

The Impact of the Power Vacuum in Afghanistan on Iran and Turkey

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1. Introduction

Located in the heart of Asia at the nexus of important geographies such as China, India, Iran and Turkestan, Afghanistan is often called the “roof and cap of the world.” Due to its geopolitical position, it has been a center of gravity from a political and military point of view since the antiquity. According to historical records, Afghanistan has been under the rule of the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Turkic tribes such as the Scythians, the Kushans and the Akhuns, and finally the Muslim Arab armies. With the exception of the Ghaznavids, it was only in the 18th century when the foundations of an independent state could be laid in Afghanistan, which had been under constant pressure from the powerful states that ruled Iran, Turkestan and India since the 10th century. At the beginning of the 18th century, the pressure on Afghanistan decreased due to the weakening of the two powerful states in India and Iran, namely the Safavids and Baburs, and in 1747, Ahmed Shah Abdali succeeded in establishing an independent state in Kandahar. Taking advantage of Afghanistan’s strategic position, the Kingdom of Afghanistan managed to take control of India up to the Indus River, Iran up to Mashhad, and South Turkestan along the Ceyhun River in such a short period of time so much so that the Afghan Kingdom had become the most powerful state in the central Asia by the end of the 18th century.¹

The 19th century, on the other hand, has been a very long and traumatic century for Asia in general and for Afghanistan in particular. Britain

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¹ Orhan Yazıcı, *Modern Afganistan’ın Kuruluşu (Establishment of Modern Afghanistan) 1834-1922*, (Malatya: Mengüceli Yayınları, 2011).

and Russia's projection of their colonial rivalry to the heart of Asia has caused a great shock to the whole continent. Afghanistan was one of the countries most affected by the competition between Russia and Britain. Russia's advance in Asia was only halted by the presence of another colonial power, the British in India. In order to prevent Russia from invading India, the British took control of the region by extending their strongholds first to the Punjab and then to the Ceyhun River.²

Afghanistan, chosen by the British as a political and military buffer to prevent Russia from descending to the south, has historically been a country of great crises and instability. The foreign interventions in Afghanistan, and the power vacuum and instability created by these interventions, have led to many problems not only for this country but also for the neighboring countries. This study will focus on two of these issues and will address their impact on Iran and Turkey. Following the second section, which gives a historical background of foreign interventions in Afghanistan from the 19th century to 1979, the third chapter focuses on the period after Soviet occupation in which the problems in Afghanistan rapidly took on a more global form. The fourth section focuses on the effects of the drug trade and irregular migration stemming from instability in Afghanistan on Turkey and Iran. The paper concludes with a section that evaluates policy proposals aimed at resolution of these issues.

2. Foreign Interventions in Afghanistan

There are a few important events that have made Afghanistan an unstable country and prevented it from getting out of the spiral of instability until today except for a few brief periods. The first of these is the British occupations in 1838 and 1878. In this period, in addition to losing the Punjab lands that stretched to the Indus river, Afghanistan was cut off from the sea and confined to a mountainous area, thereby transformed into a landlocked state. Not only Afghanistan suffered many casualties during these occupation periods, but also this first contact with a European state laid the foundations of the formation of an introverted and closed society in Afghanistan. As a result of the "jihad culture" adopted by the

² Arnold Fletcher, *Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest*, (New York: Cornell University, 1966), 76.

clergy and major tribal chieftains who organized the people against the British invasions, a great anger was built up among the Afghan people against the West and the values it represented.³ The Afghan people occasionally showed defiance and resistance against the central governments which had close contact with neighboring Russia and Britain. Especially the religious circles did not hesitate to declare their own governments as infidels each time they cooperated with Russia or Britain.⁴

Another development that worsened the dire situation in Afghanistan was the Durand Treaty signed with the British in 1893. This treaty established the 2400-kilometer Anglo-Afghan border, known as the Durand Line. Drawn with no demographic or natural reference, the Durand Line created a tangle of regional problems whose effects are still felt today. Pashtun and Baluch tribes living on both sides of the border increased the border permeability to the highest levels.⁵ Moreover, it was almost impossible to establish authority in Afghanistan when the British armed the tribes who were living alongside the passages to India with modern equipment and made them responsible for security. The British recruitment of the Pashtun and Baluch tribes, which remain on the Indian side of the Durand Line and are loyal to the British as "Tochi scouts" or "Hayber riflemen", has made the security problem between Afghanistan and India unsolvable.⁶

The St. Petersburg Agreement between Britain and Russia in 1907 is another important issue that played a role in Afghanistan's instability.⁷ Afghanistan, which was left to British influence by this agreement, soon came under the full custody of Britain. This

³ Orhan Yazıcı, "Birinci İngiliz-Afghan Savaşı ve Sonuçları (The First British-Afghan War and Its Consequences)" in *Afganistan üzerine Araştırmalar (Research on Afghanistan)* Ed. A. Ahmetbeyoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih ve Tatbikat Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 82.

