

Military Geography in Afghanistan:
A Comparative Geospatial Analysis of the Soviet War and Operation Enduring Freedom

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Introduction

According to Colonel and Professor of Military Geography, Eugene Palka's, *Modern Military Geography* "Military Geography is the application of geographic information, tools, and techniques to military problems."¹ Historically, military geography has been applied primarily to decisive battles or wars, limiting the scope of its effectiveness. Recently, geographers have extended geographic analysis and principles to unconventional military scenarios. Many geography scholars advocate analysis of geography to support peacetime and support operations. This paper will push this proposition even farther to suggest retroactive geographic analysis of conflict zones.

Geography and military geography can be divided into the subfields of Physical and Human Geography. Physical Geography examines the physical make up of an area including its climate, topography, land forms, soil content, location, and borders. Human Geography focuses on groupings of different cultural characteristics within an area. Geography is a constant in the world, it may change over time, but its impact is always present. What is called into question is whether or not that impact is as consistent as the geography it derives from; especially its impact on conflict. Afghanistan provides an opportunity to test this question.

Afghanistan has been in almost a constant state of conflict since the Soviet Invasion of 1979. The conflict in Afghanistan, while continuous, has varied in participation, combatants, casualties, intensities, and destructiveness. The Soviet Invasion and Occupation was followed by the Afghan Civil War, which was in turn, followed by

¹ Galgano, Francis A. *Modern Military Geography*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

the Coalition invasion of Afghanistan as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom. While the three conflicts vary considerably, the Soviet Invasion and Operation Enduring Freedom share common themes that make them the most comparable. This paper will use the geography of Afghanistan to identify the commonalities of these two conflicts, but the complex geography of Afghanistan makes this task difficult.

The USSR invaded Afghanistan after decades of political intervention throughout the early 20th century. The Soviet Empire spread its influence until it met a true imperial competitor. The British Empire and the successor to the Russian Empire finally came face to face in the “Great Game in Afghanistan. Facing the influence of the two huge imperial powers, Afghans eventually pushed both of them out of their country and became an independent nation state in 1919. After the expulsion of the British, the USSR saw Afghanistan as a place where communism would take hold or at least allow them to create a buffer state to shield the USSR from other powers. The USSR supported an overthrow of the Afghanistan monarchy in 1973, was soon frustrated by Afghan nationalists who would not bend to their will. The Soviets invaded in 1979 to install a government that would not only be procommunist, but also pro-Soviet.²

Tradition in Afghanistan was to resist any alien presence in Afghanistan. In the Soviet War the Mujihadeen resistance rose to combat the foreign presence. The Mujihadeen, meaning holy warrior, consisted of many different ethnic and language groups. The Afghani resistance eventually proved strong enough to drive the Soviets out

² Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

of the country. Soviet troops vacated the country in 1989 leaving their puppet administration at the hands of the resistance.³

The last remnants of the Soviet government collapsed in 1992 and was replaced by the Taliban, a largely Pashtun group organized by religious scholars from southeastern Afghanistan. The Taliban was never able to exercise control over the entire country. After its rise to power, groups of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and even some Pashtun formed the Northern Alliance in the region north of the Hindu Kush. They opposed the Taliban and its strict adherence to Sharia law in the Afghan Civil War. While combatting the Northern Alliance, the Taliban allowed al Qaeda, a largely Arab terrorist network focused on global jihad, to take up residence in the country. After al Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama bin Laden, conducted the terrorist attack in New York City on September 11th, 2001 the fate of Afghanistan drastically shifted.

Up to this point, Afghanistan was largely ignored on the global stage, but in 2001 the world focused on the central Asian country. A “coalition of the willing” was formed and quickly invaded the country as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The Taliban was removed from power and went into hiding. A provisional government was formed by the largely American Coalition while international troops remained in the country to eradicate the remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda. The coalition forces united with the former Northern Alliance and began building an Afghanistan National Army to unite the Afghanistan population against the insurgency. While this mission has not been

3 Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

completed, the original contributors to OEF are committed to removing all of their personnel, other than support staff, from the country by 2014.

The three conflicts: Soviet Invasion, Civil War, and Operation Enduring Freedom, were conducted under completely different technological, economic, and logistical conditions. The Soviet invasion was an imperial invasion opposed by rebel forces with strong foreign support. The Civil War was almost devoid of other state actors, but the current conflict in Afghanistan differs only slightly from the Soviet Invasion in the 20th Century. The American coalition has been working in conjunction with many different groups of Afghans, while the Soviets combatted the Mujihadeen largely on their own. And, unlike with the Soviet invasion, public opinion polls show that a majority of Afghans supported the overthrow of the Taliban, even if they disagree with the current actions or presence of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.⁴

How does Afghanistan's geography come into play with these three different conflicts? Does Afghanistan's unique physical geography play a large role in the outcomes of conflict or is Afghanistan's incredibly diverse Cultural Geography more effective? These are the questions that may be answered using spatial analysis of conflict data in relation to Afghanistan's geographic features.

Determining the answer to these questions is a bold endeavor, but it is useful, even if only on a large and generalized scale. During the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan, the Institute for Strategic Studies, a non-profit organization devoted to analyzing open source intelligence in Islamabad, Pakistan published monthly reports of

4 Nick Hynek and Péter Marton, *State building in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011), 285.

the conflict in Afghanistan. These reports counted the number of violent incidents in each province every month and recorded who initiated the conflict and who provided the information. The “Afghanistan Reports” also recorded how many Afghan citizens repatriated to their provinces from other areas during the occupation. The spatial data provided by the “Afghanistan Reports” is restricted to the provincial level, rather than districts or precise coordinates. However, the summaries for each province provide information about trends within the provinces regarding refugees, mobile versus immobile targets, and the initiation of conflict. Spatial data for the Soviet War was not recorded consistently or precisely due to difficulty of collection, but that collected during Operation Enduring Freedom is more detailed and precise.⁵

Most of this data was not intentionally made available to the public. Wikileaks, an international online organization that publishes secret information from anonymous sources, published the “Afghanistan War Diary” (AWD) in 2010. The AWD contained US military communications. According to this Wikileaks publication, each report in the AWD attempts to answer the questions of “Who, When, Where, What, with whom, by what Means and Why” for each violent incident reported on. The AWD provides spatial information down to the exact location of each event. For this analysis, “Where” is not the only important information. Geography is touched by all of these questions, but will focus on “Who” and “Where” for this paper to address the two sub fields of Human and Physical Geography.⁶

5 "Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad." <http://www.issi.org.pk/aboutus.php?id=52014>).

6 WikiLeaks, "Afghanistan War Diary" 2010.

The AWD, unlike the “Afghanistan Reports,” is not limited to information on a provincial level. Instead, the AWD provides geographic information in the terms of latitude-longitude, military grid coordinates, and region. With this relatively precise information, and other information available about Afghanistan’s geography, it is possible to look for trends among the tens of thousands of violent events that took place in Afghanistan from 2005-2009. This can be done by correlating these conflict points with the country’s various geographic features, including but not limited to its cities, roads, waterways, language groups, and ethnic divisions.

Around 50% of the engagements for both the Soviet Conflict and Operation Enduring Freedom occurred in a relatively small area. For the Soviet Conflict, 50% took place in 5 out of the 29 provinces in Afghanistan: Nangarhar, Qandahar, Kabul, Paktia, and Parwan. During Operation Enduring Freedom, 49% of the violence occurred in 3 out of the 34 provinces: Qandahar, Helmand, and Kunar. Why would half of the incidents during these conflicts occur in such a relatively small area? Using the conflict data from the “Afghanistan Reports” and AWD for each conflict and other geographic data from a myriad of sources, it can be determined which geographic features effect most of these conflict hotspots or whether there are no trends at all.⁷

Identifying trends in these two conflicts is difficult enough, but there is no danger of misidentifying one prominent geographic feature as a trend, because it does not appear that any one geographic feature, be it physical or cultural, dominated the two conflicts. Instead it appears that the provinces containing a high percentage of the recorded

7 WikiLeaks, "Afghanistan War Diary" (2010). “Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

engagements are geographically distinct from the provinces around them. This is not a statement of a tendency or trend, instead it is a statement of fact. The data from these two sources proves that areas with high levels of conflict are geographically distinct from the provinces around them. However, identifying a province as “geographically distinct” does not say much. The distinctions that will be highlighted here are those that push their provinces into the geographic extreme. For example, these “geographic extremes” consist of provinces that are 100% mountainous rather than others that are 90% mountainous or provinces that 92% agricultural rather than 80%. And while analysis is confined to the provincial level during the Soviet Invasion due to lack of data, this is not the case during OEF.

For OEF, data is available on a more precise level and allows for not only analysis of conflict location to specific geographic features, but also on a district level, the administrative boundaries smaller than provinces. By determining the districts within each of the provinces that experience the most violent engagements, it can be determined whether or not of these province’s extreme geographic feature is prevalent in the areas actually the experiencing violence. For example, this method is able to show that not only is a highly violent province heavily irrigated, but the violence taking place is actually taking place in those irrigated areas. Unfortunately, because this same method cannot be applied to the Soviet Conflict and the districts existing at that time, it can only be used to support the claims made for half of the analyzed incidents.

While it is difficult to prove definite trends with this limited data, it can be shown that during these two similar conflicts, the provinces that experienced the most violence

had a geographic trait making them more conducive to conflict. Identifying these features should make it possible to better predict future trends of conflict.

Chapter 1: Geographic Survey

Afghanistan is highly diverse in respect to geography. The physical and human geography differs greatly throughout the country. This chapter will explore this geography to provide background and context to the historical narrative that will be presented in Chapter 2.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located in Central Asia. It borders six countries: Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Its longest border is shared with Pakistan, but it maintains strong cultural ties to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Afghanistan's geographic connection to China is the weakest of any of its neighbors. Their shared border is the shortest and the cross border cultural ties are almost nonexistent.⁸

Within the country itself, there are three distinct physical regions. The Central Highlands, the Northern Plains, and the Southwestern Plateau. The Highlands is the largest region of Afghanistan, covering about 70% of the territory. It contains the Hindu Kush mountain range that spread from the Eastern most area of the country to the Southwest. The mountains Hindu Kush grow taller and taller the farther you get into the country. The mountains serve as a dividing line for the two other regions of the country.⁹

North of the mountains are the Northern Plains. Taking up 15% of Afghanistan's land area, it is the most agriculturally rich region of the country. The Southwestern Plateau is a slight misnomer, because it is not confined to the Southwestern area of the country. Instead the Southwestern Plateau includes all regions that are not the Highlands

⁸ Eugene J. Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

⁹ Ibid

or the Plains. These infertile areas include the Herat-Ferah lowlands in the Northwest, the Helmand River valley in the Southwest, and the Rigestan Desert in the South. The Helmand River Valley is the only fertile area on the Southwestern Plateau. The varying fertility and climates in the three regions create three distinct types of vegetation in each region.¹⁰

In the Highlands temperatures are too low to support any kind of consistent growth. The very east of the Highlands contains Afghanistan's only forest composed of trees and plants of all kinds. Trees such as spruce, pine, and fir are plentiful in this temperate oasis. Smaller plants and bushes yield many types of nuts and berries. In the Southwestern Plateau, the Helmand River and associated irrigation enable Afghans to grow wheat, maize, cotton, and barley. The Helmand River Valley is one of the two main agriculture centers in the state. The Northern Plains, the second agriculture center is known for its very fertile soil. Rainfall is as scarce here as it is in the rest of the country, but irrigation and the Amu Dar'ya river enables the Plains region to produce an abundance of fruit and vegetable crops while the South focuses on grain and commercial crop production.¹¹ A main cause of this crop diversity is the varying temperatures throughout the country.

Average temperature varies greatly across the nation from the peaks of the Hindu Kush to the lowlands. During the summer temperatures in the lowlands can rise over 38 C every day, while areas of the Central highlands average temperatures closer to 10 C. During the winter, temperatures average -10 C in the highlands, but remain around positive 10 C in the lowlands. Afghanistan lacks large bodies of water (oceans or lakes)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

that could influence its average temperatures, and the low specific heat of the earth causes drastic differences between not only summer and winter temperatures but also those of day and night.¹²

The Hindu Kush Mountains divide the country into three separate zones and make it very difficult to travel between the regions due to the mountains divide in between them. The Primary Highway of Afghanistan is known as the Ring Road or Highway 1. IT stretches from Kabul to Kandahar to Herat to Maar-e-Sharif back to Kabul. This road serves as the primary means of transportation across the country. Originally constructed in the 1960s the road was heavily damaged in the Soviet Invasion. Reconstruction of the road became a core objective of the U.S. "hearts and minds" strategy. After rapid reconstruction, the Ring Road was officially reopened in 2003. Other road networks exist in the country but all lack the long term quality of Highway 1 and consists mainly of dirt tracks and mountain paths. The mountain road network has not been paved and a majority of mountain roads are not wide enough to accommodate modern vehicles.¹³

Traveling from one side of the mountains to the other, especially north/south through the Hindu Kush, can be incredibly tricky. The Salang Pass, which is now complemented by the Salang Tunnel, is the main route from Southern Afghanistan to the North Plains. Located north of Kabul, it has been a strategic point in all military operations in Afghanistan. Without the Salang Tunnel, the only roads connecting Kabul to northern Afghanistan would have to pass through Pakistan. Tense relations with Pakistan make this option more and more unreliable. Pakistan and Afghanistan are also

¹² Ibid C-5, Figures 12.6

¹³ "Asian Development Bank: Afghanistan 'Ring Road's' Missing Link to be constructed." M2 Presswire (-10-03, 2007), 1.

divided by a mountain range. The Khyber Pass is the easiest route between the two countries and is currently in control of Pakistan.¹⁴

Until the past decade, roads were the only transportation means in the country. The rivers are not necessarily navigable and railroads did not exist. Only recent infrastructure projects follow the U.S. invasion in 2001 have begun railway construction. China is currently constructing a railroad to export minerals through Pakistan and Iran has constructed a rail between Kwacha and Herat in western Afghanistan. A rail line is also being constructed along the leg of the Ring Road from Mazar-e-Sherif to Termez at the Uzbek border. The physical diversity of Afghanistan distinguishes it from all other nations, but it is in the human geography that Afghanistan proves its true diversity.¹⁵

According to the United Nations, there are over 40 native languages in Afghanistan. These groups' different language groups serve to simultaneously divide and unite the country by cutting it off from other nations, but also creating deep divisions between the different groups within the country. The only common language for the whole country is Arabic. Arabic is the primary language of Islam. The teachings of Allah were passed to the Prophet Mohammed in Arabic, and to study the Qur'an in its purest form, it must be done in Arabic. All worship services are held in Arabic, but once those services, end, few continue to speak Arabic in their daily lives. Even though Arabic is widely known in Afghanistan, it is not one of the country's two national languages.¹⁶

