

Roads in Afghanistan and there Relation to Nationalism in the Country

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Buzkashi is the sport of Afghanistan; understand it and you can understand nationalism in Afghanistan. Goat-grabbing is the skill set and getting it to the target area is the goal. Nation-building is the skill set for nationalism, and getting the state completely built into a nation is the goal. The issue with Buzkashi is that you must be able to complete a difficult process that includes riding a horse in a skilled manner, grabbing a goat from the ground while riding, then hold on to it for the distance between pick-up and the target area. Practice makes perfect or so it would seem. Throw in a wolf-pack of other men riding horses trying to obtain the same goal and you have a level of difficulty that is hard to duplicate. The practice for nationalism is impossible since every nation is different. The wolf pack for nationalism comes in the form of outside nations trying to rip the goat (nation-building) out of the nation's hands and to the ground. The target area for nationalism is an immeasurable distance away and even when it is seen the goat still has to be thrown over the line. If laziness or weakness over comes the rider and the goat is dropped prematurely then the rider breathing down your back can snatch the goat and destroy the entire structure of nationalism just built.

Understanding Afghanistan's quest for nationalism centers around the need for dependable roads in the country. The condition of Afghanistan's roads historically and today directly relate to the country still trying to secure its grip on the goat to even have the chance to achieve the goal of nationalism. Today in Afghanistan the country has nationalism in a young form and one that is vulnerable. The understanding of how Afghanistan does not fully have it but is building it can be explained through the historical content of Afghanistan and its roads.

Nationalism is the corner stone of a nation. It is best defined two ways. The first aspect involves the members of the nation at the point of when they start taking pride in their nation. The second aspect is when the members of a nation rise up on their own to achieve their independence. When considering these two points one can conclude that Afghanistan has not developed a sense of nationalism but is building upon the first principle. The first such support comes from the writings of Renan who argues that people with nationalism have a desire to live together. This is immediately called into question for Afghanistan by how radical groups of people within the country still go about activities that kill, indenture, and disrupt fellow Afghans lives. The outside ideas of what Afghanistan's nationalism should be and how it should be centered are discussed in

Marcus Schadl's *The Man Outside* article. He notably addresses how British impressions of Afghanistan deriving from their colonial excursions have defined Afghanistan's image abroad for centuries in a negative manner. This is clearly evident when foreign nations have described the physical attributes of the country as having a "miserable appearance" (Nichols). Yet this impression is countered when it describes the people of the country as being unpolished yet displays qualities that were fascinating. The summary of the British view was that there existed a solid core of traits to build nationalism upon but the defining substance surrounding it was lacking.

The quality of outside nations playing a role in Afghanistan is described in the article *Afghan Historiography* by Robert Nichols. The article explains how the country's political dynamics during the Cold War allowed Afghanistan to use the struggles between the countries to its advantage. This allowed Afghanistan to build roads that would have never been possible had it not been for the efforts in these countries trying to influence them to their side and to secure it as a buffer state.

A key point to consider on this topic is the role that genders play in Afghanistan's nationalism and how roads transverse it. The relation of roads is key since it has allowed the incursion of outside military forces to take down the Taliban rule in the country. This in turn has helped to allow for the opening of less restrictive policies on women and for their culture to be better exposed and acknowledged (as argued in Anila Daulatzai's *Acknowledging Afghanistan*). Additionally the construction of roads has allowed for more employment opportunities. Relating to this is that there are only so many men in Afghanistan, which has led to women, especially widows, contributing to the work force by filling vital job positions, in a variety of forms as seen in Figure 1. The following material will discuss and analyze the effects that roads in Afghanistan have had on nationalism in the country.