⁴ Senzil Nawid, "The State, the Clergy and the British Imperial Policy in Afghanistan During the 19th and Early 20th Centuries", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, No:4 (November 1997): 582. See also Ashraf Ghani, "Islam and State-Building in a Tribal Society Afghanistan, 1880-1901", *Modern Asian Studies*, XII/2, (1978): 269-284.

⁵ The Durand Line, which also forms the current Afghanistan-Pakistan border, has become a border where all kinds of illegal trafficking, especially human, arms and drug smuggling, can be carried out easily. C. Collin Davies, *The problem is the North-West Frontier, 1890-1908*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 26.

⁶ See Ikramul Haq, "Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective", *Asian Survey*, 36, No:10, (October 1996): 47.

⁷ E. Huntington, "The Anglo-Russian Agreement Al to Tibet Afghanistan and Persia", *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, XXXIX/11, (1907): 653-658.

was an important development for the Afghan society, which had developed resistance to the West and the values it represented during the British occupations, as it increased its sense of nationality and sensitivity to the fight against imperialism. During this period, the Cevanan-ı Afghan group, which could perhaps be called the very first organized civil society movement in Afghanistan was formed. Led by Mahmoud Tarzī and his son-in-law Shehzad Amanullah Khan, the group adopted an anti-imperialist discourse and managed to liberate Afghanistan from British custody on November 22, 1921 after a long period of struggle.⁸ However, internal and external interventions took place against the rule of Amanullah Khan, who, as a progressive leader, soon had taken crucial steps to modernize and advance Afghanistan. First of all, the new government underestimated the possible reaction of the Afghan society to the modernizing reforms. Added to the agitations by British who could not stomach the independence of Afghanistan, these reforms soon became a recipe for a catastrophe. The British never stopped for a moment mobilizing religiously sensitive circles: they distributed photos of Amanullah Khan's trip to Europe with his wife, Queen Sūreyya, across tribal areas along the border. As a result, the Bechche-i Saka uprising of 1928 destroyed the government of Amanullah Khan and Afghanistan once again lost all its gains.⁹

During the reign of Nadir and Mohammed Zahir Shahs in Afghanistan, a balance of power policy was pursued between Britain and Russia, and relative peace and stability was sought by taking security measures at the borders. This time, the struggle for independence in India became the most important issue that weakened authority in Afghanistan. In the rebellion against British colonialism, tribes on the Afghan side of the border played an important role, crossing the border in places and giving all kinds of support to their relatives in the region. Unable to resist further as a result of the events that unfolded, British forces gradually withdrew from the border, leaving the administration and control of the

⁸ Vartan Gregorian, "Mahmoud The Style and Saraj-ol-Akhbar: Ideology of Nationalism and Modernization Of Afghanistan", *Middle East Journal*, XXI/3, (Summer 1967): 349; Yazıcı, "The First British-Afghan War and Its Consequences", 177, 211.

⁹ Bilal N. Şimşir, *Atatürk ve Afganistan (Ataturk and Afghanistan)*, (Ankara : Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2002), 219.

region to the new Pakistani government. Thus, Afghanistan faced the issue of Pakistan (Pashtunistan), an independent state mostly populated by Pashtuns just beyond the border, before it could solve the problem of the Durand line.¹⁰ Both states inherited the problem of controlling the border in the North-West Border Province from the British.¹¹ It was impossible to control the border between the two countries thanks to the system in which state-supporting tribes, armed on both sides of the border, were tolerated in their smuggling of opium, people, animals and all kinds of goods. Therefore, during this period, the central governments in Kabul and Peshawar almost had no authority along the border.¹²

