

= Nur Muhammad Taraki =

Nur Muhammad Taraki ( 15 July 1917 ? 14 September 1979 ) was an Afghan politician and statesman during the Cold War . Taraki was born near Kabul and educated at Kabul University , after which he started his political career as a journalist . He later became one of the founding members of the People 's Democratic Party of Afghanistan ( PDPA ) and was elected as the party 's general secretary at its first congress . He ran as a candidate in the 1965 Afghan parliamentary election but failed to secure himself a seat . In 1966 he published the first issue of Khalq , a party newspaper , but it was closed down shortly afterwards by the Afghan Government . The assassination of Mir Akbar Khyber led Taraki , along with Hafizullah Amin ( the organiser of the revolution ) and Babrak Karmal , to initiate the Saur Revolution and establish the communist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan .

The presidency of Taraki , albeit short @-@ lived , was always marked by controversies . Taraki launched a land reform on 1 January 1979 which proved to be highly unpopular and , along with his government 's other reforms , led to a popular backlash which initiated the Afghan civil war . Despite repeated attempts throughout his reign , Taraki proved unable to persuade the Soviet Union to intervene in support of the restoration of civil order .

At the beginning of his rule , the government was divided between two PDPA factions : the Khalqists ( which Taraki was the leader of ) , the majority , and the Parchamites , the minority . In 1978 , shortly after his rule began , Taraki started a purge of the government and party which led to several high @-@ ranking Parchamite members being sent into de facto exile by being assigned to serve overseas as ambassadors . His reign was marked by a cult of personality centered on himself that had been cultivated by Amin . His relationship with Amin turned sour during his rule , ultimately resulting in Taraki 's murder on 14 September 1979 , upon Amin 's orders .

= = Early life and career = =

Taraki was born on 15 July 1917 to a Ghilzai Pashtun peasant family in Nawa District of Ghazni Province , Afghanistan . He was the oldest of three children and attended a village school in Nawa before leaving in 1932 , at the age of 15 , to work in the port city of Bombay , India . There he met a Kandahari merchant family who employed him as a clerk for the Pashtun Trading Company . Taraki 's first encounter with communism was during his night courses , where he met several Communist Party of India members who impressed him with their discussions on social justice and communist values . Another important event was his encounter with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan , a Pashtun nationalist and leader of the Red Shirt Movement in neighboring India , who was an admirer of the works of Vladimir Lenin .

In 1937 Taraki started working for Abdul Majid Zabuli , the Minister of Economics , who introduced him to several Russians . Later Taraki became Deputy Head of the Bakhtar News Agency and became known throughout the country as an author and poet . His best known book , the De Bang Mosaferi , highlights the socio @-@ economic difficulties facing Afghan workers and peasants . His works were translated into Russian language in the Soviet Union , where his work was viewed as embodying scientific socialist themes . He was hailed by the Soviet Government as " Afghanistan 's Maxim Gorky " . On his visit to the Soviet Union Taraki was greeted by Boris Ponomarev , the Head of the International Department of the Central Committee , and other Communist Party of the Soviet Union members .

Under Mohammad Daoud Khan 's prime ministership , suppression of radicals was common . However , because of his language skills , Taraki was sent to the Afghan Embassy in the United States in 1952 . Within several months Taraki began denouncing the Afghan government under King Zahir Shah and accused it of being autocratic and dictatorial . His denunciation of the Afghan government earned him much publicity in the United States . It also attracted unfavorable attention from authorities back home , who relieved him of his post and ordered him repatriated but stopped short of placing him under arrest . After a short period of unemployment Taraki started working for the United States Overseas Mission in Kabul as an interpreter . He quit that job in 1958 and

established his own translation company , the Noor Translation Bureau . Four years later , he started working for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul , but quit in 1963 to focus on the establishment of the People 's Democratic Party of Afghanistan ( PDPA ) , a communist political party .

At the founding congress of the PDPA , held in his own home , Taraki won a competitive election against Babrak Karmal to the post of general secretary on 1 January 1965 . Karmal became second secretary . Taraki ran as a candidate for the PDPA during the September 1965 parliamentary election but did not win a seat . Shortly after the election , he launched Khalq , the first major left @-@ wing newspaper in Afghanistan . The paper was banned within one month of its first printing . In 1967 , less than two years after its founding , the PDPA split into several factions . The largest of these included Khalq ( Masses ) led by Taraki , and Parcham ( Banner ) led by Karmal . The main differences between the factions were ideological , with Taraki supporting the creation of a Leninist @-@ like state , while Karmal wanted to establish a " broad democratic front " .