The first step in understanding what Afghanistan nationalism and roads unite to form, are the aspects that have been there from day one. The physical attributes which consist of harsh desert and mountain ranges are not ideal for construction let alone roads. Alexander the Great was the first known conqueror to move through the areas of Afghanistan (Balkh, Panjshir Valley, Kandahar (Qandahar), and Oxus River Valley areas). While conquering the area Alexander had to pass over the Hindu Kosh, a mountain range that cuts through the

center of the present day country, with the highest peaks being in the east. There are a total of 16 mountain passes (“kotal”) that have historically been used by Afghans and conquerors, most of which average 5-6,000 meters in height. The three most traveled are the Salang Pass (Kotal-e Salang), Bamiyan Valley (Valley of the Buddhas), and the Khawak pass (Panjshir Valley). Others important passes, today or historically, include the Bolan Pass (used by the British during the Colonial Excursions and Anglo-Afghan wars), Kotal-e Shibar, Khyber Pass (physical area is across the border in Pakistan), Kotal-e Lataband, Tang-e Gharu road, Wakhjir Pass (Wakhan Corridor), Baroghil, Kachin, Shotogardan (Logar and Pakiya provinces), Bazarak (Mazari-Shariff), Anjuman, Hajigak, Unai, and Sabzak (Herat to Badghis). The Khawak pass is historically important because it is the pass Alexander the Great traveled through on his conquests, along with other important historical characters such as Tamerlane (Timur), Ibn Battuta, Xuanzang, and Genghis Khan.(Wood p. 134-163)

These physical barriers have also proved useful to building Afghanistan. Notably true when the Mujahaddin used the Panjshir Valley as a funnel to attack Soviet forces when they were invading the country. The topology of the valley took away the technological advantages the Soviets had, while allowing the Mujahaddin to focus their limited resources. The last physical obstacle is the country’s vast desert landscape and the water supply being low on a constant basis. These issues present physical challenges in building roads in every aspect from roads being covered by windswept desert sand to roads in dry creek beds being washed out in the rainy season.

(Army Engineers)

The reasoning for why these conquerors used these passes is critical for understanding Afghanistan’s development of nationalism. Marco Polo’s exploration exemplifies this point the best since he was seeking a path to become what we know as the Silk Road. The Silk Road was the founding father of roads in Afghanistan since it helped establish the first identity of nationalism for Afghans as traders and merchants along the road. This sense of prosperity and purpose helped to make the people believe in themselves and their surroundings which were mirrored by the rise of Afghan tribes to resist ruling empires of the area (Safavid and Mughal Empires). Other than Marco Polo, Ptolemy confirms that the Silk Road played a role in Afghanistan by tracing it’s route: “the Silk Road started from Antioch, the capital of Roman Syria, crossed the Euphrates at Hierapolis (Menbij), entered the Parthian Empire, passed through Ecbatana (Hamadan), Thogae or Rai near modern

Tehran, Hecatompylos (Shahrud) and Merv, and went on to Bactria (Balkh)...” shortly after it forked at Kashgar. (Rene P. 39-41) The importance of the Silk Road has not faded with the history of yesterday. Present day ideas in Afghanistan show a large support group that want to see a rebirth of a Silk Road transportation corridor in Central Asia. This is exemplified by the Ring Road project and how the Asian Development bank has supplied additional financing to make sure it connects to other countries in the region.

The time period between the height of the Silk Road and the beginning of the twentieth century showed little progress in the development of the road system and the internal development of nationalism. The exceptions were the development of caravan routes crisscrossing the country and the limited roads built by the British during their colonial presence. Denoted by the Mackeson road through the Khaiber Pass which was built by Colonel Mackeson during the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1839 to 1843, see Figure 2. (British Library)

Transformation into roads did not take shape for Afghanistan until the beginning of the Twentieth Century. First you must understand why roads were deemed better for Afghanistan rather than railroads. The first leader of Afghanistan in the twentieth century was Habibullah (1901-1919) who “...viewed building roads more important than railroads for independence purposes “...a British railroad, he said, would be like a “Spear pointed at the heart of Afghanistan.”” (Ispahani p 100) By doing this Afghanistan would also not incur any foreign debt nor would it be dependent on another foreign country in any way. This aspect is critical because when Britain and Russian offered deals to Afghanistan to build railroads inside the country it was always to ‘connect’ their railroads inside the country or to connect other cities by going through Afghanistan (ex: Delhi to Paris railroad via Herat and Kandahar). So the problem would be that the trains were just passing through Afghanistan and would be viewed as being part of a foreign railroad that was built on Afghan land. It would mean having an Afghan father telling his son to go play in the yard while then seeing a train passing by that had Russian, English, or Hindu writing on the side of it. The explanation the father would have to give to his son would not be filled with patriotism or confidence. Except in their own people having done some of the manual labor; this is while the son acquires a puzzling look as the white train operator waves to them. This subject is resurfacing as a result of the current situations in Afghanistan with China and Russia spear heading the building of new railroads into the country.