In addition to border problems in Afghanistan, another cause of instability was the production of poppies and opium. Due to ban on opium production in 1955 in Iran, where there were approximately one million addicts, poppy farming and opium production in Afghanistan increasingly continued until the 1970s. Free production and use of opium in Afghanistan also attracted many addicts.¹³ In 1973, when a military coup by General Mohammed Davud Khan toppled the dynasty in Afghanistan and replaced it with a republican regime, the poppy production and smuggling was banned. Especially the entry and exit of foreign drug users to and from the country were controlled and the foreign addicts who had settled in major cities were removed from the country. Yet, it proved harder to completely stop poppy farming in areas far from the center. At a time when the Afghan government is trying to maintain peace and stability across the country and establish its

¹⁰ Regarding the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and emerging new problems, see Halil Toker, "Pakistan-Afganistan Dostluğu Üzerine Düşen Gölge "Peştunistan Sorunu" (Shadow Falling on Pakistan-Afghanistan Friendship 'Pashtunistan Problem')", in *Afganistan Üzerine Araştırmalar (Research on Afghanistan)* ed. Ali Ahmetbeyoglu (İstanbul: Tarih ve Tatbikat Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 225-242.

¹¹ Until 1947, the British employed many tribes at the border with the promise of money and aid to protect the border with Afghanistan. Michael Barthorp, *The North-West Frontier: A Pictorial History, 1859-1947*, (Bristol: Blandford Pr, 1982), 83.

¹² According to a report prepared during this period, more than half of the tribal men at the border had firearms. R. O. Christensen, "Tribesmen, Government, and Political Economy on the North-West Frontier," in *Arrested Development in India: The Historical Dimension* ed. C. Dewey, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1988), 179.

¹³ Before the 1973 military coup, it is estimated that there were around 5,000 to 6,000 hippies in Kabul alone. Haq, "Pak-Afghan The Drug Trade Of Historical Perspective", 948.

authority across the country, the intervention of the United States in the Far East once again upset the balance in Afghanistan. Earlier, Afghan opium had been shipped only to the Pakistani, Indian and Iranian markets, while the Western markets had supplied opium from the “Golden Triangle,” i.e. Burma, Thailand and Laos. With America’s intervention in the Far East, the governments of Vietnam and Laos fell and the drug supply line in these countries were disrupted. Coupled with a severe drought, the production capacity of the “Golden Triangle” gradually shrank and fell short of meeting the global demand for heroin. As a result, larger demands began to be made on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, called the “Golden Crescent”, another base of opium production.¹⁴

3. Afghanistan After the Invasion of the Soviet Union

The Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 set the country on a new path in international politics.¹⁵ As a response to the central government in Kabul coming under full Soviet control, the Afghan people acted again with the efforts of many tribal forces and clerics who called for jihad, as they did during the British occupations of the past, and the Mujahideen groups took full control of their regions.¹⁶ The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was met with a backlash in the Islamic world as well as in the Western world, which acted with a Cold War reflex. Muslim states such as Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as Western states led by the United States cut all ties with the legitimate government in Kabul and provided large amounts of weapons and financial assistance to the Mujahideen groups fighting against the occupation, who became important agents. They had started to provide the cash needed for the arms and ammunition through the opium trade, which they gave legitimacy to. The Mujahideen groups, who were engaged in a struggle against the invading Soviet army and government forces, also contacted illegal organizations in order to supply the military

¹⁴ I. Haq, “Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective”, 949.

¹⁵ In this regard, see Esedullah “Afganistan’ın Sovyetler Tarafından İşgali ve İşgalden Sonra Afganistan (Afghanistan After the Soviet Invasion and Occupation of Afghanistan)”, in *Afganistan Üzerine Araştırmalar (Research on Afghanistan)* ed. Ali Ahmetbeyoglu, İstanbul: Tarih ve Tatbikat Vakfı Yayınları, 2002, 2791.