Pashto and Dari are the two official languages. Pashto is the language of the Pashtun people, the majority ethnic group in the country. However, despite that fact, it is

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

¹⁶ Ibid

the not the most wide spoken of the two. Pashto is an Indo-European language spoken by 35% of the population all primarily from the Pashtun ethnicity. Dari, the other official language of Afghanistan, is not confined to a single ethnic group. Tajiks, Hazara, and Aimaq peoples are all primarily Dari speakers, and together outnumber the Pashto speakers. While these are the primary languages spoken in Afghanistan, smaller language groups remain significant.¹⁷

Nuristani, another Indo-European language, is spoken exclusively by a small ethnic group of the same name. The language, like the ethnic group, is sometimes referred to as Karifi meaning infidel or non-believer because the people were one of the largest non-Muslim groups in the country until a recent forced conversion. The Turkik ethnic groups of the north and far western regions of the country all speaker different dialects of Turkik languages. The Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz people all speak mutually unintelligible dialects that fall under this umbrella. The Baloch people of southern Afghanistan speak their own Kurdish dialect, and the Brahui speak a Dravidian dialect that is derived from Tamil. Not only are these dialects unintelligible to each other, they come from completely different linguistic families. The language barriers within Afghanistan contribute to a greater socio-diversity detract from the concept of Afghan nationalism.¹⁸

Afghan nationalism may not be consistent, but strong identification with your personal ethnic group is very common in Afghanistan. The country is composed of many

17 Olaf Caroe, "The Pathans," *Asian Review* 57 (-01-01, 1961), 3-17.

18 Julius Cavendish, "First, Take Nuristan: The Taliban's New Afghan Plan, Time2011" Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

ethnic groups of varying ancestries, languages, and traditions. The differences between these groups have often been assumed to be a primary reason for prolonged conflict in the region. These ethnic groups are not confined by political boundaries on the provincial or national level. As such, these ethnic groups are a large part of the connection between Afghanistan and its neighbors.¹⁹

The Pashtun are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and have dominated it politically and culturally since the 18th Century. Both the Taliban and PDPA were composed primarily of ethnic Pashtuns. Before the creation of the Afghani nation-state, the Pashtun were referred to simply as Afghanis. The Pashtun traditionally live in a large swatch of territory on the southern side of the Hindu Kush spanning from Pakistan to Iraq.²⁰

The larger Pashtun group, composed of almost 17 million people, can be divided into smaller segments. First, there are the three main groups of Pashtun Afghanis. The first is the Durrani Pashtun. The Durrani tribes are sedentary, residing mostly in the South of Afghanistan, north of Kandahar. The Durrani have been the dominant tribe of Pashtun for hundreds of years, providing the ruling class from 1749-1978. Apart from the Durrani is the Ghilzai tribes that are primarily nomadic in the eastern part of the country. All Pashtun that do not belong to the Durrani or Ghilzai do not identify as part of a larger cultural group.²¹

¹⁹ Caroe, *The Pathans*, Vol. 57, 1961), 3-17.

²⁰ A. Giustozzi, "Ethnic Groups and Political Mobilization in Afghanistan," *Revista De Estudios Sociales* (Bogotá, Colombia), no. 37 (-12-01, 2010), 30-45.

²¹ Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

All Pashtun tribes (Durrani, Ghilzai, or non-identifying) associate with a *khel*, or subtribe. These subtribes are not as significant as the next cultural subunit, the *khol*. The *khol* is made up of one's extended family and other local clans. Pashtun rarely identify as a part of the larger ethnic group. Instead allegiance stops at the tribal level. Durrani Pashtun do not feel connect or obligated to Ghilzai or members of other tribes. These divisions have prevented the Pashtun from effectively controlling the nation. They are unable to soothe tensions among their own ethnicity let alone with other groups.²²

One unifying trait of the Pashtun is their religion. The Pashtun are primarily Sunni Muslims. They are believed to be more conservative relative to Afghani Sunni from other ethnic groups. Apart from the unifying presence of Islam, the Pashtun people are united by the *Pashtunwali*, the Pashtun code of conduct. This code is extensive, having been compiled from many different tribal codes, but has overarching themes. These include:

1. Hospitality to guests
2. Right to asylum
3. Blood revenge
4. Bravery
5. Manhood
6. Persistence
7. Steadfastness
8. Righteousness
9. Defense of property

²² Giustozzi, "Ethnic Groups and Political Mobilization in Afghanistan." Decanatura de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de los Andes, 2010), 30-45.

10. Defense of the honor of Women²³

Due to the historic Pashtun dominance of the Afghan government, the Pashtunwali had a significant influence on the development of the Afghanistan legal code prior to the Soviet invasion. After the rise of the Taliban, the relevance of the Pashtunwali to the secular legal system is even clearer. Along with the specific laws, the traditional Pashtun method of governance has had a significant impact on Afghanistan. The smaller Afghani clan is governed by a *Jirga*, or tribal assembly. According to Syed Abdule Quddus, author of *The Pathans*, an in-depth look into Pashtun culture in Pakistan, the Jirga system is the closest thing the modern world has to Athenian Democracy. The Jirga system would later be used to form the Loya Jirgas that appointed Karzai and write the new Constitution in 2003.²⁴

Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. They are divided up throughout the country, but are not as culturally fragmented as the Pashtun. Tajiks are Dari speaking Sunni Muslims. Tajiks also have very close ties to the Tajik majority nation of Tajikistan. Tajiks are located in both the northeastern part of Afghanistan as well as in pockets of the central and western regions.²⁵

Tajiks played an important role in the opposition to the Taliban and were a vital part of the Northern Alliance. In recent years, Afghani Tajiks have believed it as their

²³ Caroe, *The Pathans*, Vol. 57, 1961), 3-17.

²⁴ Caroe, *The Pathans*, Vol. 57, 1961), 3-17.

²⁵ Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

time to take control of the country. Tajiks make up about 25% of the population of Afghanistan, but share a language with more than 50%.²⁶

The Hazara are the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, making up slightly less than 10% of the country's population. They are primarily a pastoral people living in the central region of Afghanistan known as the Hazarijat. The primary language of the Hazara is Dari, similar to the Tajiks. Just as the Pashtun have ruled Afghanistan for 200 years, the Hazara have been politically dominated for this amount of time.²⁷

Traditionally the Hazara have very little say in government or politics. Hazara as a whole are traditionally under-educated and work the jobs lowest on the rungs of the social ladder. Hazara are farmers and shepherds in the central highlands. The harsh climate of the high lands does not make it easy to live a subsistence lifestyle, but the Hazara have managed for centuries.²⁸

Despite a linguistic commonality with the Dari speaking Tajiks, most of the Hazara are Shi'ite Muslims. This difference distinguishes them as even more of a minority in Afghanistan. The Tajiks also lack the numbers to compete with the Pashtun, but their religious beliefs give them a common ground uniting them as a dominating Sunni force that the Hazara have no hope to outpace.²⁹

26 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

27 Giustozzi, "Ethnic Groups and Political Mobilization in Afghanistan." *Decanatura de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de los Andes*, 2010), 30-45."

28 Ibid

29 Klaus Ferdinand, "Ethnographical Notes on Chahar Aimaq, Hazara and Moghol," *Acta Orientalia* (København) 28 (-01-01, 1964), 175-203.; Grant Farr, "Hazara," in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Philip Mattar, 2nd ed. ed., Vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 1014-1015.

The Hazara have been persecuted by the Pashtun for centuries. This persecution is traditionally attributed to the Sunnite/Shi'ite divide, but some maintain that this persecution was present before the introduction of Islam into Central Asia. Most recently the Hazara were dominated by the Taliban, who have been accused of atrocious acts towards the Hazara including the slaughter of hundreds of Shi'ite in one Hazara village in 1998. This particular event led to rising tensions between Iran and the Taliban regime.³⁰

The Hazara also served as an integral part of the Northern Alliance. Against the Taliban, they allied themselves with the Tajiks and other ethnic groups who are primarily located north of the Hindu Kush. They were one of the last groups maintaining resistance to the Taliban tyranny, but now that a new regime has taken power they find themselves treated slightly better than before. While Tajiks rose to powerful positions in the new government and Afghan National Army, the Hazara are still discriminated against by many.³¹

The Nuristani occupy a very small area of Eastern Afghanistan along the Pakistani border known as Nuristan. Until the late 19th Century this land was known as Karifistan, which loosely translates to "Land of non-believers". Until they were conquered by the Khans, the natives of Karifistan practiced a Vedic religion reminiscent of Indian and Iranian polytheistic traditions. This tradition continues to this day through

30 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

31 Farr, Hazara, ed. Mattar, 2nd ed. ed., Vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 1014-1015.

modern day animism, polytheism and mysticism. In recent years, Nuristan has proved to be an area of frequent conflict.³²

After the Soviet Invasion in 1979, a Nuristani general ordered his people to rise up against the Soviet presence and they did just that. In many ways, the Mujihadeen began in Nuristan and grew out westward. During the early years of Operation Enduring Freedom Nuristan was, once again, a central location of Afghan resistance. In 2011, Qari Ziaur Rahman, a Taliban leader, claimed that any trouble in Nuristan is trouble for the central government of Afghanistan.³³

The Aimaq people of western Afghanistan are the only ethnic group of Afghanistan to show outward signs of Mongolian ancestry. The Aimaq are a nomadic people residing primarily in a small region north of Herat. There are less than 1 million Aimaq in Afghanistan, but the number that self-identify as Aimaq are even fewer. Only one subset of Aimaq, with heavy mongoloid features and yurt like living quarters self-identify as Aimaq. The remainder view themselves as a part of the Hazara people. Unlike the Hazara, the Aimaq are Sunni Muslim, similar to the Pashtun and Tajik ethnicities. The Aimaq share the Dari language with the Tajik and Hazara, but it is laced with borrowed Turkic and Mongol words.³⁴

The Turkmen and Uzbek peoples of Northern Afghanistan both speak Turkic languages, as opposed to the Indo-European of the Pashtun. They have more in common with their ethnic counterparts in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan than they do with other

32 Cavendish, "First, Take Nuristan: The Taliban's New Afghan Plan", 2011).

33 Ibid.

34 *Ferdinand, Ethnographical Notes on Chahar Aimaq, Hazara and Moghol*, Vol. 28 Munksgaard [etc., 1964), 175-203.

ethnic groups in Afghanistan. These Turkiks are Sunni Muslims. This gives them some common ground with the Tajiks and Pashtuns, but their populations are so small that they are traditionally inconsequential in government.³⁵

The Baloch live in the Southern region of Afghanistan while also inhabiting parts of Iran and Pakistan. The Baloch number around 250,000 in Afghanistan (8 million globally) and are predominantly Sunni Muslim. The Baloch speak a distinct dialect that is very similar to Kurdish. Just like the like the Kurdish peoples of other nations, the Baloch have had trouble with the central government of the state they are living in.³⁶

Similar to the Kurds of other nations, the Baloch of Afghanistan and Pakistan have advocated for their own nation-state. In the case of the Baloch, this I known as Balochistan. Balochistan is currently a province of southwestern Pakistan. An insurgency known as the Baloch Liberation Army has been present in this region since the beginning of the 20th century. It is not a goal of the BLA to bring parts of Afghanistan into Balochistan, but the Baloch of Afghanistan potentially harbor more attachment for a region outside of their own nation than they do for Afghanistan. The Baloch people of Afghanistan are relatively uninterested in Afghan politics, but their role as stakeholders cannot be ignored.³⁷

The Brahui are very closely connected to the Baloch people, separated by one distinction. The Brahui speak a dialect that derives from Dravidian, a language from Southern India. Aside from this linguistic difference, the Brahui are completely immersed

³⁵ Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

³⁶ Carina Jahani, Agnes Korn and Paul Brian Titus, *The Baloch and Others: Linguistic, Historical and Socio- Political Perspectives on Pluralism in Balochistan* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2008), 399.

³⁷ Ibid

in Baloch culture. They are also Sunni Muslim and found primarily in Balochistan, Pakistan. Groups of Brahui have migrated with larger groups of Baloch into Afghanistan and Iran. The Brahui number under 2.5 million globally, with a majority of that number living in Pakistan. The presence of Brahui does not have a large impact on Afghanistan politics other than that there is one more group that the central government has to try and please.

More than 99% of Afghanistan's citizens identify as Muslim. The teachings of Mohammed entered Afghanistan over 1,200 years ago, and have been shaped by the rise and fall of dynasties since then. Islam in Afghanistan is different than that of other nations, but also Islam within Afghanistan is not uniform. Soon after the death of the Prophet, Islam divided into two sects that are both present in modern Afghanistan.³⁸

Sunni Muslims make up 85% of the Muslim population in Afghanistan. After the death of Mohammed, the Sunni population believed in selecting a successor (caliph) from a deserving member of the community. Sunni Muslims make up 90% of the world's Muslim population and are generally considered to be less conservative than other branches of Islam.³⁹

However, in Afghanistan this generalization does not hold. Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan made up a majority of the PDPA and the Taliban and were considered to be conservative. This does not align with the traditional view of Sunni Muslims and did created some distance between Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan. The less conservative

38 Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

39 Ibid

Sunnites in Afghanistan did not support the Taliban and joined with the Northern Alliance in opposition.⁴⁰

Shia Muslims in Afghanistan are more than 14% of the Muslim population. After the death of Mohammed, Shia Muslims believed that the successor of Mohammed should be a direct descendent of the prophet. But the Shi'ite Islam is not completely united.⁴¹

Shia Muslims are divided into two further sects, Twelvers and Seveners. Twelver Shi'ites believe that there were 12 decedents of Mohammed before the line came to an end with the disappearance of a child. Sevenser Shi'ites believe that there were only seven because they did not support his successor. There are citizens of Afghanistan that are not Muslim. There are very small Christian, Sikh and Hindu communities in areas of the country. Before the rule of the Taliban there was a small Jewish community, but it has since disbanded. All members of this community, except for one, fled to Israel. As of 2005 there appeared to be only one Jewish man living in all of Afghanistan.⁴²

23.5% of Afghanistan's population lives in an urban environment. There are five large urban centers in Afghanistan and all developed off the trade resulting from Afghanistan's central location, agriculture, and access to water.(Palka 2004)

Kabul (1.5 million) is not only the Capital City, but also the country's largest city. Located in the Central Province of Kabul, the city was built in a triangle shaped valley near the Kabul River. The city contains a large Pashtun citizenry, but has a majority of

40 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

41 Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

42 Ibid

Dari speaker, and as existed for more than 3,500 years. Highway 1 runs through Kabul and connects it to other Ring Road cities and the rest of the country.⁴³

Kandahar (225,000), Afghanistan's second largest city, is known as the cross road city. Located in the southeastern Kandahar province, this city lacks the manufacturing capacity of Kabul. Its location on roads between Kabul and Heart that also lead to Iran or Pakistan have built the city up into a major commercial center. Despite its commercial status, Kandahar remains rather bucolic and entirely reliant on local agriculture.⁴⁴

Herat (180,000) serves as the economic center for western Afghanistan. Herat is the closest urban center to the Iranian border and lies in the middle of Afghanistan's most fertile land. The area surrounding Herat is the most densely populated farmland in Afghanistan. Herat's population is distinct from the other urban centers of the country. Herat contains mostly Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek Afghanis as opposed to the Pashtun, Aimaq or Dari speakers that inhabit other cities.⁴⁵

Mazar –I Sharif (130,000) is the only urban center north of the Hindu Kush. The name literally translates to 'tomb of the saint,' in honor of the nephew who is supposedly buried in the city. The city is very important to Sunni Muslims, but Shia Muslims do not view it as a religious sanctuary. Apart from its religious import, Mazar-i Sharif is well known for its grain and cotton production.⁴⁶

Jalalabad (60,000) lies on the Kabul River less than 200 km from the capital city and less than 100 km from the Pakistani border. Jalalabad is worth noting because of its

43 Ibid

44 Ibid

45 Ibid

46 Ibid

population. Jalalabad is the largest city that is primarily ethnic Pashtun and Pashto speaking. Pashtuns are by far the largest ethnic group in the country, but they do not typically overwhelm in urban areas, maintaining traditional lifestyles in rural areas.⁴⁷

Afghanistan's geography, both physical and cultural, make no two places in the country alike. There are dozens of language and ethnic groups and the different terrains. These make daily life in various areas of the country completely different. These factors will play a key role in not only the history of Afghanistan, but more specifically in the military engagements that take place there. However, because the geography of Afghanistan is so varied, it is unlikely that any one factor is having a dominant effect. Instead, it will need to be determined what is most geographically significant about the regions which experienced the most of these violent engagements.