The ironic situation put forth is one that is altered by the focus of centering the movement of Afghanistan and the lives onto roads. Having a system of roads allows for the work to be done by Afghans in a larger portion. This involves the Afghans that repair the roads, that drive the trucks, that own the trucks, and the ones that repair the trucks and roads. Having an Afghani talk to a fellow Afghani or see another Afghani doing those roles provides a sense of accomplishment and belief that is undeliverable by any outside force.

The next leader of Afghanistan during the twentieth century was Amanullah (1919-1929) who during his reign created the first road to receive lighting in Kabul, which was from the main entrance of the Arg to the main Kabul River Bridge. He later extended the lights “down the road between the Idgah Mosque and the Chaman Huzuri.” (Ispahani) Amanullah’s goal for the road became reminiscent of European Boulevards since the road was extremely wide and had Persian Elms planted along the sides. During his reign Amanullah used the Russians and British against each other to get a variety of things he had desired for the country such as road construction and repairs.

Mohammad Zahir Shah became ruler of Afghanistan shortly after Amanullah and continued his processes of improving the road system (he reigned from 1933 to 1973). He did this by appealing to the Japanese, Italians, and Germans for advisors to help map out a modern road network for the country. The Helmand Valley Project which was backed by the United States and done by the Morrison Knudsen Company was one result of these actions. The roads were not the main target of the project but to support the infrastructure of the project roads had to be built and repaired, especially bridges. (Calluther) This time period arrived at a key moment for Afghanistan to benefit from, as a result of the United States and Soviet Union trying to make Afghanistan a buffer state in their Cold War conflict. This created an economic battle but in the end it resulted in Afghanistan receiving thousands of miles in new and rebuilt roads. The dividing lines of the projects took a noticeable North and South trend with the Soviets doing their projects in the North and the Americans in the South of the country. The Soviets started out in 1953 by paving and widening the Jada-yi Maiwand Avenue in Kabul. In 1955 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev pledged \$100 million in aid to Afghanistan with the keystone of the project being a 5-lane highway from the Soviet border to Kabul. The main accomplishment of this economic conflict was a basic highway system for the country connecting the southern

and northern provinces; with a highlight being the construction of a road with a 1.7 mile tunnel the Salang Pass in 1967 by the Soviets. The year 1967 also marked the opening of two of the highest impact projects for internal trade of Afghan cities; this was the opening of a road from Sher Khan (qizil Qala) on the Amu Darya via Kunduz and Pul-i-Khumri through the Salang tunnel to Kabul. (Ispahani pg 325) Shortly followed by the opening of the road going Southeast from Kabul via Jalalabad to Peshawar. In 1969 there was a paved highway opened between Kabul and Mazar. These projects were the result of the First Five-year Economic and Social Development Plan (1956-1961, \$14 Billion Afghanis) that was worked out by the Soviet Union and United States. This was followed by the Second Five-Year Plan (1962-1967, \$25 Billion Afghanis) and the Third Five-Year Plan (1967-1971, \$33 Billion Afghanis). The first two had large allocations towards roads but the third plan had little dedicated towards roads. During the late 1960s rural development projects were formed to help build roads in small local communities. This was accomplished by making the surrounding community of the project was to be, put up 75% of the project in the form of labor and supplies. This was noteworthy because it allowed Afghans to have input into their own roads. By the end of 1966 the U.S. had given \$350 million, the Soviet Union had given \$600 million, and West Germany had given \$33 million in aid.