¹⁶ For more information on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the struggle in Afghanistan, see Shabbir-Alvi-Rizvi, *Sovyet İşgalindeki Afganistan (Soviet-occupied Afghanistan)*, trans. I. Bosnian-A. Arslan (İstanbul: Bürde Yayınları, 1982).

equipment needed to carry out the war that would last for nearly a decade. "Opium is very important for our survival and for our jihad against the infidel Russians," mujahideen leaders who launched the resistance against the Soviet army told foreign media.¹⁷ For this reason, many of the groups that started the resistance against the Soviets started to encourage opium production and buy weapons and ammunition with the large amounts of money they obtained.¹⁸

While jihad was being waged against the Soviet occupation, the groups were also fighting for dominance in their regions. They financed both battles through foreign aid and drug production.¹⁹ Thus, the resistance groups established their own administrations in the regions under their control and took over local security, logistics, agricultural activities and all kinds of social services. Dissolution of central authority in Afghanistan and poppy farming continued hand in hand. During the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, agricultural production in this country completely collapsed, except for poppy farming. The fact that the income from the poppy was ten times higher than the income from wheat led almost all Afghan farmers towards this product.²⁰

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States played a leading role in arming resistance organizations in Afghanistan. It was undoubtedly the drug and arms traffickers who benefited most from America's entry into the region under the pretext of political protection. Under their auspices, opium from poppy fields in Afghanistan was converted into heroin in factories in Pakistan, and then it was transferred to the new market, Europe and America.²¹ From 1980

¹⁷ I. Haq, "Pak-Afghan The Drug Trade in Historical Perspective", 956.

¹⁸ It is known that one of the largest resistance groups to consolidate its dominance in the Helmand (Hilmend) River Valley, Hizb-i Islami, produced opium by using a partner (broker) in order to provide equipment to the mujahideen. See John Jennings, "Afghanistan: Efforts to End Opium Cultivation Hit New Snags", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (June 1990): 22.

¹⁹ Between 1982 and 1983, the opium harvest in Afghanistan doubled and reached 575 tons after the Mujahideen took control. See. Haq, "Pak-Afghan The Drug Trade in Historical Perspective", 954.

²⁰ Mohammed November Yusufi, "Effects of the War on Agriculture in the Tragedy of Afghanistan" in *The Social, Cultural, and Political Impact of the Soviet Invasion*, Ed. B. Hultdt-E. Jansson, (London: Routledge, 1988), 212.

²¹ It was the countries that were directly involved which suffered the most from the turmoil. Pakistan is a case in point. In 1980, the number of drug addicts in Pakistan increased from just around 5,000 to seventy thousand in 1983. Later, according to Pakistan's Narcotics Control Administration, the increase went "completely out of

onwards, Afghan drug traffickers have risen to become the leading actors in the international market.

With the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan without any gains and the overthrow of the Kabul government, Afghanistan entered a new process. The international public expected that the country would regain its state status and became a source of stability in the region. However, instead of coming together to form a central authority and ensuring the integrity of the country, the Mujahideen groups engaged in civil war to establish their own authority. The civil war initiated by the insurgent organizations has plunged Afghanistan into total turmoil, while security in the country have completely disappeared.²²

4. Drugs and Irregular Migration

Instead of bringing peace, the Soviet intervention and the struggle against it turned Afghanistan into the center of world opium production. In the same years, the business took on another dimension, with the tribes at the border, especially the Pashtuns, learning to process opium and turn it into pure heroin. Afghanistan, which until that day exported raw opium, was now producing heroin in successive factories in Helmand (Hilmend) province, which borders both Iran and Pakistan. Thus, the need for factories in Pakistan gradually disappeared and it was possible to transfer the heroin obtained to the foreign market by other means.²³ The dissolution of the Soviet Union shortly after its withdrawal from Afghanistan and the emergence of new states bordering Afghanistan created a new route for drug traffickers.²⁴ The disappearance of

control" and in less than three years the number of drug addicts had reached one million and three hundred thousand people. After 1990, with an optimistic estimate, this number was around two million. Haq, "Pak-Afghan The Drug Trade in Historical Perspective", 953.

²² Mansoor Akbar Kundi and Faiza Mir, "Afghanistan War Out and End", in *Afghanistan Üzerine Araştırmalar (Research on Afghanistan)* ed. by Ali Ahmetbeyoglu (İstanbul: Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 323.

²³ During a decade of struggle after Soviet intervention the central authority in Afghanistan had completely disappeared and this country had become the most important part of the Golden Crescent. According to estimates, the Helmand valley in southwestern Afghanistan under the control of insurgents alone covered 40% of the country's production. See. Haq, "Pak-Afghan The Drug Trade Of Historical Perspective", 950.