⁴⁷ Ibid

Chapter 2: Historical Narrative

Afghanistan has been the scene of conflict for a better part of the 20th and all of the 21st centuries. A majority of modern Afghans have known only a few years of peace in their entire lifetimes. An understanding of this sequence of conflict is crucial to an understanding of what role Afghanistan's geography has played in shaping this conflict. This chapter will serve as a brief survey of conflict in Afghanistan focusing on the period from the Soviet Invasion in 1979 to the present. The purpose is to demonstrate the interaction between Afghanistan's people and its geography.

Throughout its history, the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan have shown a strong independent spirit. This continues to this day. Various empires sought control over the land now known as Afghanistan, but no one ruler was able to conquer the entire area. Neither Darius and the Persians, nor Alexander and the Macedonians, nor Genghis Khan and the Mongols was able to control the whole territory of present day Afghanistan. This trend has never truly been broken. While the modern nation state of Afghanistan has, in theory, controlled the entire area for decades, the amount of control it has exhibited over some areas was and is problematic. The modern Afghan state itself was formed in response to other, greater, powers fighting for dominance in Central Asia during the 19th Century.⁴⁸

Both the Russian and the British Empires sought to expand into Central Asia in the 19th century and found themselves at odds in Afghanistan. When Russia attempted to annex Herat in 1863, Britain used its political and military influence to counter Russian expansion into Afghanistan. This resulted in the first Anglo-Afghan war. This conflict,

48 Hynek and Marton, *State building in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011), 285.

and the ones following, are not going to be evaluated in detail in this work, but they cannot go without mention. The first Anglo-Afghan war had no tangible or measurable result. “After four years of disaster, both in honor, material, and personnel, the British left Afghanistan as they found it, in tribal chaos.”⁴⁹

Following this war, Russian and British attempts to control Afghanistan continued in earnest. This resulted in the also inconclusive Second Anglo-Afghan War, and the establishment of ineffective treaties between the British and the Russians. These conflicts led to an official demarcation of Afghanistan’s borders in 1896, when a cartographic line was finally drawn to separate Afghanistan from Northwest British India, modern day Pakistan. This demarcation, dividing the ethnic Pashtuns between two nations, proved ill advised. For the most part, however, in the period before World War I, Afghanistan served as a boxing ring for the two imperial powers.⁵⁰

During World War I, Afghanistan was ruled by Habibullah Rahman, a Pashtun member of the Afghan royal family, but the strong British influence inhibited Afghanistan from exercising universal control over its foreign affairs. Despite the British presence, Habibullah managed to maintain Afghani neutrality during the Great War. After Habibullah’s murder in 1919, his son, Amanullah came to power. Amanullah was a staunch nationalist and disapproved of British control of any part of Afghanistan. Two months after taking the throne, the Amir instigated the Third Anglo-Afghan war which lasted for only one month due to post World War I exhaustion but, unlike earlier wars, it resulted in a decisive event. The Treaty of Rawalpindi freed Afghanistan to conduct its

49 Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

50 Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

own foreign affairs. With this step, Afghanistan became a fully independent state in 1919.⁵¹

During the period between the World Wars, Afghanistan occupied a unique position as the only nation to support Muslim nationalists resisting Soviet advances. Amanullah viewed himself as a leader of a potential Caliphate, encompassing all of the Middle East and Central Asia.⁵² Despite the numerous ethnic groups in Afghanistan, all are a large majority Muslim groups by this point in history.⁵³ However, these dreams were crushed by the Soviet annexation of Khiva and Bukhara, two emirates that declared independence from the USSR, but were subsequently reconquered. With the demise of his Caliphate dream, Amanullah turned his focus inward, and promoted rapid modernization in Afghanistan. To his dismay, his push for Westernization was not appreciated by the entire Afghanistan populace.^{54 55}

Amanullah's attempts to modernize, and simultaneously westernize, Afghanistan alienated many rural communities. Resentment towards the central government in Kabul reached a boiling point in the northern regions of the country which is made up of primarily Tajik ethnic groups and is separated from the south by the Hindu Kush mountain range. This will prove to be a trend in the following decades. Habibullah Kalakani, a warlord in the area north of Kabul and ethnic Tajik, drove Amanullah from

51 Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History: Monarchy, Despotism Or Democracy?* The Problems of Governance in the Muslim Tradition (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

52 Goodson, Larry P. *Afghanistan 's Endless War : State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001.

53 Nuristan Conversion

54 Rasanayagam, Angelo. *Afghanistan : a Modern History : Monarchy, Despotism or Democracy?* The Problems of Governance in the Muslim Tradition. London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003.

55 Malet 160 Malet, David. *Foreign Fighters : Transnational Identity in Civic Conflicts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

the throne only to be ousted by a Pashtun army less than a year later. This army was led by Mohammad Nadir Shah. Nadir Shah then established the dynasty that would rule Afghanistan from 1929 to 1973. Tensions between the northern and southern regions were not a new phenomenon and will be relevant again during the Soviet Invasion, the Civil War, and OEF when the North operates in opposition to the rest of the country.⁵⁶

Afghanistan's role in World War II was very limited. Zahir Shah, son of Nadir Shah, declared Afghanistan neutrality in 1940. After the end of the war in 1945, King Zahir appointed his cousin, Mohammed Daoud Khan, to the role of Prime Minister. In effect, Zahir gave Daoud complete control and responsibility in running the state. Daoud encouraged very close ties with the USSR. During his time as Prime Minister, Daoud extended a previously established treaty of nonaggression and friendship and created very favorable trade relationships for Afghanistan with the USSR. Many considered Daoud's time a golden age. Unfortunately, it was cut short when his foreign relations skills failed him in his dealings with Pakistan, Afghanistan's neighbor to the east that would not be ignored.⁵⁷

While relations with the USSR continued to grow stronger, Daoud's relations with Pakistan were seriously strained from 1953-63. Up to this point, because of the shared Pashtun identity between many Pakistani and Afghani citizens, Afghanistan had been offering citizenship to any Pakistani national who wanted residency in Afghanistan. Afghanistan discontinued its offer of residency to any Pakistan national who wanted to

⁵⁶ Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History: Monarchy, Despotism Or Democracy?* The Problems of Governance in the Muslim Tradition (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

⁵⁷ Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

move across the border increasing the discord between the two nations. There were also skirmishes between Afghan and Pakistan forces on both sides of the border in 1960. Tensions rose so high that embassies and consulates in both countries were closed. Daoud's inability to resolve the conflicts resulted in him stepping down from his position of Prime Minister in 1963. Within months of his resignation, King Zahir was able to reopen communications with Pakistan and the border was open once again.⁵⁸

After ousting Daoud from his role as Prime Minister, King Zahir praised Mohammed Yousef, a minor bureaucrat, to the post. Yousef's tenure was short lived, but he did assist in the writing of a new constitution for the Afghanistan Government. The 1964 Constitution was in effect for little over 10 years, but did have one interesting feature. Members of the royal family were legally no longer allowed to serve as Prime Minister, as a member of Parliament, or as a member of the Supreme Court. King Zahir stated that it was time for the educated elite of Afghanistan to come into their own and to serve as the leaders of Afghanistan.⁵⁹

The educated elite of Afghanistan were ready to answer King Zahir's call and the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) quickly began to take shape under Nu Mohammed Taraki and Babrak Karmal. This communist party gained popularity with the university students in Kabul. However, in 1967, the two communist leaders divided it into two hostile factions: The Khalqis under Taraki and the Parchamis

58 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264. .42

59 Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985)46.

under Babrak.⁶⁰ Initially the divide between the two groups had no geographic basis, but it prevented the party from being effective for the next decade despite the members being primarily from the same ethnic group. In the meantime, Daoud Kahn returned to the political scene in an almost bloodless coup resulting in the exile of King Zahir and the establishment of the Afghanistan Republic.⁶¹

The Kremlin was originally pleased with the outcome of Daoud's coup. Daoud had always supported a closer relationship with the USSR and the Soviets had no reason to believe it would be any different this time around. The Soviets assumed that Daoud would function primarily as a figure head for a Soviet puppet government. What they did not take into account was how much Daoud had changed since his first decade in power. After gaining control of the government, Daoud forced over 150 Parchami educated youth into the countryside to prevent them from opposing his rule; distributing politically active people from centralized urban locations to the less hostile rural environments. He also removed many leftist advocates from their government positions. These moves did not go over any better with local leftists than it did with Soviets and also enabled future resistance groups to build a rural presence with the aid of the distributed Parchami youth.⁶²

In reaction to Daoud's domestic and foreign policies, the Parchami and Khalq factions reunited to reform the PDPA. After the assassination of Mir Akbar Khyber, a

60 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264. 52

61 Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.48-52.

62 Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

strong Parchami advocate of the PDPA, the party reacted by blaming the American CIA. The PDPA took to the streets and held a massive demonstration of over 10,000 people. Daoud feared the power of this gathering and moved to arrest leftist PDPA leaders. In hindsight, Daoud either moved too early or did not move swiftly enough – because his attempt to undermine the power of the PDPA resulted in his own death one day later. The PDPA, who came to power with avid members located throughout the country rather than just in the cities, were firm supporters of the Soviets and it was understood by all that the Soviet influence in the country would begin growing at an exponential rate.⁶³

While it seemed at first that the PDPA power was equally divided between the Khalq and Parchami, the balance soon shifted in favor of Taqari and the Khalq. Parchami officers were removed from their positions and Taqari was in full control as Prime Minister. This sort of infighting among traditional Pashtun communities was never uncommon, and it is of no surprise that it drifted to the political scene. However, Taqari's radical policies soon lost him the support of the rest of the PDPA. These policies included replacing the green national flag with a red one (green being a traditional color of Islam), land reforms, credit reforms, marriage reforms, and mandatory education for both sexes. The Parchami were forced out of the PDPA and many did not like that his policies were drifting away from traditional Islamic practices. As unrest turned towards potential rebellion, it is no surprise that the USSR began supporting Babrak and the Parchami.⁶⁴

In response to waning Khalq popularity, Taraki made a decision to nominally transfer the head of state position to Habibullah Amin, a fellow Kalq. Taraki hoped to use

⁶³ Ibid. 66

⁶⁴ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War :State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.⁵⁶

Amin as a scapegoat and blame the unpopular ties with the Soviets on the new premier. Taraki attempted to have Amin assassinated, but it resulted in his own arrest and death in the autumn of 1979. The death of Taraki at the hands of another Kalq further subdivided the PDPA.⁶⁵

Amin's actions following the death of Taraki did not fully satisfy Soviet wishes. With growing rumors of cooperation with Iran and Pakistan, and more and more Western aid flowing into the country, the Soviets realized that it was time to act. In late-December 1979, Soviet forces entered Afghanistan and assassinated Amin. By the end of the calendar year, Amin and his entourage were completely eradicated. While many of Amin's policies had been of questionable morality and legality, it cannot be denied that Amin resisted Soviet control over Afghanistan. The USSR recognized that Amin would not compromise and decided to eliminate him and replace him with a familiar face in Afghanistan politics: Babrak Karmal, founder of the PDPA and leader of the Parchami faction. Karmal found himself at the helm of a country naturally divided physically and culturally and even further divided by Daoud's forced diaspora of the Parchami. Karmal ultimately failed to unite the country, and the increased Soviet presence only added to the tension and the determination of resistance movements.⁶⁶

Despite their familiarity with Babrak, the Afghan population knew that his regime was a puppet government for the Soviets. The nationwide unrest with the Kalq rule under Taraki and Amin now shifted to disapproval of the Soviet supported Parchami. Violent

⁶⁵ Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History: Monarchy, Despotism Or Democracy?* The Problems of Governance in the Muslim Tradition (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

⁶⁶ David Malet, *Foreign Fighters :Transnational Identity in Civic Conflicts*, 2013).161}} *
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resistance first developed in Nuristan, at this time not a province but a region of northern Kunar Province, but the heaviest fighting actually took place in 5 different provinces. In point of fact, the Soviets never gained full control Nuristan or Hazarajat. Violent uprisings in the cities of Qandahar, Herat, and Jalalabad resulted in periods of time with no government control. *Mujihadeen*, which means Holy Warrior and, was the term used to describe the resistance to the Soviet invasion. They successfully utilized guerilla tactics out of the North Eastern Hindu Kush mountains. At one point the Mujihadeen controlled 75% of the rural territory of Afghanistan. From 1981-1983, the urban and rural areas were under the control of the Soviet friendly government and Mujihadeen respectively.⁶⁷

In 1983, the Soviets shifted their military tactics to focus more on air power. Soviet forces began bombing villages and depopulating areas that supported the Mujihadeen. From 1984-1986, the Soviets supplemented this air strategy with large scale ground offensives, especially in Panjshir Valley, Herat, and Qandahar. Despite the statistical success of these raids (Afghani casualties far outweighed Soviet losses) it is difficult to describe any of these operations as successful; these operations were completely ineffective in eradicating the resistance to Soviet power in Afghanistan. Instead it mostly likely contributed to its vigor.⁶⁸

Immediately after its formation, the Mujihadeen began receiving aid from the United States. The U.S. provided weapons, technology, and supplies to the Mujihadeen in their efforts to stifle the growth of the Soviet Union. Most of this aid came through the

⁶⁷ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.⁶⁷

⁶⁸ Ibid. 67.