The time period between the Cold War Great Game and the invasions of 2001 was not of major concern for the well being of the roads in Afghanistan. This is one of the reasons why roads have played such a critical area of concern for the forces currently there and Afghan's alike. During the Soviet Invasion the focus was on maintaining and repairing the roads for military traffic, which involved them performing operations on the same roads they built during the Great Game. After the Soviet withdrawal the civil war in the country took a huge toll on the roads and left a majority in great need of repair. This hampered Afghanistan as a whole which is why some scholars have talked of this time period as regressing Afghan nationalism so much, which is why the mission facing the ISAF/United States international forces and Afghans today is so great. During the Taliban rule there was limited work done on roads. Then when foreign nations did come in and assist they used it to their advantage to assert control over the nation. Explained by how "...project priorities were set by the funders, so Afghans ...rightly questioned the wisdom of building...roads with foreign labor while local people

remained unemployed.” This frustration was the source the Taliban used to chip away at the Afghans belief in the government. (Barfield p 274)

Following the invasion in 2001 by the United States and defeat of the Taliban there was an immediate focus on rebuilding the country, especially its roads and highways. This was a result of there only being 12,350 km of paved roads in Afghanistan out of an estimated 42,150 km of roadway as of 2006. (CIA) Saudi Arabia, Japan, and the Asian Development Bank joined together to reconstruct the Kabul-Heart road and on to Islam Qala border with Iran. They also extended the road system from Kabul via Jalalabad to Torkahm and the Pakistan border. Road projects are of high importance because they are done on massive scales and are considered ‘high visibility’ projects towards the mission the NATO/ISAF forces are trying to achieve. This in turn directly relates to fundamental goals which are being argued in this paper towards roads playing a crucial aspect in helping Afghanistan develop nationalism. An additional aspect of these projects is that they are handled and overseen by the new Afghanistan government to make it look like they are ‘in control’ of all aspects. (Marsden) Afghan citizens believe the new government is in control and helps accomplished the goals above. One of the main objectives is to complete the Ring Road of Afghanistan which is a road that circles inside the nation and connects all the major commerce centers of the country. (USAID and Smucker) So far \$180 million by the United States, \$50 million by Japan, \$30 million by Saudia Arabia has been given towards the projects with an estimated \$70 million still needed to finish the project. Completing the highway between Kabul and Kandahar will cost the contributing governments an estimated \$250 million (Gannon). The roads are deemed so critical that many other projects aimed at rebuilding the nation are hinged upon the success of the roads. One such example is the Trans-Afghan natural gas pipeline (TAP/TAPI) that is riding on the success of roads bringing security to the regions in which it will be built through. (Marsden)

The body of nationalism is growing in Afghanistan with the continued success of new development projects in the country. In 2008 a 135 mile road was finished that connected the Iranian container port of Chahbar with Afghanistan’s Nimroz Province. The completion of this makes Afghanistan a part of the most efficient transit system in central Asia. “For millennia the old silk route caravan trade made Afghanistan’s cities rich, and their decline coincided with the atrophy of these overland routes. New motorized transport

by...road promises to restore the importance of these old routes as investment in Afghanistan's infrastructure fills the missing gaps." (Afghanistan 'Ring Road's') The importance of building up infrastructure in the nation to allow for political unity such as what roads would do is well argued in the article *The Road Ahead: Political and Institutional Reconstruction in Afghanistan* by Alexander Thier and Jarat Chopra; which focuses on the fluidity of power that the infrastructure would allow. As this happens, Afghanistan's strategic position will change from an isolated buffer state to a transit state whose stability will be an invested interest to all its neighbors." (Barfield P. 345)

The threat of roads in the process of building the country into a nation is such that Taliban declared war on it. (Paul McGeough) Another aspect of how the roads will extend the reach of the government to the far edges of the country is exemplified in the following quote. "The road is part of a grand design to break five strategic centers from economic and social dependency on neighboring Pakistan. By linking them together and to the national ring-road, they might be hooked back into Kabul's orbit." This is "A key construction project in the volatile south-eastern border region is the Washington-funded K-G Road – a \$US100 million (\$A114 million), 100-kilometre blacktop through wild Taliban country between Khost, on the Pakistan border, and the hub city of Gardez, south of Kabul." (Paul McGeough)