²⁴ Regarding the effects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Central Asia, see Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier, *The Afghan War and Soviet Central Asia*, (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 1986).

northern border security alongside the border with Pakistan in the south and the Iranian border in the west has accelerated drug trafficking. Not only routes in Pakistan or Iran but also those in the new states of Central Asia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan were also used as it was easier and cheaper to reach Europe through these routes.²⁵

Heroin originating in Afghanistan was smuggled by land and air to Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka and then shipped to Western Europe and the United States. Another parallel transit route was from Pakistan to Hong Kong and Malaysia, from there to North America by ships. The second transit route was by land from Iran, Turkey and Lebanon to Europe or by sea from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, and through the Suez canal to the major markets in Europe and North America. During the ten-year period from 1980 to 1990, 50% of the heroin entering the European and American markets originated in Afghanistan.²⁶ In 1994, the United States suspended all economic aid to Afghanistan, blaming the Kabul government for drug production, as heroin from Afghanistan flooded European and American markets. However, it was not the central government that was responsible for both poppy farming and heroin production, but resistance groups supported by America, Pakistan, Iran and other states. Poppy farming was encouraged in the areas where they dominated, the land of the villagers was rented, seeds and fertilizers and even loans were provided to producers. Again, many heroin factories were known to run freely in areas controlled by resistance organizations. The resulting product was easily shipped abroad by trucks bringing aid to the country. As it turned out, the states that supported the resistance organizations instead of the central government in Afghanistan after the Soviet intervention, by turning a blind eye to poppy farming in the country almost transformed it into a drug production center.

The support for resistance organizations instead of the central government in Kabul led to the rapid disunion of Afghanistan,

²⁵ Taking advantage of the authority vacuum that emerged with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the Turkistan road was opened, providing a new route to be used in the supply of heroin to Europe. For this new drug route, see United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, "World Drug Report 2007", 187.

²⁶ Haq, "Pak-Afghan The Drug Trade in Historical Perspective", 954.

whereby religious and ethnic divisions peaked. During this period, an organization called the “Taliban” was formed by Arab and other Muslim nationals who came to Pakistan to join the jihad in Afghanistan and settled in madrasahs in the border provinces and Pashtuns on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. After the Soviet withdrawal and America’s withdrawal of support for the central government in Afghanistan, this organization easily began to find supporters across the border and penetrate into Afghanistan. It soon took full control of the provinces in southern Afghanistan, captured Kabul and established its own government. Once again, Afghanistan having lost all its administrative and military gains, has been governed by a foreign-backed group with no historical or political background. Particularly notorious for its strict religious practices, the Taliban initially tried to ban opium production, but after a while it softened the bans and even started to encourage opium production.²⁷

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 events, the United States intervened in Afghanistan, which it blamed for attacks on its country, destroying the Taliban regime in Kabul and establishing a central government led by Hamid Karzaï. Despite all the support by the Western world, neither Karzaï’s nor Ashraf Ghani’s governments have been able to extend their authority even to the outskirts of Kabul. Despite de facto support of NATO forces, Taliban dominance could not be broken especially in Afghanistan’s southwestern and southeastern provinces. Therefore, with this intervention, the central authority weakened even further.

After NATO intervention, poppy farming continued exponentially in places where the central government could not assert control. For example, in 1990, when the Soviet Union withdrew, poppy farming was carried out on 41,000 hectares of land in Afghanistan, compared to 91,000 hectares in 1999, 104,000 hectares in 2005 and reached to 165,000 hectares in 2006 with an increase of 59%. In 2007 448,000 families engaged in poppy farming in 28 of the 34 provinces, as it spread almost throughout the country. On a large

²⁷ Mansoor Akbar Kundî and Faiza Mir, “Afghanistan War Out and End”, 329; For Taliban’s activities in Afghanistan, see also Rauf Beg, *Adı Afganistan’dı; Talibanların Eline Nasıl Düştü? (Its name was Afghanistan; How Did It Fall into the Hands of the Taliban?)* (Istanbul: Turan Yayıncılık, 2001).

and small scale, local traders guarantee loans, seeds, fertilizers and purchases to increase production. It is also known that a significant number of these traders transport large quantities to the border and beyond and have some kind of connection to international criminal networks. The total number of local opium traders in Afghanistan is estimated to be around 250,000.²⁸