U.S. CIA. After years of failed attempts to expel the Soviet presence by the Mujihadeen, the U.S. decided to increase the fire power of those they assisted. In 1986, the US began sending FIM-92 missiles, also known as Stingers, to Afghanistan. The Stinger is a portable surface to air missile. After the introduction of this weapon, Mujihadeen resistance shifted to more roadside attacks, and Parwan Province, home to the Salang Tunnel, began experiencing more military engagements.⁶⁹

By 1986 the Soviets were looking for a new strategy to suppress opposition in Afghanistan. They decided to replace Babrak with a pure Pashtun, Mohammad Najibullah, a distant relative of the formerly royal Amanullah line and former chief of the Afghanistan Secret Police. Najibullah attempted to declare a ceasefire in 1987, but to no avail. He then tried to form a “National reconciliation” government, only to fail, just as Babrak had before him.⁷⁰

Similar to the plight of the national government, the resistance found itself unable to unify into one force. This resulted in a balance between the two splintered resistance groups, neither of which had control over the country, controlled by different ethnic groups (Tajiks and Pashtun). Lack of progress and increased American pressure led to the Soviets agreeing to leave the nation over the next nine months on April 14, 1988. Fighting continued for the remainder of the year, but Soviet troops were officially

69 . “Afghanistan Report, Vol. 14-42 (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, 1984-1987).

70 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.65.

withdrawn from Afghanistan by February of 1989, leaving Najibullah with little political or military support to retain his power.⁷¹

The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan did not end the conflict, but simply shifted it from a conflict between an invading force and a resistance force, to a full-fledged Civil War. The Mujihadeen did not back down after Soviet forces withdrew. They viewed the Najibullah regime as invalid. After all, it had been put in place by the Soviets. The Mujihadeen sought control just as fervently as they had before 1989. Soviet supplies, missiles and other weapons were airlifted to Najibullah and enabled the National Military to survive until April of 1992. The Mujihadeen attempted to shift from guerilla tactics to traditional warfare immediately after the Soviets forces evacuated out of the country, but they moved too early and were soundly defeated by Najibullah. This and the lack of a unified front on behalf of the Mujihadeen prevented the resistance forces from quickly replacing the communist government established by the Soviets.⁷²

In early 1991, the American and Soviet superpowers mutually agreed to cut off all military aid to Afghanistan by the beginning of 1992. Along with reduced military aid, the USSR began to tighten its restrictions on economic aid to the country. However, these aid restrictions were merely a symptom of a larger problem: the demise of the USSR. With Gorbachev's resignation in December of 1991, the question of whether Najibullah's government would fall became a question of when Najibullah's government would fall.⁷³

71 Ibid. 67-69

72 Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

73 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

After a coup attempt in February of 1992, Najibullah agreed to step aside in favor of an UN-sponsored multiparty interim government. The interim government was eventually led by Buhanuddin Rabbani, one of the earliest leaders of the Mujihadeen. It was intended that Rabbani would step down in October 1992, either for national elections or to allow a representative body to assume power. However, as was often the case, Rabbani refused to step down and was elected president by a body of his supporters in December 1992.⁷⁴

Rabbani's chief rival, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of a Pashtun dominated party, convened a council of party leaders in Islamabad and it was decided that Rabbani would be permitted to serve out his term. Hekmatyar would serve as prime minister and the military would be turned over to sixteen member council. Hekmatyar was sworn in as prime minister in June 1992, but never convened a single cabinet meeting. Despite the new agreement, violence between the different Mujihadeen groups continued, especially in Northern Afghanistan. Hekmatyar focused on shelling Kabul with his own forces rather than serving as prime minister.⁷⁵

The competition within Kabul between 1992 and 1994 caused serious divisions in the city itself. Different parties of the Mujihadeen controlled different areas of the city. Kabul had been relatively untouched by the previous conflicts, but now it was center stage. Northern minorities controlled the city center and northeastern quarter and Pashtuns controlled the high ground and suburbs surrounding Kabul. Other cities throughout the country did not experience the internal division of Kabul, but all of the cities were ruled by various groups separate from the national government. This

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 72.

fragmentation set the perfect stage for the rise of a new power that could promise stability and an end to the war. The Taliban was ready to answer this call.⁷⁶

The Taliban, a group of religious intellectuals focusing on Muslim fundamentalism, rose in the southeast attempting to stabilize the local region. However, Taliban culture led them try and conquer the entire country. By March 1995, the Taliban controlled more than 1/3 of Afghanistan. The Taliban was briefly pushed back from the area surrounding Kabul, allowing the city to exit siege mode for the first time in years. The Taliban was finally able to take the capital in September 1996. At this point, the Taliban controlled Kabul and the surrounding area, but found themselves unable to control the Salang Tunnel, the main connection between the southern and northern regions of the country. In fact, the tunnel had been blasted shut by the opposition in late 1996. It was not until May of 1997 that they were able to reopen the tunnel and push forward.

At this point, a popular uprising against the Taliban incursion on their own territory led to a significant defeat for Taliban forces in years, losing over 4000 troops, but this loss would not deter the Taliban from its ultimate goal.⁷⁷

In 1998 the Taliban pushed eastward again, taking Afghanistan town by town. It was reported that more than 8000 noncombatants were killed in the two cities of Siberghan and Maza-i-Sharif. With the fall of these two cities, Autumn of 1998 saw the Taliban controlling over 90% of Afghanistan with only one major opponent named Ahmad Shah Massoud in northern Afghanistan. The situation in the northern territory

⁷⁶ Ibid. 75.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 77-78

remained fluid for several years to come. Those still resisting in the north, mostly Tajiks, Uzbeks and other Pashtuns, united under Massoud into the Northern Alliance. They had one goal, to push back the Taliban before fighting each other again. This resistance was the main opposition to the Taliban and were the reason the Taliban never had control of the entire nation.

The opposition in the north under Massoud refused to relinquish control of the plains north of Kabul. These plains were the only area south of the Hindu Kush the north had immediate access to via the Salang Tunnel. The north was continually pushing back and forth with the Taliban government in Kabul. During this time, the Taliban implemented *sharia* law throughout the entire country. This unilateral proclamation failed to account for the different tribal and legal systems throughout the country and generated more resentment of the Taliban regime. While sharia law would fit naturally into legal systems of some groups, others found it oppressive and strange. Some groups that still practiced ancient religions alongside Islam found their beliefs outlawed and punishable by death.⁷⁸

Ethnic crimes committed by the Taliban and the drastically increased production of opium was drawing attention to Afghanistan by other nations. These factors, combined with the re-appearance of Osama bin Laden, wanted for attacks on Americans in Saudi Arabia, in Afghanistan led the UN to impose sanctions in November 1999. Unfortunately, sanctions had little effect on the Taliban's policies or methods. The Taliban began implementing a scorched earth policy on the northern plains in early 2000, pushing Uzbeks and other ethnic minorities out of the north into other parts of the country and

⁷⁸ Ibid. 93.

creating an even greater division along ethnic lines. Over 160,000 refugees fled to the Panjshir Valley and another 70,000 moved to Kabul or other southern cities.⁷⁹

By 2001, the Taliban controlled as much as 97% of the country, and the forces opposing them in the north were waning in numbers and quickly decentralizing. Contrary to popular belief, the Taliban never controlled 100% of Afghanistan. They had come closer to unilateral control than any other group in almost a century, but they were not quite there. The terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, and the international response to those attacks, prevented the Taliban from fully accomplishing its goals. However, despite their lack of complete control and short-lived dynasty, the impact of Taliban support and the impact of its social/religious policies cannot be ignored.⁸⁰

On September 11th, 2001 al Qaeda, under the direction of Osama bin Laden executed a terrorist attack on United States territory. Within two weeks, the Authorization of the Use of Military Force was passed by United States Congress and signed into law by President Eugene W. Bush. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) began soon after. The goals of OEF were to destroy al Qaeda and their affiliate organizations and to ensure that Afghanistan would no longer be a safe haven for terrorists.

The invading forces immediately allied themselves with the Northern Alliance. Their combined forces swept towards Mazar-e Sharif and the rest of the country. The Taliban fled from Kabul in November of 2001. They retreated back to their region of origin in Qandahar Province. Qandahar City was the last city to fall to the American coalition in December of 2001. After this, Afghanistan was considered to be “liberated”

⁷⁹ Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

⁸⁰ Ibid

and the Northern Alliance was officially installed in Kabul to establish a new government for the country.⁸¹

The coalition in Afghanistan would not actually fight many extended battles during its initial occupation. An exception was Operation Anaconda in the Tora Bora Mountains of Nangahar Province. The Taliban forces that were expelled from Qandahar fled to the Tora Bora Mountains. Between March 2nd and 19th, 2002 coalition forces attempted to exterminate a pocket of al Qaeda forces discovered in a valley. While the U.S. and its allied forces underestimated the Afghan forces, the operation was an overall success. This was the only traditional battle of Operation Enduring Freedom, other conflicts are fought much more of a guerrilla style.⁸²

After the fall of the Taliban, a new government needed to be established for Afghanistan. The United Nations called a conference in Bonn, Germany. There were representatives from all nations in the Western coalition, Pakistan, Iran, the Northern Alliance, and even the ousted royal family. The resulting Bonn Agreement called for a *Loya Jirga* (a traditional Pashtun tribal council) to establish a provisional government, and the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).⁸³ This force included of troops from 48 nations to assist the new government in retaining its power. Upon its conception, the Americans refused to participate in the ISAF believing it would inhibit their ability to stabilize the country. During this time, its jurisdiction would be

81 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

82 William Maley 1957-, *The Afghanistan Wars* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

83 Ibid.

limited to Kabul and surrounding areas, leaving warlords free to do as they wished in the outlying regions.⁸⁴

The *Loya Jirga* called to establish the provisional government was structured by the Bonn Agreement. It was originally supposed to be composed of only 1450 members, but was eventually increased to 1600. Representatives from all constituencies were elected to attend the meeting. This included different minority groups within Afghanistan, geographic regions, displaced populations, and even refugee populations outside of the country. Women were guaranteed at least 100 seats on the council by the agreement. The *Loya Jirga* was held in June 2002 in Kabul. There were many independent candidates seeking control of the provisional government, but international and factional pressure pushed for Hamid Karzai to take the seat. The *Loya Jirga* was an attempt to unite and gather input from all ethnic groups within Afghanistan. However, the *Loya Jirga* is a Pashtun concept and ultimately proved to only benefit the Pashtun people.⁸⁵

Many Pashtun nationalists were upset when they learned that a member of the former Pashtun royal family was pressured to step aside and support Karzai by U.S. interests.

Beyond the election of Karzai, they failed to provide any structure to the interim administration. According to Afghanistan scholar, Larry Goodson, the *Loya Jirga* succeeded at showing the rest of the world that “most power still lies with the strongmen, that ethnic rivalries continue to smolder, and that questions of governmental structure are

84 Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.

85 Goodson, Larry, “Afghanistan’s Long Road to Reconstruction” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (2003).

highly intractable.”⁸⁶ The decisions of this body were only temporary as the Bonn Agreement called for the meeting of another *Loya Jirga* within 18 months of the conclusion of first to establish a new Afghanistan Constitution.⁸⁷

The Constitutional *Loya Jirga* did not meet until December of 2003. Exactly 18 months after the close of the first *Loya Jirga*. The *Loya Jirga* did not meet to craft a new constitution. Instead, it met to consider a proposed constitution written by one of Karzai’s vice presidents. This *Loya Jirga* delegation was made up of 504 people, some appointed directly by Karzai, others elected at either a district or provincial level. The convention, originally planned to last 10 days, did not ratify the new constitution until January 2004. This new constitution called for the creation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and elections to be held for a president and national assembly in October 2004. Islam was made the state religion and no laws can be created that contradict the laws of Islam. The elections held in October elected Hamid Karzai to a five year term as Afghanistan’s president. The creation of an Islamic Republic aimed to unite the country under the closest thing it has to a universal geographic trait, its religion. However the unifying pull of Islam was not able to outweigh the separating pulls of every other aspect of Afghanistan’s geography.⁸⁸

During the *Loya Jirga* process and the election of Karzai, the ISAF expanded the role it played in national security. To increase self-sufficiency and decrease reliance on foreign troops, many NATO countries wanted to increase ISAF jurisdiction. Originally

86 Larry Goodson, "Building Democracy after Conflict: Bullets, Ballots, and Poppies in Afghanistan," *Journal for Democracy* 16, no. 1 (2005).

87 Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

88 *The Constitution of Afghanistan*, (2004).

ISAF only had jurisdiction within 50 miles of Kabul. While some countries hoped to expunge this limitation, the United States opposed expanding the power of ISAF and vetoed the move, but soon realized there was no other option and the ISAF's jurisdiction was expanded to the entire country. In 2003, NATO gave ISAF command over the previously German-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in northern Afghanistan and called for the establishment of additional PRTs in the region. By 2004, ISAF was maintaining security in the nine northern provinces of Afghanistan. Northern Afghanistan was the quickest to cooperate with the ISAF as they saw any change from Taliban government to be a positive one.⁸⁹

In early 2005, before the official election of Karzai, NATO announced the expansion of ISAF into the western region of Afghanistan, a region experiencing relatively little conflict. ISAF began operating in Herat and Farah, and soon expanded to the capital of the Baghdis province. With this expansion, ISAF was providing security assistance to 50% of the country. In mid-2006, ISAF moved into southern Afghanistan, taking control of PRTs from American forces. With this expansion, ISAF's forces doubled from 10,000 to 20,000. In October 2006, ISAF finally took control of security in the entire country by assuming control of PRTs in the western region. In this process, ISAF began in the areas experiencing the least violent incidents and gradually incorporated the areas experiencing the most. However, the ISAF was not the only force operating in the country in terms of peace keeping.⁹⁰

89 Goodson, "Building Democracy After Conflict: Bullets, Ballots, and Poppies in Afghanistan", Vol. 16, 2005).

90 Edgar O'Ballance and Edgar O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, Rev paperback [ed. (London: Brassey's, 2002), 277.

When nations gathered in Bonn Germany and agreed on the terms of the Loya Jirga, they also agreed on how to divide up the peace keeping efforts between each other. Germany would develop the Afghanistan National Police, Italy would reform the judicial system, the United Kingdom would focus on antinarcotics, Japan would aim to disarm regional warlords, and the United States would build up the Afghanistan National Army (ANA). The effort to build up the ANA did not begin until 2003, and it was a slow process at first. Original goals called for a force of 70,000 soldiers, but western and Afghani experts knew the ANA would need to be at least 200,000 strong to maintain security over the entire country.