Aspects that play critical roles in how Afghans relate to the roads are the amount of time it takes them to get somewhere (ex: a day's journey, three days journey, etc), and how it affects their well-being (ex: better roads allowing pregnant women from further away villages to come to hospitals to receive care during complicated pregnancies). Afghans do not measure trips in miles but rather in time so projects that cut their travel times by massive margins are some of the most impressive ways to improve their way of life especially in relation to trade and selling their crops at market. This is true for when the Soviets built a road connecting Kabul and Kunduz that cut the travel time from two weeks to five hours. (Slobin) These affects across the country have and could have huge effects on how the citizens view the government. The other main reason roads are critical in Afghans lives are their use of them for migratory routes. Afghans migrate for many reasons which include: the undertaking of a pilgrimage, the search for work, an opportunity to trade, or the need for medical treatment. (Monsutti pg 145)

The physical attributes of Afghanistan are what drive the nation's situation with roads and its relation to nationalism. The evidence from above clearly shows that they are closely connected in several manners. These forces are further complicated by the acts of disruptive forces outside and inside the country in the forms of the nations of the world and insurgents inside the country. The outside nations of the world have viewed Afghanistan as insignificant and one that needs a lot of help. When the Americans were asked to help Afghanistan with aid for development plans "Ambassador Robert G. Newmann (1966-1973) later said that John Foster Dullus turned down the Afghan request for...aid because. In view of Afghanistan's "location and poor communications, an enormous logistics effort would have had to be undertaken by the United States where the risk of escalating the Cold War would have been high." This has an immediate consequence on Afghanistan nationalism because it takes the Afghans when they are pleading at their neighbor's feet for assistance and kicks them straight in the jaw. This creates a shudder effect of Afghans morale (especially for the leaders of the government) because it can have the negative psyche effect to make them think what they are doing, trying to build their nation, is wrong. The other side of this discussion is the negligence on the Americans' part in how they are viewing the Afghan state (for this time period). "The idea of Afghanistan being "remote" is brought about by the nations large in sea power." (Ispahani p. 87) If they see no water than they see no potential. This is a very broad excuse and one that is quickly diluted down and if not washed away from relevance when you consider the historical significance of Afghanistan's location. It is the gateway from Western Europe and the Mediterranean to China and India, which is closely shown through the amount of historic conquerors that have traveled through it as shown above. The Americans forgot an additional aspect when reading their history books. There was and still is importance in land routes and how they can act as the means to spread authority. History presents this case best by looking at the Roman Empire and the road system throughout their empire helping to make them one of the greatest empires in history. Their road system allowed them to move quickly and easily throughout the empire to establish the sense of a ruling power and nationalism over their people. Additional examples for current understanding is when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany and built the Autobahn, which helped to physically support the mental sphere of nationalism he drew over the German people. The final relation can be drawn from the experience of America when they were developing into a

nation. The industrialization of America was not kicked off until the construction of an adequate infrastructure was finished. When this was completed companies such as Ford Motor Inc rose into strength which then started the industrial strength for America which they have ridden to becoming one of the most powerful nations in the world to this day. Current and continuing examples of the power that roads bring countries is shown through China rise onto the nation scene is who building a road and highway system rivaling the United States Interstate system.

The counter to that is that it's still a landlocked country and getting into it to set up all the required structure is difficult. The response to that if answered in Buzhashi terms again would be: focus on grabbing the goat and not what the other riders are doing. Yes from the time that the question has arisen water has been the highway of nations but the boats and the majority of the material transported on the boats has to have come from land. Additionally not all of those materials are on shores right next to the docks, they must come from the interior. So by controlling the interior crossroads (Afghanistan) you have effectively put a leech on the system. Yes the road system and the size of Afghanistan cannot act as a toll booth to every Asian route but the possibilities that could be extracted from the potential chunk of that market is one that Afghanistan could use as a cornerstone to build its nationalism upon.

In conclusion we can understand that nationalism is growing in Afghanistan through the means of roads but it will be in a fragile state until the structure of it can be solidified. The roads represent the spread of power in the nation while helping to tie together every corner of the nation. The worse the conditions of the roads the worst the state of the nation. An isolated and broken nation will and cannot stand; roads provide that cement to the country to make it a nation; once that cement hardens then do you truly have nationalism in Afghanistan.

