

## **A Brief History of Policing in Afghanistan (1960's – 2002)**

During the relatively progressive 1960s and 1970s, there was a national civilian police force in Afghanistan. It was built on the European policing model and received training from both West and East Germany. During the Soviet period which followed, the Ministry of Interior, which was responsible for the police, became the focus of a power struggle between the Parchami and Khalq factions of the ruling *Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan* (PDPA).

To contain the powerful Khalq Interior Minister, the PDPA leader, Babrak Kamal, severed the Intelligence Department from the Ministry and created the *Khedamat-e-Atlaat-e-Dawlati* (KhaD) or *State Information Services* under an influential Parchami supporter. The KhaD became a strong instrument of state control, trained by the KGB, with its own army division and responsibilities for internal intelligence, arrests and interrogations of political suspects, subversion of border tribes, assassinations and counter-intelligence. While left with only a criminal investigation and policing role, the Ministry of Interior grew in size to outnumber the army and had its own light infantry force, which engaged in armed clashes with the KhaD. Thus the police were militarised, and their disintegration and deterioration as a civil institution began.

After the withdrawal of the Soviet army in 1989, an attempt was made to establish a new police force, and a training academy was built in Kabul by the Germans. But the experiment ended when the post-jihad mujahideen brought civil war to Kabul. From then on, with the exception of the 'Vice and Virtue Police' employed by the Taliban, no organised civilian police force operated until 2002.

At the beginning of the reconstruction period in 2002, there were 50,000-70,000 police, consisting of some professional police trained before the civil war and a vast number of untrained and largely illiterate mujahideen and conscripted soldiers.

They lacked discipline, formal policies and procedures, facilities, equipment, uniforms and public trust. There was also an ethnic imbalance since most of the senior police posts were held by *Tajik Afghans*. Provincial and local police commanders owed allegiances to local military commanders, and central control was virtually non-existent. Moreover, there was no clear chain of command to the Minister of Interior. In March 2003, an Amnesty International investigator

reported that it was unclear who was responsible for the direction of the police, since at least five senior ranking officials appeared to claim overall leadership responsibility.

The jihad against the former Soviet Union and the civil war had exacerbated ethnic tensions and encouraged the rise of many regional commanders with their own militias. These became a powerful counterweight to centralised government and remained a source of continuing instability. Many of the police, including provincial police chiefs, were more loyal to the militia commanders than they were to the Interior Ministry, not least because the warlords had access to more money than the government. Pay for the lower ranks equivalent to \$16–24 (USD) a month (money that well into 2003 was not paid regularly), encouraged corruption, secondary employment and the sale of loyalty at all levels. In the south and the north-east many local commanders remained engaged in poppy and opium production, often to finance the continuation of their opposition to the central government or for factional fighting. This meant that there were strong factional, criminal and corrupt elements intermingled among the police at all levels. Such was the state of the police which the Afghan Interim Authority inherited after the fall of the Taliban.