After initial recruiting failures and high AWOL rates, the ANA was beginning to be viewed as a success story by 2005. In 2008 the force was expanded from 70,000 to 122,000 personnel. Opposition to the foreign presence and the Karzai regime rallied around the remnants of the Taliban in the border region with Pakistan. Unofficial and covert support from the Pakistan ISI flowed to the Taliban and al Qaeda, encouraging their attacks on the Coalition forces. ISAF and ANA forces worked together to eradicate this resistance.⁹¹

In 2007, the Netherlands became the first Coalition nation to pull out all of their troops from Operation Enduring Freedom. American President Eugene W. Bush called for NATO countries to increase their support in the region, but received little support. After winning the 2008 United States election, new President Barack Obama, pledged a surge of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan to assist in stabilization. These troops arrived in

91 Obaid Younossi et al., "The Long March Building an Afghan National Army" National Defense Research Institute (2009).

2010, increasing the US troop presence to almost 100,000. On May 3rd 2011, United States' forces succeeded in assassinating Osama bin Laden in a compound in Pakistan. This operation strained the relationship between Pakistan and the United States even more than it had been since the beginning of the conflict.⁹²

After the death of bin Laden, President Obama announced that the surge troops of 2010 would all be removed from Afghanistan by 2014 at the latest. He later amended this date to 2013. Out of fear of a Taliban revival, leaders of the former Northern Alliance banded together once again to oppose a Pashtun state. Ahmad Zia Massoud, Tajik and brother of the assassinated former leader of the Northern Alliance, stated that the Afghanis who had assisted in the ousting of the Taliban were currently ignored by the United States and Karzai. Masoud united with leaders of both the Hazara and Uzbek ethnicities to form the National Front of Afghanistan.

This group met in Berlin, Germany and called for a reform of the constitution. They wanted to replace the current system with a true parliamentary democracy that granted more power to elected provincial governors. The NFA still holds military power in Afghanistan and fears militant action by the Taliban after foreign troop withdrawals in 2014. The NFA hopes to run a candidate in the 2014 presidential election in direct opposition to any Taliban friendly candidate.⁹³

At the end of 2013 the international military presence was declining in Afghanistan. In 2014, all remaining nations of the coalition plan to remove troops from Afghanistan, leaving small groups to assist the ANA in a strictly advisory capacity. The

92 Ibid

93 Ibid

ANA currently stands 200,000 strong, but they are untested veterans. The next year will decide the direction that Afghanistan continues to head in the near future.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Stauss, Haley, "United States' Strategy in Afghanistan from 2001 to Today," Pepperdine Policy Review 5, no. 3 (2012).

Chapter 3: Comparative Analysis

Chapters 1 and 2 provided the background information necessary for understanding any impact the geography of Afghanistan has had on conflict during the Soviet War and Operation Enduring Freedom. In order to identify this impact and further analyze it, this chapter will identify the provinces to experience 50% of the recorded violent incidents during each conflict and aim to identify the geographic features within each province that contributed the most to this conflict.

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and Operation Enduring Freedom following 9/11 were similar conflicts. Both involved a foreign superpower toppling a regime in Afghanistan to replace it with one more sympathetic to its own goal. In both cases a resistance force rose to meet the challenge and executed nontraditional military activities against the foreign power. Both of these non-state forces had assistance from other nations. Over the past 30 years, there has been one constant other than conflict in Afghanistan: its geography. The terrain of the country has not changed. There have been no great genocides and ethnic groups remain where they have been for centuries. The country's land use, development, and infrastructure have stayed the same. This is largely due to the halt in development brought on by the Afghan Civil War and Taliban rule during the 1990s.

While other countries like Japan and China experienced an economic boom in the 1990s, Afghanistan found itself treading water. But this stagnation provides a unique opportunity for the study of conflict. The Soviet Invasion and Operation Enduring Freedom can be examined as two similar conflicts occurring in almost identical states. This provides a "controlled" environment to determine if variables have a consistent or

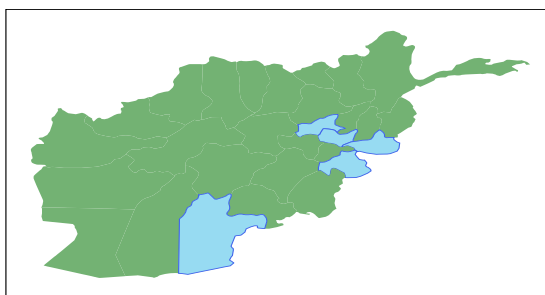
inconsistent effect on such conflicts. And why not examine the most consistent of all these factors, the geography? By selecting the provinces that experienced the most violence in the two conflicts and examining their geographic similarities and differences, it can be determined that Afghanistan's geography did not have a consistent impact on conflict, but rather that violence in Afghanistan during these two periods tended to congregate in areas of physical and/or cultural geographic extremes.

During the Soviet Occupation, the Crisis and Conflict Analysis Team of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, Pakistan published monthly reports on the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Reports were gathered from Mujihadeen sources on how many violent incidents occurred in each province, how many were against mobile targets, how many against immobile targets, and how many were initiated by Soviet-Karmal forces. The reports also tracked the number of incidents reported by Kabul Radio, but also acknowledged their propaganda-like nature. Clearly, this brings their numbers into question. The numbers reported by Kabul radio are drastically lower than that of the Mujihadeen sources and tended to focus on reports of individual criminals or political events.⁹⁵ This analysis will focus on the numbers provided by the Mujihadeen sources. These numbers, while more realistic to the naked eye, should still be viewed with scrutiny.⁹⁶

95 . "Afghanistan Report, Vol. 14-42 (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, 1984-1987).

96 Ibid.

According to Mujihadeen sources, 50% of the military engagements to occur during the recorded years took place in five of Afghanistan's 29 provinces. These provinces were: Nangahar, Kabul, Qandahar, Paktia, and Parwan.⁹⁷



1 Provinces with highest rates of conflict in Soviet War

Apart from Qandahar, the provinces are grouped together along the Pakistan border and similar in size, but vary greatly in population size. Kabul and Nangrahar are both heavily populated, while Paktia is in the bottom half for population. Even the four provinces that are grouped together near the Eastern border of the country vary geographically and it is hard to find significant similarities, but it is in the lack of similarities make that these provinces are alike.⁹⁸

Kabul Province is the home to Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan and the only province with more than 1 million people. According to Mujihadeen sources Kabul Province was the site of more than 10% of violent events during the Soviet Conflict between 1984 and 1987. Easily Afghanistan's most Western and developed urban area, the Province has easy access to the Highway 1, a road leading east to Pakistan, and of

97 It should be noted that there some provinces were created / split between the time of the Soviet Invasion and American operations in Afghanistan.

98 . "Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

course can access Northern Afghanistan via the Salang Tunnel to the North in Parwan Province. Of the 1200 incidents reported in Kabul Province during these three years, only 450 took place within the city of Kabul, approximately 37%.⁹⁹

Soviet officials during the war claimed that Kabul was completely immune to attack and even western journalists from the time support this claim. Despite these claims of peace and stability in the capital during Soviet Occupation, Soviet radio reported that over 15% of approximately 1300 violent events took place in the Province of Kabul. Radio sources do not specify whether these attacks took place within the city limits, but this at least pokes holes in the Soviet claims that Kabul City was untouched by Mujihadeen forces during the occupation.¹⁰⁰

The most notable geographic feature of Kabul province is its urbanization. This urbanization has had two large effects on Kabul's human geography. Being the capital city, Kabul attracts people from all over country to come to live and learn. Already a diverse province, with members of the Tajik, Pashtun, Kuchi, and other groups, the city of Kabul forces these groups to live and work together. Unlike other diverse provinces, different ethnic groups in Kabul do not live in villages separated by Kilometers. Instead, until 1992 and the Afghan Civil War, ethnic groups lived in mixed neighborhoods. The urbanization of Kabul also means it is the only province that does not primarily rely on

99 Within the City is not defined in the provided reports.

100 Jonathan Steele, "Car Bombs and Suicide Bombers were Unknown in Soviet-Era Kabul," *The Guardian* 27 September 2011, 2011.

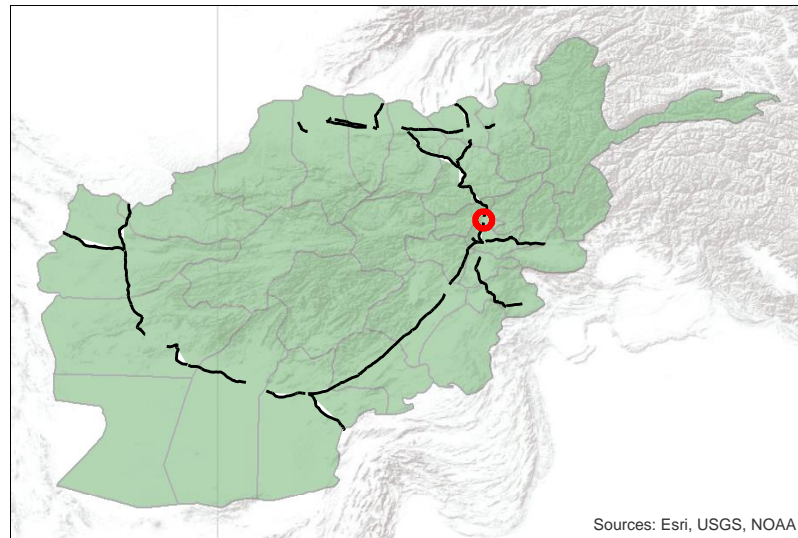
agriculture for income and is the only province to rely a majority on trade and service industries.¹⁰¹

While Kabul had the highest number of military events in the Soviet War, this was not the case in Operation Enduring Freedom. It has served as the command center for the foreign power in both conflicts, but the current actors in Afghanistan have proven much more able to isolate the conflict to outlying areas than the Soviets. Soviet era Kabul was not the oasis of peace that the occupying forces claimed because its urban geography would not let it be. As the representative center of the country it had no choice as to whether it would be a part of this conflict. This lack of geographic choice is something that Kabul province shares in common with its neighbor, Parwan.¹⁰²

Parwan is a small province directly North of Kabul. While it is home to a number of ethnic groups, its populace is primarily Dari speaking ethnic Tajiks. Similar to a majority of the other provinces it relies primarily on agriculture for its income and is not heavily urbanized. The distinguishing geographic feature of Parwan is its road structure. Highway 1 passes from Kabul straight through Parwan to get to Northern Afghanistan via the Salang Tunnel.

101 Lianne Gatcher, "A City Divided: Ethnic Tensions Splitting Kabul," *The Independent* 01 November 2011, 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/a-city-divided-the-ethnic-tensions-splitting-kabul-6255444.html>

102 Arnold, *Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in Perspective*, Rev an enl ed., Vol. 321 (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 179.



2 Ring Road (Salang Tunnel in red)

The Salang Tunnel is the only major road to connect Southern Afghanistan to Northern Afghanistan. Completed by the Soviet Union in the 60s, the tunnel is an unlit, two lane, 2.6 km long road that goes beneath the Hindu Kush Mountains. If you wish to drive from the South to the North without using the tunnel, you must either drive west and go around the mountains, or drive east across the Pakistan border and use a pass there to traverse the mountains. The tunnel was equally important to both the Soviets and Mujihadeen during Soviet Occupation. The Mujihadeen hoped to regain control of the tunnel to expand their influence in the country and for the Soviets it was their only lifeline back home.

For the Soviets, it was the most direct land route not only to Northern Afghanistan, but back into true Soviet Territory. The existence of this tunnel and its usefulness to both sides of this conflict, led the Soviets to be more aggressive in their operations in Parwan than in other provinces. Of the top five provinces to experience these high rates of

conflict, Parwan is fifth on that list, but it is the first in the number of Soviet initiated attacks. The Salang Tunnel was also the home to one of the infamous events of the Soviet Occupation: the Salang Tunnel Fire on November 3rd, 1982.¹⁰³

The details of the fire, caused by a collision involving a Soviet oil truck, are still disputed. Some estimate the death toll in the hundreds, but others put it at over 2000, with a majority of these deaths being Afghanistan citizens and only a few hundred Soviet soldiers. After the fire, Afghanistan returned to a policy of only allowing traffic to go in one direction at a time. This policy holds to this day. The fire has never been claimed as an intentional act by either the Soviets or the Mujihadeen, but that people continue to use this tunnel in its unsafe state despite the tragedy show just how important it is. Even with resistance to Soviet occupation being based in the North, Parwan and the Salang Tunnel were not always hotbeds of conflict during the war. Before September of 1986, Parwan was actually experiencing the ninth most violent events.¹⁰⁴

It was not until the introduction of the FMI-2 Stinger missiles in September 1986 that conflict started drifting towards Parwan. Up until that point, Parwan was not one of the provinces to experience the most conflict. In fact, it was ninth highest on the list. The use of Stingers allowed the Mujihadeen to better attack mobile targets and made attacks on or near the Salang Tunnel easier. After the introduction of Stingers, Parwan quickly moved into the top 5 of the provinces experiencing conflict. The other four were in the top five the entire time. While Parwan's geography always made it an ideal target for the

103 Sean Carberry, "Afghan Tunnel: Decrepit, Dangerous, yet Indispensable," National Public Radio 24 January 2012, 2012.

104 Ibid

Mujihadeen it was not until the introduction of the Stinger that the Mujihadeen had the capability to attack these targets effectively.¹⁰⁵

Both Kabul and Parwan are internal provinces with no international border, but the remaining three provinces that experienced the highest rates of conflict are all located on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border. The easiest description of Nangarhar is that is a combination of Kabul and Parwan Provinces. Similar to Parwan, Nangarhar Province is home to one of Afghanistan's major roads. The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway connects the capitals of Kabul and Nangrahar Provinces. The road passes from Jalalabad to the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border and eventually to the Khyber Pass, one of the main passages of trade for the two countries.

The Khyber Pass is located inside the Pakistan Border and, when relations are friendly enough to allow transport, it is much cheaper and easier to travel east to Pakistan and North to Russia than to attempt the Salang Tunnel. Even today it can take days to travel the few hundred miles from the northern border to Kabul. Similar to Kabul, Nangarhar has a very high percentage of its citizens making a living from trade or the service industry, but there are still over 50% of Nangrahar's residents living off agriculture. Despite these slight similarities to Kabul, Nangrahar possesses one distinguishing trait.¹⁰⁶

In a country of noted and endlessly commented on ethnic and linguistic diversity, Nangrahar is noticeably homogeneous. With 3rd highest population at the time,

105 John W. Lyons 1930-, "Critical Technology Events in the Development of the Stinger and Javelin Missile Systems Electronic Resource] : Project Hindsight Revisited," Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University,
106 Carberry, "Afghan Tunnel: Decrepit, Dangerous, yet Indispensable," 2012).