On 19 April 1978 a prominent leftist named Mir Akbar Khyber was assassinated and the murder was blamed on Mohammed Daoud Khan 's Republic of Afghanistan . His death served as a rallying point for the pro @-@ communist Afghans . Fearing a communist coup d'état , Daoud ordered the arrest of certain PDPA leaders , including Taraki and Karmal , while placing others such as Hafizullah Amin under house arrest . On 27 April 1978 the Saur Revolution was initiated , reportedly by Amin while still under house arrest . Khan was killed the next day along with most of his family . The PDPA rapidly gained control and on 1 May Taraki became Chairman of the Revolutionary Council , a role which subsumed the responsibilities of both president and Chairman of the Council of Ministers ( literally prime minister in Western parlance ) . The country was then renamed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan ( DRA ) , installing a regime that would last until April 1992 .

= = Presidency = =

= = = Establishment and purge = = =

Taraki was appointed Chairman of the Revolutionary Council and Chairman of the Council of Ministers while retaining his post as PDPA general secretary . He initially formed a government which consisted of both Khalqists and Parchamites ; Karmal became Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council while Amin became Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers . Internal problems soon arose and several prominent Khalqists accused the Parcham faction of conspiring against the Taraki government . A Khalqi purge of the Parcham then began with the faction 's most prominent members being sent out of the country : Karmal became Afghan Ambassador to Czechoslovakia and Mohammad Najibullah became Afghan Ambassador to Iran . Internal struggle was not only to be found between the Khalqist and Parchamites ; tense rivalry between Taraki and Amin had begun in the Khalq faction with both vying for control .

Karmal was recalled from Czechoslovakia but rather than returning to Afghanistan he went into hiding with Anahita Ratebzad , his friend and former Afghan ambassador to Yugoslavia , as he feared execution if he returned . Muhammad Najibullah followed them . Taraki consequently stripped them of all official titles and political authority .

= = = Socio @-@ economic changes = = =

= = = Land reform = = =

Taraki 's Government initiated a land reform on 1 January 1979 which attempted to limit the amount of land a family could own . Those whose landholdings exceeded the limit saw their property requisitioned by the government without compensation . The Afghan leadership believed the reform would meet with popular approval among the rural population while weakening the power of the

bourgeoisie . The reform was declared complete in mid 1979 and the government proclaimed that 665 000 hectares ( approximately 1 632 500 acres ) had been redistributed . The government also declared that only 40 000 families , or 4 percent of the population , had been negatively affected by the land reform .

Contrary to government expectations the reform was neither popular nor productive . Agricultural harvests plummeted and the reform itself led to rising discontent amongst Afghans . When Taraki realized the degree of popular dissatisfaction with the reform he quickly abandoned the policy . However , the land reform was gradually implemented under the later Karmal administration , although the proportion of land area impacted by the reform is unclear .

== = Other reforms = = =

In the months following the coup , Taraki and other party leaders initiated other radical Marxist policies that challenged both traditional Afghan values and well established traditional power structures in rural areas . Taraki introduced women to political life and legislated an end to forced marriage . However , he ruled over a nation with a deep Islamic religious culture and a long history of resistance to any type of strong centralized governmental control , and consequently many of these reforms were not actually implemented nationwide . Popular resentment of Taraki 's drastic policy changes triggered surging unrest throughout the country , reducing government control to only a limited area . The strength of this anti reform backlash would ultimately lead to the Afghan civil war .

Under the previous administration of Mohammad Daoud Khan , a literacy program created by UNESCO had been launched with the objective of eliminating illiteracy within 20 years . The government of Taraki attempted to reduce this time frame from 20 to four years , an unrealistic goal in light of the shortage of teachers and limited government capacity to oversee such an initiative . The duration of the project was later lengthened to seven years by the Soviets in the aftermath of the Soviet intervention . The cultural focus of the UNESCO programme was declared " rubbish " by Taraki , who instead chose to introduce a political orientation by utilizing PDPA leaflets and left wing pamphlets as basic reading material .

== = Afghan ? Soviet relations = = =

Taraki signed a Twenty Year Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union on 5 December 1978 which greatly expanded Soviet aid to his regime . Following the Herat uprising , Taraki contacted Alexei Kosygin , chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers , and asked for " practical and technical assistance with men and armament " . Kosygin was unfavorable to the proposal on the basis of the negative political repercussions such an action would have for his country , and he rejected all further attempts by Taraki to solicit Soviet military aid in Afghanistan . Following Kosygin 's rejection Taraki requested aid from Leonid Brezhnev , the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Soviet head of state , who warned him that full Soviet intervention " would only play into the hands of our enemies ? both yours and ours " . Brezhnev also advised Taraki to ease up on the drastic social reforms and to seek broader support for his regime .