External interventions in Afghanistan have resulted in failure to establish a central authority in this county and ensure the integrity of the country. The constant occupations and coups Afghanistan has undergone, pose a threat to not only its domestic security but also the security of neighboring countries. The drugs shipped from Afghanistan, which became the center of world drug production after the Soviet invasion, to Europe and America through Pakistan, Iran and the Turkic Republics of Central Asia affected the internal dynamics of these countries and endangered their border security. Thanks to the high income from drug trafficking, many criminal networks have emerged in these countries. 1 kg of heroin, which is worth \$2,000-\$3,500 at the Afghan border, is sold for \$7,000 in Pakistan and between \$35,000 to \$45,000 in the UK, a major European market. If the heroin is packaged in grams and marketed that way, the price of the product increases from \$43,700 per kg to \$73,500. Diluting of heroin further increases its price.²⁹

Iran is one of the countries most affected by drug trafficking originating from Afghanistan, as reflected in the reports on the production and trafficking of drugs published by the United Nations. Public disorder in Iran's Sistan region, which borders Afghanistan's largest drug base, Helmand province, is extreme compared to other parts of the country. The drug route through Sistan and South Azerbaijan is under the control of ethnically based separatist terrorist organizations in the region and poses a major threat to Iran. Despite the efforts of the government and security forces in Iran to combat drug trafficking, the country remains an important route. Even the implementation of the death penalty in this country cannot prevent the trafficking of drugs. Criminal networks play

²⁸ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, "World Drug Report 2007", 183.

²⁹ Roger Lewis, "Serious Business: The Global Heroin Economy", in *Big Deal: The Politics of the Illicit Drug Business*, ed. A. Henman R. Lewis T. Maylon, (London : Pluto Press, 1985), 9.

an important role in the instability of Iran by smuggling people, weapons, oil and many other commodities besides drugs.³⁰

Turkey is another country threatened by the drugs that originate from Afghanistan and trafficked through Iran. Drugs originating from Afghanistan or the “Golden Crescent” are passed through the Eastern and Southeastern provinces of Turkey and sent to Europe in transit. Although many criminal networks play a role in the transport of heroin originating from Afghanistan to Europe via Iran and Turkey, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) terrorist organization is the primary actor. It is not coincidental that the PKK terrorist group, which is almost the same age as the Soviet occupation, settled in the Iran-Iraq-Turkey border triangle and made the region the center of instability. The drugs from Afghanistan are smuggled into Iraq and Turkey via the route controlled by the PKK terrorist group and transported from there to Europe. Although the earnings in this way cannot be fully calculated, it is estimated that the terrorist organization has an income of between \$600 million and \$1.5 billion.³¹ The money obtained from this trade is allocated for weapons and equipment for the terrorist organization. In fact, PKK which creates unstable regions and then organizes the smuggling of people, oil and weapons along the routes in these regions, can at the same time be considered a major criminal enterprise.

Another issue created by the government vacuum in Afghanistan is the phenomenon of irregular migration, which has been going on for four decades. Apart from Pakistan, Iran and Turkey are the two countries that are particularly affected by this phenomenon in Afghanistan. Affected by the successive crises like Soviet occupation, civil war, Taliban rule and NATO intervention, the Afghan people generated large migration movements.³² The influx of refugees to Pakistan and Iran, which started with the Soviet occupation, continues to this day without losing its speed. The number of Afghan refugees who have migrated to Iran since the Soviet occupation is

³⁰ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, “World Drug Report 2018”, 10.

³¹ “PKK ve Uyuşturucu Kaçakçılığı (PKK and Drug Trafficking)”, M5 Magazine, <http://m5dergi.com/2018/12/pkk-ve-uyusturucu-kacakligi/>

³² M. Naseh, M. Potocky, P.H. Stuart, et al. “Repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran: a shelter profile study”. *International Journal of Humanitarian Action* 3, 13 (2018).

estimated to be around 2,600,000.³³ Afghan refugees living in very unsanitary conditions in Iran also pose a major problem in terms of the internal dynamics of this country. The Iranian government opened its borders to Afghan refugees during the Soviet occupation and tried to take advantage of this migration to attain cheap labor during the Iran-Iraq war.³⁴ Afghans, who were initially placed in refugee camps, began to control one part of the trade albeit on a small scale by purchasing businesses in their camps and later in urban centers, and eventually became the most important actors in trade between Iran and Afghanistan. These refugees, who know the traditional border crossings of the region very well, have also been able to carry out all kinds of illegal activities with ease.³⁵ However, Iran's economy, disrupted by the economic embargoes imposed, has been unable to bear the burden of refugees any longer. The issue of Afghan refugees, which is now cited as one of the causes of unemployment and public disorder in Iran, is causing discontent and great criticism among the Iranian people. Despite U.N. support programs for Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan, the desired results have not yet been achieved. The biggest reason for this is also the instability and public disorder in Afghanistan.³⁶