Nangrahar is over 90% Pashtun and almost exclusively Pashto speaking despite the small number of Tajik and Arab minorities. This homogeneity is a rarity among Afghan provinces and almost makes Nangrahar more of an outlier because of its lack of ethno-diversity. Nangrahar's near neighbor, Paktia, has a similar diverse make up, but the Pashtun dominance is not quite as obvious. In Nangrahar, other than Pashtuns there are multiple small groups of different ethnicities. Paktia, on the other hand, is also 90% Pashtun, but the remaining 10% is exclusively Tajik. While the ratio of Pashtun to non-Pashtun is just as high, the minority groups in Paktia have more of an influence than in Nangrahar.¹⁰⁷

Paktia's human geography has little to distinguish it from the other provinces of Afghanistan, but its terrain is unlike any other. Paktia is almost 100% mountainous and the forests there provide a unique industry and resource for the people of Paktia that rest of the country lacks. The readily available lumber in Paktia is not only used by this province during the winter months, when days can have average high temperatures of -8 C, but is exported to all other provinces. Timber and livestock make up a majority of the Paktia economy. With other provinces focusing on either horticulture or trade in its absence, Paktia's industry differs greatly from that of the rest of the country due to its physical makeup. What made Paktia such a hotbed of conflict is not clear. It could have been the large number of Pashtun residents or Soviet Occupation was somehow effecting

107 Cmicweb.org. Afghanistan Census Data. <https://www.cmicweb.org/Pages/newhomepage/index.html>

the unique Paktia economy differently than other provinces, but it is clear that once again conflict with the Soviets was more common in an area of geographic extremes.¹⁰⁸

Having discussed the four provinces that cluster around the North Eastern Afghanistan-Pakistan Border that experienced a significant portion of military engagements, it is time to take note of the true outlier of the top five violent provinces of the Soviet War. Qandahar is the only province to appear on the top five for both the Soviet conflict and Operation Enduring Freedom. Qandahar is a large majority Pashtun, but does contain decent sized groups of Hazara and Balochi people. Both the Hazara and Balochi people are traditionally oppressed in Afghanistan. The Hazara are Shi'a Muslim which is in the minority Afghanistan and the Balochi people relate more strongly to the Kurdish peoples to the South West of Afghanistan, even speaking a dialect of Kurdish rather than Pashto or Dari, but despite the presence of two groups with little in common, Qandahar is thoroughly Pashtun. Qandahar's ethno-diversity is intriguing but not its most distinguishing trait, so its physical make up must be examined.¹⁰⁹

Similar to Paktia, it is Qandahar's physical geography that distinguishes it from the rest of the country. Qandahar has a very small mountainous region in the North but the rest of the province composed of flatlands, a majority of which is desert. Unlike Helmand and Nimruz to its west which are also composed of desert, Qandahar lacks a large natural water source to irrigate the region for large crop production, although it has managed to become famous for its vine crops and pomegranates. It is Qandahar City that links the Soviet Occupation with Operation Enduring Freedom. Qandahar City and its

108 Mark Bell, *Afghan Agriculture* Davis, [2013]).

109 Palka, *Geographic Perspectives: Afghanistan* (Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 104.

surrounding area were the birthplace of the Taliban. It was from Qandahar that the Taliban pushed out to the rest of the country, only unable to penetrate the northern most areas of the country.¹¹⁰

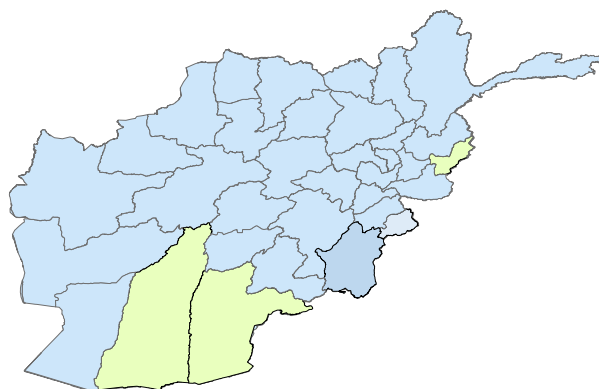
Qandahar City, the capital city of Qandahar province is of great cultural significance to the Pashtun people. Unlike the other ethnic groups of Afghanistan, the Pashtun are much more centralized under a complex clan and tribal system. The Loya Jirga system used to develop the Afghanistan constitution is a traditionally Pashtun concept, and the city of Qandahar is considered by some to be the Pashtun seat of power. Qandahar was also the birth place of the Taliban. It served as the unofficial capital of the Taliban Government during the 1990s when the Taliban's hold on Kabul was not as strong.¹¹¹

The prominence of Qandahar is directly tied the international prominence of Afghanistan going back thousands of years. Afghanistan is often referred to as the crossroads of the world for the role it played in Empires since before Alexander the Great. But this role can be more specifically assigned to Qandahar. Qandahar sits right on the route for trade or invasion to the Indian Subcontinent. Qandahar's physically extreme environment and cultural significance pulled it into the conflict with the Soviets in the 80s, but it was its cultural extremism and ties to the past that have pulled it into the conflict with the United States

110 Bell, *Afghan Agriculture* Davis, 2013).

111 Ibid.

and ISAF. However, Qandahar has not been the province to experience the most conflict during Operation Enduring Freedom.¹¹²



3 Provinces with highest conflict rates in OEF

Helmand Province, which experienced the most military engagements from 2004-2009, has a lot in common with its Eastern neighbor, Qandahar. Their ethnic makeup is almost identical, with a large Pashtun majority and small contingents of oppressed minorities in the Hazara and Balochi peoples. Helmand has served as a Taliban stronghold since the U.S. invasion in 2001.¹¹³ It serves as a source of income, supplies, and is the most agriculturally rich part of the country. All of these facts about Helmand, its agriculture, the use by the Taliban, and the amount of conflict, all relate back to the Helmand River. It is noteworthy to examine the importance of the river. 64% of the

¹¹² Joseph J. Collins, *Understanding the War in Afghanistan: A Guide to the Land, the People, and the Conflict* (New York: Sky horse publishing, 2013).

¹¹³ WikiLeaks, "Afghanistan War Diary", 2010).

enemy non-ISAF initiated conflicts in Helmand Province from 2004 to 2009 took place within one mile of a river. This is 6% higher than the national average of 58% of conflicts happening within one mile of a river. This shows that not only is the Helmand River crucial to supporting industry in Helmand, but also attracts more conflict than other bodies of water in the country.¹¹⁴

The Helmand River enables Helmand Province to be the agricultural center of Afghanistan. In 2005, over 92% of its residents were reliant on agriculture for income. The only province with a greater percentage is Zabul, but where Helmand is the third most populated province in the country, Zabul is the fourth least populated province in the country. Helmand's fruit, vegetable, and grain production already make it an agricultural standout among the other provinces of Afghanistan, but it is the illegal crops also being grown there that produce a lot of the income for the Taliban and other resistance groups. In 2005 41% of households in Helmand Province reported income from opium or opium related activities. The next highest report is in Balk Province with only 9% of households reporting income. In 2011, Helmand Province had over 63,300 Hectares being used for Opium cultivation. Latest reports from Balk in 2005 show it only utilizing about 11,000 Hectares for Opium cultivation.¹¹⁵ Helmand Province, already with an agricultural monopoly in the country, is the biggest opium producer in the country as well. The highly agrarian nature of Helmand, whether legal or illegal, has made the province more conducive to conflict.¹¹⁶

114 Ibid

115 Cimiweb.org. Afghanistan Census Data. <https://www.cimiweb.org/Pages/newhomepage/index.html>

116 Ibid

Helmand combined with Qandahar and Kunar province account for 50% of the enemy initiated conflict during those five years. Kunar experienced over 4000 conflicts during this time, only a little less than Qandahar. What is surprising about Kunar's role in conflict is that it did not serve more of a battleground role during the Soviet Occupation. The Mujihadeen Rebellion against the Soviets actually originated in Kunar, but it is in the lower 50th percentile of provinces' military engagements between 1984 and 1987.¹¹⁷

The creation of the Nuristan Province in 2001 helped ease some of the tension between the Pashtun and Nuristani tribes that each made up about half of the original Kunar province population. Before the creation of the Nuristan Province, there was often conflict between the two groups, but the groups would unite against a common threat as was demonstrated by the Soviet Invasion. After the creation of Nuristan province from parts of Kunar and its neighbor Laghnam, the ethnic ratio drastically shifted in favor of the Pashtun. After 2001, Kunar was 95% Pashto and 5% Nuristani transforming it into a relatively homogenous state similar to Paktia during the Soviet Occupation. This clear Pashtun majority created a very pro-Taliban and anti-western sentiment in the Kunar.¹¹⁸

Kunar also lies on the border of and serves as a connection to the Federally Administered Tribal Area of Pakistan. Villages in the FATA are known to provide shelter and resources to al-Qaeda fighters active in Afghanistan. Whether the FATA is willingly or unwillingly assisting those fighting in Afghanistan is beside the point. In more recent years, Nuristan has become much more violently active than its neighbor Kunar. The numbers are not available, but it suggests that violence in Kunar was an effort to push

117 WikiLeaks, "Afghanistan War Diary" 2010).

118 Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 264.

fundamentalist ideas out from the border and further into Afghanistan. But Nuristan, which has never been friendly to fundamentalist Islam after a forced conversion in the late 19th century, was not be an easy place for native Taliban fighters or foreign al Qaeda fighters to find support.¹¹⁹

The data obtained from the Afghanistan War Diary (AWD) is precise down to the specific location of the event. Because of this, OEF can be analyzed not just on a provincial level, but on a district level as well. The districts to experience the most conflict continue to support the idea that violence in Afghanistan tends to congregate in areas of physical or cultural geographic extremes.

In Qandahar, the districts to experience the most violence are Panjwayi and Qandahar City, with 2184 and 574 instance of enemy initiated conflict respectively. Both are physical distinguished by their location in desert like areas (deserts being Qandahar's most distinguishing physical trait), they are even more significant culturally to the region. Qandahar as a province is considered to be the home of the Pashtun people, but this label should not be applied to the entire province but only to two specific areas. The first, in Panjwayi district, is considered to be spiritual homeland to the Taliban. Qandahar City, the second, is the city from which Pashtun leaders have ruled for centuries. The Taliban is primarily a Pashtun fundamentalist force and the Taliban with help from foreign groups such as al-Qaeda and Pakistan ISI is the face of the resistance forces in Afghanistan. These two areas' cultural significance to the movement that is fighting back

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

against foreign occupation almost make it mandatory for them to take part in this conflict.¹²⁰

Unlike Qandahar, Helmand is not culturally significant, but rather physically significant. Nad Ali, Nahri Sarraj, and Sangin of Helmand Province were all within the top five districts to experience the most enemy initiated violence. And all three lie in the heavily irrigated areas in the north east of Helmand province. While the Helmand river is valuable for its entire length throughout the province, and provides water for electrical and agricultural endeavors allover, it is in the north east of the province that the Helmand Valley Authority, modeled after the Tennessee Valley Authority, has been best able to irrigate the land on a wide spread scheme.¹²¹

District profiles provided by the Afghanistan Information Management Service report that all three districts have over 90% of their land irrigated, cultivated, and in regular use to produce not only subsistence crops but also commercial crops such as cotton and tobacco. Garner, the district in south eastern Helmand, is fourth on the list of Helmand Province districts to experience conflict and sixth on the list over all, initially stands out because at first look, this province is mostly desert and does not fit with the other districts in Helmand to experience so much violence. However, upon closer analysis, all of the violence in Garner all took place in the northwest along the Helmand River, the only irrigated and agriculturally significant part of the district. Analyzing Helmand on a district level shows that violence in the Province clusters toward the

120 Afghanistan Information Management Services, "District Profiles," (2014).

121 Ibid.

irrigated areas in the north east, but even in the less fertile areas of the province, violence still happens where the river is source of life.¹²²

The two districts that experienced the most conflict from 2004 to 2005 in Kunar were Dara-i-Pech and Asadabad. With respect to Kunar, analysis must give heavy weight to the ethnic make-up of the conflict areas. Before the creation of Nuristan, Kunar was constantly plagued by conflict between the Nuristani people and Pashtun people. Both Dara and Asadabad are located in north east Kunar on the Nuristan Border but are 100% Pashtun. In a province previously plagued with ethnic conflict, any administrative region that is completely dominated by one group is of note. The location of these two provinces also calls them into question. Both are on the border with Nuristan, the province created to ease the ethnic tensions during the Afghan Civil War. The data analyzed about Operation Enduring Freedom ends in 2009. It is of note that after 2009, violence shifted from these two regions into Nuristan, making it one of the most hotly contested provinces during the early 2010s. The result of an increase in Nuristani violence has led to a decrease of that in Kunar, but it still reflects the resonating ethnic tensions from previous years. A district in Kunar with 100% Pashtun population is not that unusual, however, a district with 100% Pashtun population on the border of a province primarily composed of an ethnic foe is.

As a whole, the provinces and districts that experienced a majority of the conflict in the documented years do not present one common geographic trait. High rates of conflict are not determined by the mountains or by the one ethnic group. Instead there was heavy conflict in highly urban Kabul, transportation-vital Parwan, ethnically

¹²² Ibid.

homogenous Nangrahar and Kunar, mountainous Paktia, desert Qandahar, and the breadbasket of Helmand. Other than religion and political boundaries, there are no obvious geographic traits to tie these areas together and push them to the frontlines of national conflict. But each of these provinces is an outlier in some capacity. In some way, each is drastically different from their neighbors. For some it is in their terrain, some it is their land use, and others it is in their cultural geography. Examining the conflict and geographic data from these two time periods has not yielded one geographic feature to help identify conflict heavy areas, but it has answered a question. Did geography have a similar effect on these two very similar conflicts? Yes. Almost 50% of the violence during each conflict took place in a small group of provinces composed of geographic extremes.

Conclusion

The data gathered from the Afghanistan Reports and Afghanistan War Diary permit a geographic glimpse into the Soviet War and Operation Enduring Freedom. Where violent incidents occur reveals information about why they are happening and can help reveal information about the nature of not only the conflict in question, but conflict in general.

No, there was not one geographic factor linking all these areas together. Instead each province proved drastically different from the next. The only thing that these provinces had in common was that together they made up more than 50% of violence in their respective wars and that they were each geographically unique. Some provinces were culturally homogenous while the rest of Afghanistan is amazingly diverse. Others were 100% mountainous, while other Afghan provinces are made up of many different kinds of terrain. The majority of the violent events during these two conflicts took place in the following provinces with extreme geographic features.

For the Soviet War:

Province	“Extreme” Geographic Feature
Kabul	Urbanization, Capital City, Ethnically and Linguistically Diverse
Nangahar	Clear ethnic majority and dominance, best route to Pakistan
Paktia	100% Mountainous
Parwan	Salang Tunnel (only connection point between North and South)

Qandahar	Almost 100% desert with no large body of water.
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For Operation Enduring Freedom:

Province	“Extreme” Geographic Feature
Qandahar	Almost 100% Desert, historical/cultural significance to Pashtun culture
Helmand	Helmand River, Almost 100% Agrarian Population, Largest Opium Producer
Kunar	95% Percent Pashtun. Conflict concentrated on border with Nuristan.