In 1979 , Taraki attended a conference of the Non Aligned Movement in Havana , Cuba . On his way back he stopped in Moscow on 20 March and met with Brezhnev , foreign minister Andrei Gromyko and other Soviet officials . It was rumoured that Karmal was present at the meeting in an attempt to reconcile Taraki 's Khalq faction and the Parcham against Amin and his followers . At the meeting , Taraki was successful in negotiating some Soviet support , including the redeployment of two Soviet armed divisions at the Soviet Afghan border , the sending of 500 military and civilian advisers and specialists , and the immediate delivery of Soviet armed equipment sold at 25 percent below the original price . However , the Soviets were not pleased about the developments in Afghanistan and Brezhnev impressed upon Taraki the need for party unity . Despite reaching this agreement with Taraki , the Soviets continued to be reluctant to intervene further in Afghanistan and repeatedly refused Soviet military intervention within Afghan borders during Taraki 's rule as well as

later during Amin 's short rule .

= = = Taraki ? Amin break = = =

In the first months after the April 1978 revolution , Hafizullah Amin and Taraki had a very close relationship . Taraki reportedly remarked , " Amin and I are like nail and flesh , not separable " . Amin set about constructing a personality cult centered on Taraki . In party and government meetings Amin always referred to Taraki as " The Great Leader " , " The Star of the East " or " The Great Thinker " among other titles , while Amin was given such titles as " The True Disciple and Student " . Amin would later come to realize he had created a monster when the Kim Il @-@ sung @-@ like personality cult he had created inspired Taraki to become overly confident and believe in his own brilliance . Taraki began discounting Amin 's suggestions , fostering in Amin a deep sense of resentment . As their relationship turned increasingly sour , a power struggle developed between them for the control of the Afghan National Army . Their relations came to a head later that year when Taraki accused Amin of nepotism after Amin had appointed several family members to high @-@ ranking positions .

Taraki could count on the support of four prominent army officers in his struggle against Amin : Aslam Watanjar , Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoy , Sherjan Mazdoryar and Assadullah Sarwari . These men had joined the PDPA not because of ideological reasons , but instead due to their lofty political ambitions . They also had developed a close relationship with Alexander Puzanov , the Soviet ambassador in Afghanistan , who was eager to use them against Amin . After the Herat city uprising on 17 March 1979 , the PDPA Politburo and the Revolutionary Council established the Homeland Higher Defence Council , to which Taraki was elected its chairman while Amin became its deputy . At around the same time , Taraki left his post as Council of Ministers chairman and Amin was elected his successor . Amin 's new position offered him little real influence , however ; as Chairman of the Council of Ministers , Amin had the power to elect every member of the cabinet , but all of them had to be approved by the head of state , Taraki . In reality , through this maneuver Taraki had effectively reduced Amin 's power base by forcing him to relinquish his hold on the Afghan army in order to take on the supposedly heavy responsibilities of his new but ultimately powerless post .

During Taraki 's foreign visit to the non @-@ aligned conference in Cuba , his Gang of Four had received an intelligence report that Amin was planning to arrest or kill them . This report , it turned out , was incorrect . Nonetheless , the Gang of Four were ordered to assassinate Amin , its leader Sarwari selecting his nephew Aziz Akbari to conduct the assassination . However , Akbari was not informed that he was the chosen assassin or that it was a secret mission , and he confided the information to contacts in the Soviet embassy . The embassy responded by warning Amin of the assassination attempt , thereby saving him from certain death .

= = = Fall from power = = =

Taraki was greeted by Amin at the airport on his return to Kabul . The flight was scheduled to land at 2 : 30 but Amin forced the delay of the landing by an hour as a demonstration to Taraki of his control over the government . Shortly afterward , Taraki sought to neutralize Amin 's power and influence by requesting that he serve overseas as an ambassador . Amin turned down the proposal , shouting " You are the one who should quit ! Because of drink and old age you have taken leave of your senses . " The following day Taraki invited Amin to the presidential palace for lunch with him and the Gang of Four . Amin turned down the offer , stating he would prefer their resignation rather than lunching with them . Soviet Ambassador Puzanov managed to persuade Amin to make the visit to the palace along with Sayed Daoud Tarun , the Chief of Police and Nawab Ali ( an intelligence officer ) . Upon arriving at the palace , unknown individuals within the building opened fire on the visitors . Tarun was killed , while Ali sustained an injury and escaped with an unharmed Amin . Shortly afterward , Amin returned to the palace with a contingent of Army officers and placed Taraki under arrest . The Gang of Four , however , had " disappeared " and their whereabouts would

remain unknown for the duration of Amin 's 104 @-@ day rule .

After Taraki 's arrest , Amin reportedly discussed the incident with Leonid Brezhnev in which he said , " Taraki is still around . What should I do with him ? " Brezhnev replied that it was his choice . Amin , who now believed he had the full support of the Soviets , ordered the death of Taraki . Taraki was subsequently suffocated with pillows . The Afghan media would report that the ailing Taraki had died , omitting any mention of his murder .