Turkey also takes its share of the issue of Afghan refugees. Refugees fleeing Afghanistan easily cross the border into Iran and reach the Turkish border, where a significant number of them are smuggled into Turkey by the terrorist group PKK and other criminal networks. The issue of Afghan refugees, which has been going on for forty years, does not come up much in the Turkish press, where we have witnessed many criticisms about Syrian refugees today. It is also known that there are many networks smuggling Afghan refugees to Europe, crossing Turkey from east to west almost unhindered. Afghans are the biggest customers of irregular migration through Iran and Turkey to Europe, and it is ethnically based separatist

³³ "Refugees Living in Iran", ANKASAM, <https://ankasam.org/iranda-yasayan-multeciler/>

³⁴ Rhoda Margesson, "Afghan Refugees: Current Status and Future Prospect" CRS Report for Congress, (January 2007): 13.

³⁵ According to Girardet refugees were infiltrating vital places in the border area, smuggling consumer goods, weapons and drugs. See Edward R. Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, (New York, 1985), 207.

³⁶ See "Returns to Afghanistan in 2018: Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report", ReliefWeb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/returns-afghanistan-2018-joint-iom-unhcr-summary-report-endaripashto>.

organizations and criminal networks operating in Iran and Turkey that enable their passage.

5. Conclusion

Afghanistan had taken its place in Asian history as a strong state by the second half of the 18th century, yet after it fell into the grip of two important powers, Britain and Russia in the 19th century, it was twice occupied by the British and became a country mired with instability. The Soviet invasion in 1979 made Afghanistan a global problem. Supported by the Western bloc and the Islamic world, resistance groups in Afghanistan launched a formidable struggle against the occupying forces on the one hand and the central authority in Kabul on the other. As a result, Soviet army was forced to withdraw from the country without any gains. Nevertheless, instead of joining forces and building a fully independent country, the Mujahideen groups that seized power, fought each other, thus condemned Afghanistan to instability.

Drug and arms traffickers took advantage of the instability in Afghanistan and encouraged poppy production, making this country the center of global drug production in a short time. Large sums of money made from drugs returned to the country as weapons and ammunition, fueling the civil war. The central authority disappeared completely in 1995, when the Taliban seized power in several cities. The US-led NATO intervention after 9/11 made things even more complicated in Afghanistan. As a country hindered with lack of authority for forty years, Afghanistan exports major problems, especially drug production and irregular growth. Years of turmoil in Afghanistan have become a threat not only to this country, but also to all the countries around it, including Iran and Turkey. So much so that this instability has been a lifeline to all kinds of crime and terrorist organizations in the surrounding countries.

Since 1979 Afghanistan has been pushed into great crises by foreign interventions and it is not likely for it to overcome this impasse and stop becoming a threat to regional security on its own. The only way to eliminate this situation is to support the central authority and legitimate governments rather than the local forces in Afghanistan and establish the integrity of the country. Only when an environment of peace and tranquility is maintained in Afghanistan, then it can become a country governed by trust and

stability and stop being a regional and global problem. Therefore, all international organizations, especially the United Nations, should take an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and restoration of its institutions. In addition, it is very important for friendly and neighboring countries to have close contact with the elected central government in Afghanistan, rather than the ethnic and religious groups they consider close to them, in order to preserve the unity and integrity of this country. There are very important problems waiting for central governments in Afghanistan. The most urgent of these problems are undoubtedly the disarmament of the tribes, the liquidation of terrorist organizations and the prohibition of poppy farming and drug production. In addition, all kinds of support should be given to the central government in resolution of main issues such as agriculture and soil reform to prevent migration, rapid construction of infrastructure and superstructure to increase employment, spreading education throughout the country, building roads and railways, maximizing border security and preventing all kinds of trafficking. Only then can the central government in Afghanistan consolidate its power and move the country to its rightful place in the modern world.

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