspaper of the same name. The leftist nature of this group is concentrated mainly on international issues (e.g.,

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support for the Palestinian causes, anti-Western Imperialism, excesses of Iranophobia, wild-eyed support for Pushtunistan).

8. Mossawat (Equality)

Former Prime Minister Mohammad Hashem Maiwandwal's group is still active, although somewhat reduced in numbers and influence. with the mid-1972 departure from his fold of a number of valuable supporters led by Wolesi Jirgah Deputy Abdul Rauf Benewa (see Kabul A-80, July 5, 1972). Beyond a doubt the most moderate of all leftist groups, Mossawat has both the highest intellectual credentials and the smallest membership roles. In recent months Maiwandwal has been attempting to enhance his appeal to potential leftist supporters by a number of devices (including joining the anti-Helmand Treaty forces with gusto and issuing some heavily anti-American statements at the time of the Vietnam Peace Agreement). He also plans to run for Parliament in the coming elections.

COMMENT: Afghan leftist groups devote about as much time and effort to internecine conflict as to the supposedly much more important struggle with class enemies. On the more violent side of things, they have probably done in more of their own kind than all the Moslem Youth, mullahs, and other "reactionary" forces put together. They remain small in numbers, but significant in the dangers they pose for the Afghan establishment if only because of their organization. In an environment permitting political parties (which could be the case before the end of 1973), the Left would presently hold a tremendous advantage for that very reason. Their real threat to the present regime, however, is probably minimal -- no matter how much trouble they might cause initially in the already chaotic halls of Parliament. The "democratic experiment" in Afghanistan is still an experiment, and the controls over that experiment remain overwhelmingly greater than even the most optimistic spokesmen for the Left would care to admit.

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