During these two wars, violence occurred all over the country, but it was concentrated in these small areas with the above listed extreme features. These areas were all of great cultural or physical geographic significance in the country and the features that distinguished them from the provinces around them made them more conducive to conflict.

Unfortunately, the data provided by the “Afghanistan Reports” reported incidents by province. The intention of these reports was to simply recount the sequence of events. It was not specifically compiled to be analyzed geographically and only supplied the number of violent incidents that took place in each province and basic information about what type of conflict occurred. Mujihadeen sources reported 10,783 incidents between

September of 1984 and September of 1987, but the reports did not focus on specifically where or why these events were happening.

The data provided from AWD is more detailed and precise. It provides the specific time and location of each of the 37,383 enemy-initiated events rather than just the month and province in which it occurred. Analyzing this data can highlight trends within Operation Enduring Freedom from 2004-2009. Examples of these trends show that conflict, more often than not, occurs near water sources, roads, and cities. However the analysis that can be done on the two wars is limited by the precision of the Afghanistan Reports.

The AWD data was examined for proximity to water, roads, airfields, mineral deposits, urbanization, and what ethnic and language groups dominates the location of the event. These events examined on a small scale revealed little that was not expected. The events were grouped together near prominent every day features like roads and water sources, with about half taking place inside cities. Unfortunately, the data from the Afghanistan Reports could not be examined in the same way because the data provided fewer details. The reports revealed which provinces experienced conflict, what type of target was it against, who initiated it, and did it take place in a city. But the reports did not reveal where inside the provinces these incidents took place. Therefore, this information does not allow for small scale geographic analysis.

The limiting nature of the geographic data available about the Soviet War limits the information one can gain from it. Therefore, restricting the comparative analysis that can be done with the data provided for OEF. In regards to OEF, researchers were able to pick out specific points in the country that experienced more conflict than other areas.

They were not confined to the provincial level, but could instead work within the smaller district level. The ability to work with the WikiLeaks data at a district level confirms that this conflict was occurring not only in provinces of geographic extremes, but also in the specific areas containing those extremes. This district level analysis has little impact in a comparative analysis because of an inability to apply this same practice to the Soviet War, but it does prove that this method should be applied for future conflicts.

The immediate impact of this result is almost negligible. It seems intuitive that extreme conditions would be more conducive to conflict. However, this result, begins to prove this supposition. If there had been point specific data available from during the Soviet Occupation this analysis would have had more specific results, instead this data suggests that these trends should be analyzed further. It suggests that this data is vital to a true understanding of why conflict happens where it does. That this data is not made readily available to the academic community and is instead only available through institutions such as the AWD does nothing but harm to any military effort because analysis of this data by as many sources as possible can only have a positive impact.

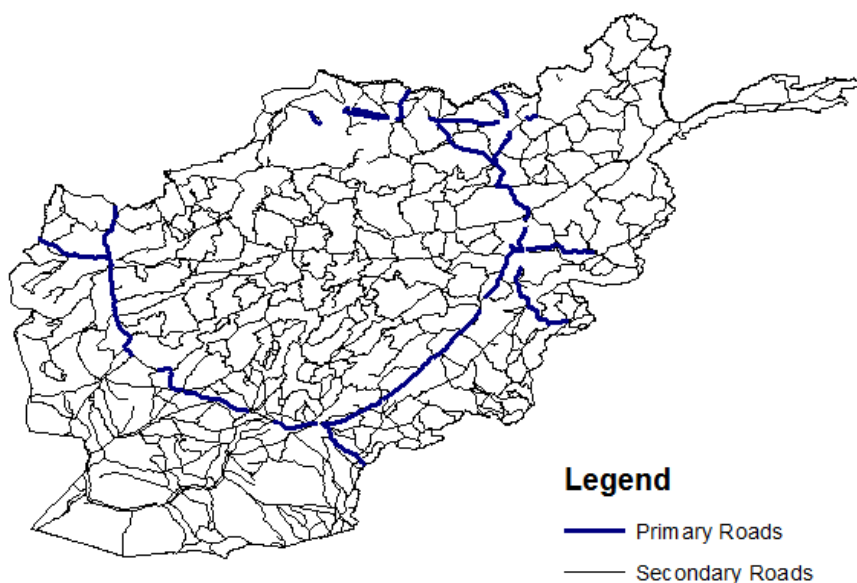
Broad trends in data analysis are the easiest to spot. This paper has only touched on the potential of a trend, but that this potential even exists suggests that retrospective geospatial analysis of this data and future conflict data will be crucial any military operation. Military institutions routinely consider geography when making decisions for the future. They need to know the terrain for a future operation, they assess temperatures to determine what kind of equipment is necessary, and make sure they have people that speak the language of where they will be operating. Instead of using geography when

looking forward, military decision makers should be looking backwards with a spatial perspective.

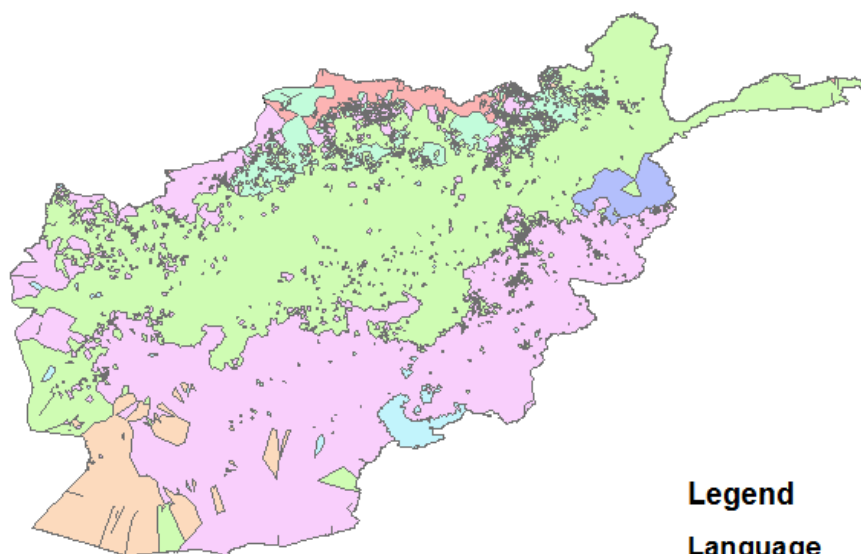
Geographers in the service of the National Geo-Spatial Intelligence Agency and the different branches of the military are possibly the only ones with the information necessary to answer the questions that might be able to save time, money, and lives. Is conflict more likely to occur in areas that speak multiple languages? Is conflict more likely to occur at a higher elevation than a lower one? At the moment, the data is not available to establish trends that prove or disprove these questions, but it should be. According to Colonel and geographer, Eugene Palka's, *Modern Military Geography*, the military currently only uses geography to plan future operations, but the military should begin to use geography in assessing past operations and see if there are any trends being established in real time to help make any military effort more effective and efficient.

Appendix

Afghanistan Roads



Afghanistan Languages



Legend

Language

LANGUAGE_

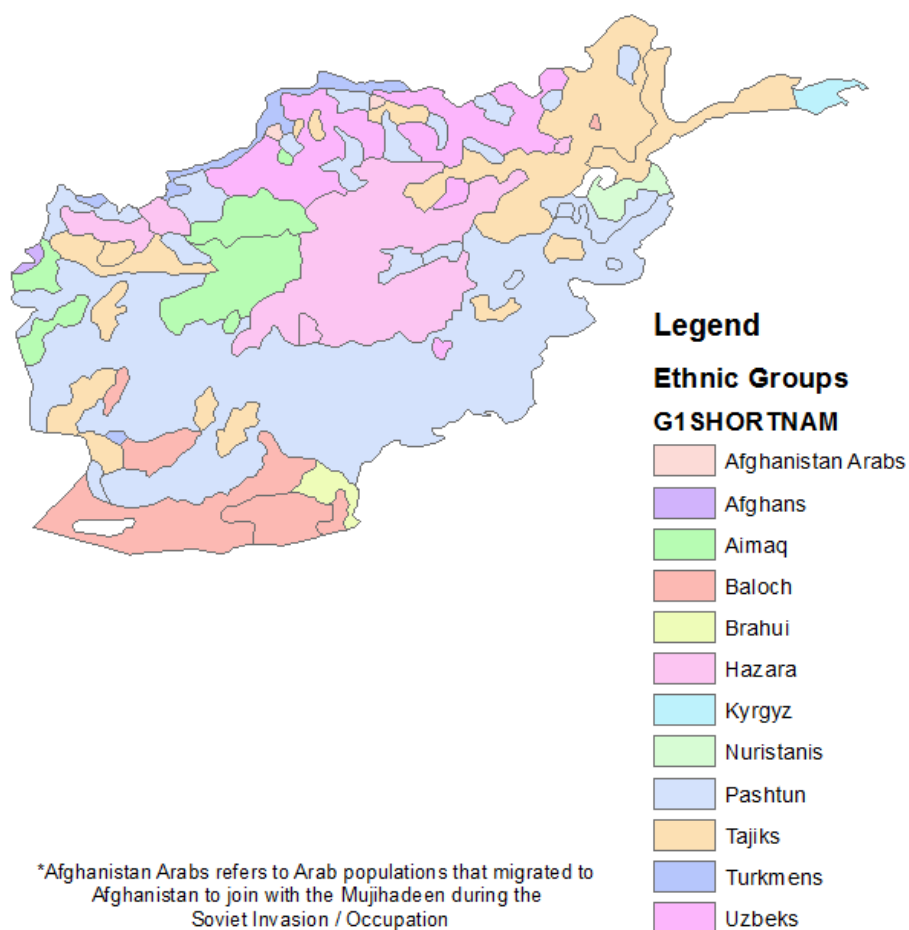
	Balochi
	Dari
	Nuristani
	Other
	Pashto
	Turkmen
	Uzbek

Map was generated using a data set that provided the primary spoken language for every village in Afghanistan. It was assumed that areas between villages shared a common language with the village of a closest euclidian distance.

Province	Area (mi ²)	Province Capital
Badakhshan	18,298	Feyzabad
Badghis	8,437	Qal'eh-ye Now
Baghlan	6,604	Baghlan
Balkh	4,861	Sharif
Bamian	6,722	Bamian
Farah	18,446	Farah
Faryab	8,600	Meymaneh
Ghani	9,024	Ghazni
Ghowr	14,925	Chakcharan
Helmand	23,866	Lashkar Gah
Heart	23,668	Heart
Jowzjan	7,326	Sherberghan
Kabul	1,770	Kabul
Kandahar	18,403	Qandahar
Kapisa	722	Raqi
Konar	4,045	Asadabad
Kunduz	3,021	Konduz
Laghman	2,783	Mehtalam
Logar	1,796	Baraki
Nangarhar	2,940	Jalalabad
Nimruz	15,963	Zaranj
Paktia	3,698	Gardeyz

Paktika	7,464	Zareh Sharan
Parwan	3,628	Charikar
Samangan	5,969	Samangan
Sare Pol	9,856	Sare-Pol
Takhar	4,777	Taloqan
Uruzgan	11,308	Tarin Kowt
Wardak	3,483	Kowt-e Ashrow
Zabul	6,675	Qalat

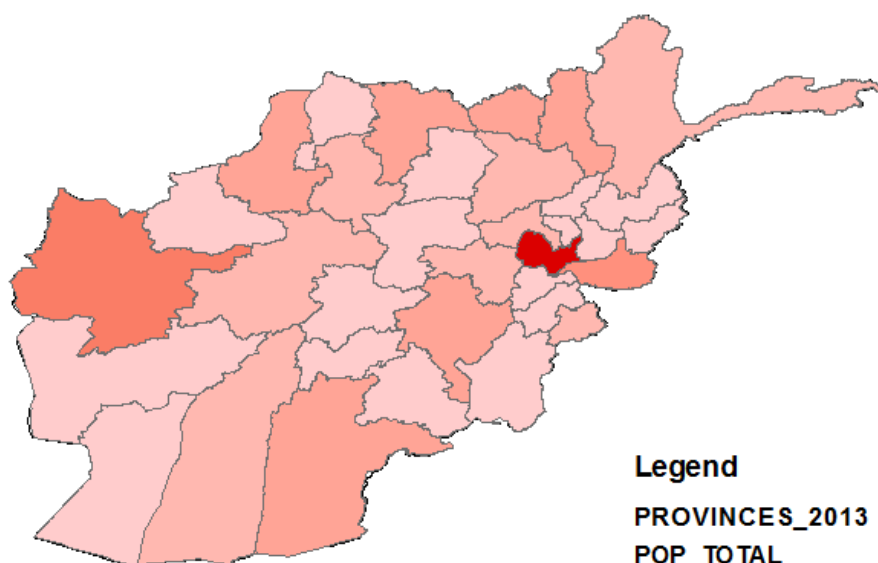
Afghanistan Ethnic Groups



Province	Area (mi ²)	Province Capital
Badakhshan	18,298	Feyzabad
Badghis	8,437	Qal'eh-ye Now
Baghlan	6,604	Baghlan
Balkh	4,861	Sharif
Bamian	6,722	Bamian
Farah	18,446	Farah
Faryab	8,600	Meymaneh
Ghani	9,024	Ghazni
Ghowr	14,925	Chakcharan
Helmand	23,866	Lashkar Gah
Heart	23,668	Heart
Jowzjan	7,326	Sherberghan
Kabul	1,770	Kabul
Kandahar	18,403	Qandahar
Kapisa	722	Raqi
Konar	4,045	Asadabad
Kunduz	3,021	Konduz
Laghman	2,783	Mehtalam
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Nangarhar	2,940	Jalalabad
Nimruz	15,963	Zaranj
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Paktika	7,464	Zareh Sharan
Parwan	3,628	Charikar
Samangan	5,969	Samangan
Sare Pol	9,856	Sare-Pol
Takhar	4,777	Taloqan
Uruzgan	11,308	Tarin Kowt
Wardak	3,483	Kowt-e Ashrow
Zabul	6,675	Qalat

Population



Legend

PROVINCES_2013

POP_TOTAL

	135300 - 516800
	516801 - 898300
	898301 - 1279800
	1279801 - 1661300
	1661301 - 2042800
	2042801 - 2424300
	2424301 - 2805800
	2805801 - 3187300
	3187301 - 3568800
	3568801 - 3950300

Soviet War Data

Afghanistan Population by Province in 1979¹²³

Table 24
THE POPULATION OF AFGHANISTAN IN THE LATE
1350s Š./1970s, ACCORDING TO THE NOMAD SURVEY
OF 1357 Š./1978 AND THE CENSUS OF 1358 Š./1979

Province ¹	Sedentary population in 1358 Š./1979	Nomad population in summer 1357 Š./1978 ²
Kabul	1,373,572	64,994
Parwān	504,732	30,134
Kāpīsā	250,553	1,669
Wardak	287,605	24,948
Lōgar	216,303	15,792
Ġaznī	646,623	37,772
Paktīkā	245,229	4,217
Paktīā	484,023	13,765
Nangrahār	745,986	336
Konar	250,132	11,273
Laġmān	310,751	2,503
Badaġšān	497,758	38,231
Takār	519,752	28,224
Baġlān	493,882	38,466
Kondoḡ	555,437	10,752
Samangān	261,693	58,900
Balk	580,146	20,065
Jowzjān	629,608	50,814
Fāryāb	541,706	39,978
Bādġis	209,526	52,864
Herat	793,198	72,369
Farāh	234,621	17,573
Nīmrōḡ	103,634	—
Helmand	517,645	2,498
Qandahār	567,204	1,204
Zābol	179,362	10,909
Orozġān	444,168	10,321
Ġōr	337,992	86,307
Bāmīān	268,517	23,448
Nomads with no regular camping ground		1,137
Afghanistan	13,051,358	771,463

Notes: (1) The provincial organization of Afghanistan has undergone change since 1357 Š./1978; data have been adjusted to reflect the situation in 1363 Š./1984. (2) Including semi-nomads; data have been obtained by multiplying the number of families recorded in the survey of 1357 Š./1978 by 5.6, the average number of persons per nomad family recorded in the 1358 Š./1979 survey. About 3,000 nomad families (ca. 16,800 persons) that summer in Pakistani Baluchistan were surveyed but are not included here.

Sources: For the sedentary population, CSO, *Natāyej*, pp. 148ff. For the nomad population, the author's calculations from the data sheets of the 1357 Š./1978 survey.

¹²³ Table 24. The Population of Afghanistan in the Late 1350s Š./1970s, According to the Nomad Survey of 1357 Š./1978 and the Census of 1358

Note:

All of the following data was gathered from the “Afghanistan Reports” published by the Institute for Strategic Studies in Islamabad (ISSI). ISSI is a non-profit committed to analyzing conflict using all available open source intelligence. The following information was gathered from the “Afghanistan Reports” from September 1983 to September 1987. The Afghanistan Reports were published monthly and provided a total number of violent incidents per province for the month. Each incident was also labeled as inside or outside of a city and against a mobile or immobile target. The reports also recorded the initiator of each incident. The data was compiled into a geodatabase so that it can be analyzed special. This database is now available through UNC Libraries.

Total Number of Incidents According to Mujihadeen Sources (Sept 1984- Sept 1987)¹²⁴

Province	Incidents	%
Nimruz	55	1%
Helmand	196	2%
Quandahar	1135	11%
Zabol	148	1%
Ghazni	442	4%
Paktika	218	2%
Paktia	846	8%
Nangarhar	1187	11%
Kunarha	553	5%
Badakhshan	150	1%
Takhar	268	2%

124 . “Afghanistan Report, Vol. 14-42 (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, 1984-1987).

Konduz	295	3%
Baghlan	305	3%
Samangan	118	1%
Balkh	269	2%
Jowzjan	175	2%
Faryab	299	3%
Badghis	83	1%
Herat	582	5%
Farah	205	2%
Bamian	55	1%
Ghowr	119	1%
Oruzgan	125	1%
Kabul	1187	11%
Parvan	627	6%
Kapisa	221	2%
Laghman	179	2%
Lowgar	437	4%
Vardak	284	3%

Acts of Violence within vicinity* of Urban Area¹²⁵
***Vicinity is not Defined by the Afghanistan Report**

Province Name	Total Incidents	Urban Incidents	Percent of Incidents that were Urban
Nimruz	55	7	12.73%
Helmand	196	27	13.78%
Quandahar	1135	413	36.39%
Zabol	148	33	22.30%
Ghazni	442	54	12.22%
Paktika	218	20	9.17%
Paktia	846	41	4.85%

125 . “Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

Nangarhar	1187	55	4.63%
Kunarha	553	39	7.05%
Badakhshan	150	22	14.67%
Takhar	268	34	12.69%
Konduz	295	32	10.85%
Baghlan	305	68	22.30%
Samangan	118	12	10.17%
Balkh	269	50	18.59%
Jowzjan	175	9	5.14%
Faryab	299	33	11.04%
Badghis	83	22	26.51%
Herat	582	163	28.01%
Farah	205	30	14.63%
Bamian	55	20	36.36%
Ghowr	119	21	17.65%
Oruzgan	125	16	12.80%
Kabul	1187	437	36.82%
Parvan	627	81	12.92%
Kapisa	221	3	1.36%
Laghman	179	5	2.79%
Lowgar	437	39	8.92%
Vardak	284	22	7.75%

**Incidents initiated by Mujihadeen against Mobile Targets
(September 1984 – September 1987)¹²⁶**

Province Name	Mobile Incidents	% of Total that are Mobile
Nimruz	19	34.55%
Helmand	70	35.71%
Quandahar	386	34.01%
Zabol	63	42.57%
Ghazni	178	40.27%
Paktika	89	40.83%
Paktia	275	32.51%

126 . “Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

Nangarhar	845	71.19%
Kunarha	139	25.14%
Badakhshan	38	25.33%
Takhar	95	35.45%
Konduz	79	26.78%
Baghlan	111	36.39%
Samangan	37	31.36%
Balkh	83	30.86%
Jowzjan	47	26.86%
Faryab	107	35.79%
Badghis	22	26.51%
Herat	161	27.66%
Farah	72	35.12%
Bamian	11	20.00%
Ghowr	48	40.34%
Oruzgan	48	38.40%
Kabul	360	30.33%
Parvan	196	31.26%
Kapisa	86	38.91%
Laghman	61	34.08%
Lowgar	154	35.24%
Vardak	100	35.21%

Incidents Initiated by Mujihadeen against Immobile Targets (September 1984 – September 1987)¹²⁷

Province	Immobile Incidents	Percent of Talks that are Immobile
Nimruz	23	41.82%
Helmand	87	44.39%
Quandahar	419	36.92%
Zabol	44	29.73%
Ghazni	151	34.16%
Paktika	73	33.49%
Paktia	319	37.71%
Nangarhar	569	47.94%
Kunarha	223	40.33%
Badakhshan	72	48.00%
Takhar	73	27.24%
Konduz	106	35.93%

127 . “Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

Baghlan	97	31.80%
Samangan	51	43.22%
Balkh	103	38.29%
Jowzjan	81	46.29%
Faryab	130	43.48%
Badghis	32	38.55%
Herat	269	46.22%
Farah	59	28.78%
Bamian	27	49.09%
Ghowr	52	43.70%
Oruzgan	65	52.00%
Kabul	529	44.57%
Parvan	265	42.26%
Kapisa	96	43.44%
Laghman	51	28.49%
Lowgar	161	36.84%
Vardak	70	24.65%

Violent Incidents Initiated by Soviets According to Mujihadeen Sources (September 1984 – September 1987)¹²⁸

Province	Events Initiated by Soviets	Percent of Total
Nimruz	14	25.45%
Helmand	61	31.12%
Quandahar	395	34.80%
Zabol	57	38.51%
Ghazni	131	29.64%
Paktika	73	33.49%
Paktia	328	38.77%
Nangarhar	407	34.29%
Kunarha	222	40.14%
Badakhshan	55	36.67%
Takhar	110	41.04%
Konduz	135	45.76%
Baghlan	117	38.36%
Samangan	40	33.90%

128 . “Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

Balkh	84	31.23%
Jowzjan	110	62.86%
Faryab	131	43.81%
Badghis	33	39.76%
Herat	172	29.55%
Farah	74	36.10%
Bamian	21	38.18%
Ghowr	33	27.73%
Oruzgan	34	27.20%
Kabol	300	25.27%
Parvan	227	36.20%
Kapisa	58	26.24%
Laghman	76	42.46%
Lowgar	106	24.26%
Vardak	146	51.41%

Total Events Reported By Soviets (September 1984 – September 1987)¹²⁹

Province	# Events Reported by Soviets	% of Total Events
Nimruz	5	0.38%
Helmand	21	1.59%
Quandahar	120	9.10%
Zabol	14	1.06%
Ghazni	26	1.97%
Paktika	9	0.68%
Paktia	94	7.13%
Nangarhar	127	9.63%
Kunarha	23	1.74%
Badakhshan	9	0.68%
Takhar	58	4.40%
Konduz	45	3.41%
Baghlan	66	5.00%
Samangan	31	2.35%

129 . “Afghanistan Report (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamabad Institute for Security Studies, [1984-1987]).

Balkh	43	3.26%
Jowzjan	22	1.67%
Faryab	55	4.17%
Badghis	22	1.67%
Herat	112	8.49%
Farah	33	2.50%
Bamian	5	0.38%
Ghowr	9	0.68%
Oruzgan	11	0.83%
Kabol	204	15.47%
Parvan	45	3.41%
Kapisa	23	1.74%
Laghman	18	1.36%
Lowgar	47	3.56%
Vardak	22	1.67%

Data from Operation Enduring Freedom

Number of Enemy Initiated Conflicts by Province (2004-2009)¹³⁰

Province	Enemy Initiated Conflicts
Helmand	9838
Qandahar	4620
Kunar	4166
Paktika	2764
Khost	1897
Zabul	1851
Ghazni	1533
Uruzgan	1365
Maydan Wardak	1122
Paktya	1083
Farah	838
Logar	765
Kabul	730

¹³⁰ WikiLeaks, Afghanistan War Diary, 2010).

Nuristan	728
Nangarhar	596
Kapisa	568
Laghman	473
Badghis	442
Kunduz	378
Hirat	353
Parwan	229
Faryab	183
Nimroz	181
Baghlan	177
Balkh	134
Ghor	76
Badakhshan	73
Jawzjan	47
Takhar	40
Bamyan	18
Daykundi	18
Samangan	17
Sari Pul	17
Panjsher	10

Percent of House Holds receiving any income from Opium production or sale¹³¹

Province	Percent of Families Reporting Opium Income
Helmand	41
Balk	9
Badaksan	7
Orozgan	5
DaiKundi	5
Qandahar	4
Nangrahar	4
Baglan	4
Baghlan	4
Zabol	4
Faryab	3
Takar	3

¹³¹ Cmicweb.org. Afghanistan Census Data. <https://www.cmicweb.org/Pages/newhomepage/index.html>

Farah	2
Gor	2
Jowzjan	1
Samangan	1
Sar-e pol	1
Kunar	1
Paktika	1
Logar	1
Parwan	1
Wardak	1
Badgis	1
Nuristan	1
Kabul	0
Herat	0
Nimroz	0
Konduz	0
Paktia	0
Lagman	0
Panjshir	0
Kapisa	0
Gazni	0
Bamian	0

Percentage of Conflicts within certain distance of Water Sources¹³²

Distance from Water source	% of Enemy Initiated Conflicts
.5 miles	37.5
1 mile	58.7
5 miles	96.2

Percentage of incidents within certain distance from Roads¹³³

132 Mapcruzin. 27 March 2013. Afghanistan Lakes. <http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-afghanistan-lakes-arcgis-maps-shapefiles.htm>

133 Afghanistan Information Management Services. Afghanistan Roads. August 2005. http://www.aims.org.af/services/mapping/shape_files/afghanistan/line/roads.zip

Distance from Roads	% of Enemy Initiated Conflicts
.5 miles	42.34
1 miles	61.5
5 miles	92.8

Percentage of Incidents within certain distance of airfields¹³⁴

Distance From Airfield	% of Enemy Initiated Conflicts
.5 miles	.6
1 miles	1.3
5 miles	5.7

Percentage of Conflicts Taking place in Ethnic Group Areas

Ethnic Group	% of Enemy Initiated Conflict
Afghans	.018
Aimaq	.728
Baloch	.123
Brahui	.11
Hazara	1.17
Nuristani	.33
Pashtun	81.54
Tajik	13.61
Turkmen	.44
Uzbek	1.78

Violent Incidents By Language Group Areas¹³⁵

Language Groups	% of Total Incidents
Balcohi	.57%

134 Mapcruzin. 27 March 2013. Afghanistan Airfields. <http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-afghanistan-airfields-arcgis-maps-shapefiles.htm>

135 Language areas were determined using the primary language of each village. Language domination was assumed to the point equidistant from two villages.
SAID. Afghanistan Provinces. June 2013. Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives.
<http://usaidmisti.com/content/provinces-2013>

Dari	6.58%
Nuristani	0.29%
Other	0.86%
Pashto	88.49%
Turkmen	0.12%
Uzbek	0.47%

Percentage of incidents that take place within or within a certain distance of irrigated areas¹³⁶

Distance from Irrigated Area	% of total enemy initiated events
Within	34.78
.5miles	52.23
1 miles	80.73
5 miles	98.17

Percent of incidents within certain distances of mineral deposits¹³⁷

Distance from Mineral Deposit	% of enemy initiated events
.5miles	.01
1 mile	.03
5 miles	3.08

Number of Incidents by District (Confined to Qandahar, Helmand, and Kunar Provinces)¹³⁸

District Name	Province Name	Total Incidents
Panjwayi	Qandahar	2184
Dara-i-Pech	Kunar	1983
Nad Ali	Helmand	1920

136 Mapcruzin. 27 March 2013. Afghanistan Irrigated Areas. <http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-afghanistan-irrigated-areas-arcgis-maps-shapefiles.htm>

137 There did not appear to be a relationship between what mineral made up the deposit and frequency of conflict.

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138 WikiLeaks, "Afghanistan War Diary" 2010).

Nahri Sarraj	Helmand	1761
Sangin	Helmand	1522
Garmser	Helmand	1451
Musa Qala	Helmand	832
Naw Zad	Helmand	675
Asad abad	Kunar	612
Qandahar City	Qandahar	574
Nawa-i-Barak Zayi	Helmand	511
Kajaki	Helmand	500
Maywand	Qandahar	422
Daman	Qandahar	350
Shah Wali Kot	Qandahar	347
Nali	Kunar	347
Lashkargah	Helmand	320
Sirkanay	Kunar	307
Arghandab	Qandahar	296
Chawkay	Kunar	295
Bar Kunar	Kunar	285
Reg	Helmand	245
Narang Wa Badil	Kunar	194
Spin Boldak	Qandahar	162
Washer	Helmand	137
Khakrez	Qandahar	73
Ghorak	Qandahar	49
Khas Kunar	Kunar	40
Marwara	Kunar	38
Arghistan	Qandahar	31
Maruf	Qandahar	31
Dangam	Kunar	31
Shorabak	Qandahar	21
Chapa Dara	Kunar	20
Nurgal	Kunar	14
Bughran	Helmand	12
Reg	Qandahar	4
Disho	Helmand	1

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