Images and Figures Section

Figure 1:



Afghan Women Work As Members Of Road Construction Crew

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN - FEBRUARY 22: An Afghan woman paves a street while driving an asphalt roller as she works as part of the road construction crew hired by the K.F.W. German Development Corporation February 22, 2003 in Kabul, Afghanistan. K.F.W. has employed 28 Afghan widows to work alongside 130 male laborers performing road construction in Kabul. The 5 million euro project has already fixed 80 kilometers (approximately 50 miles) of road in the capitol city area. The project is sponsored by the German government through K.F.W.

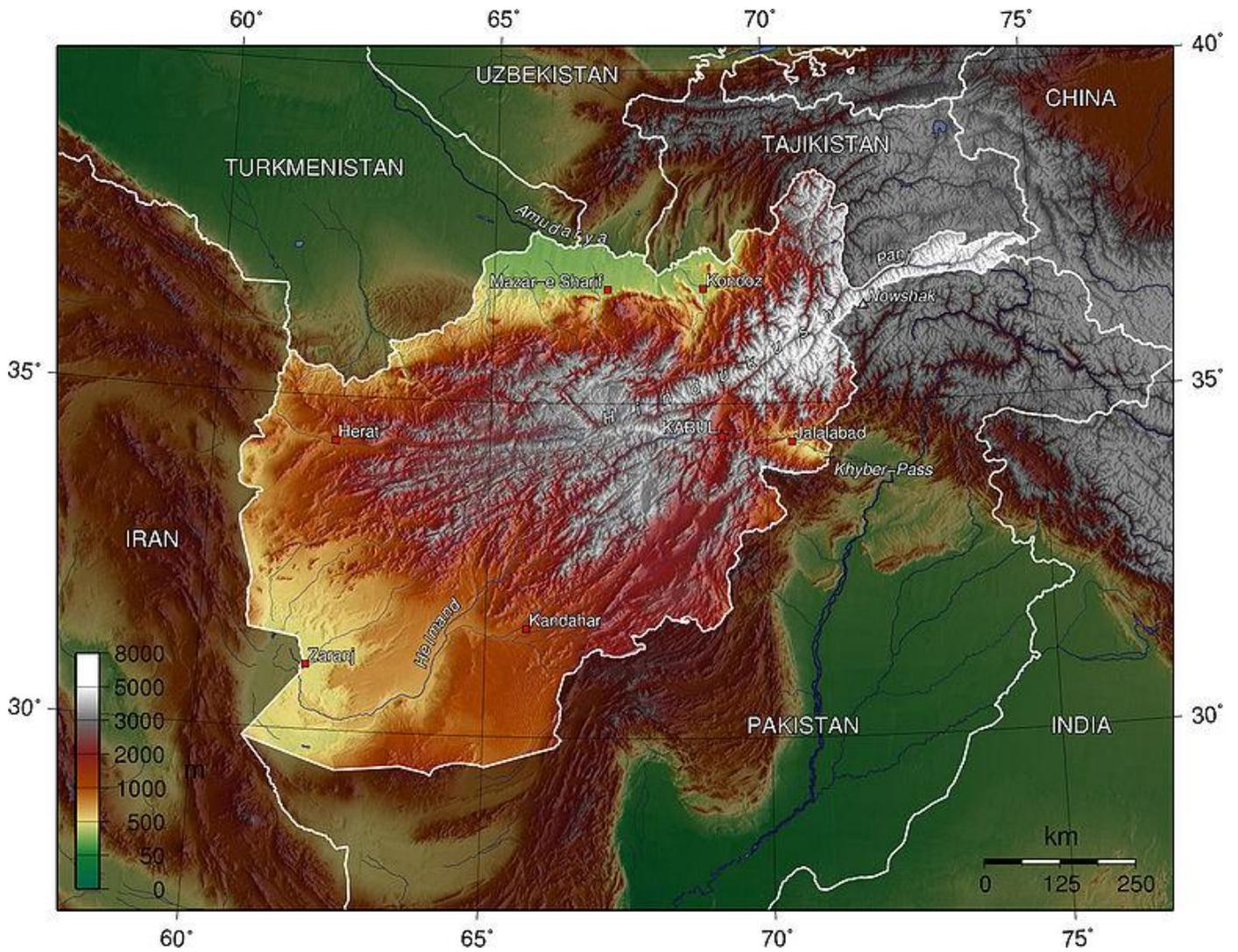


Figure 2:

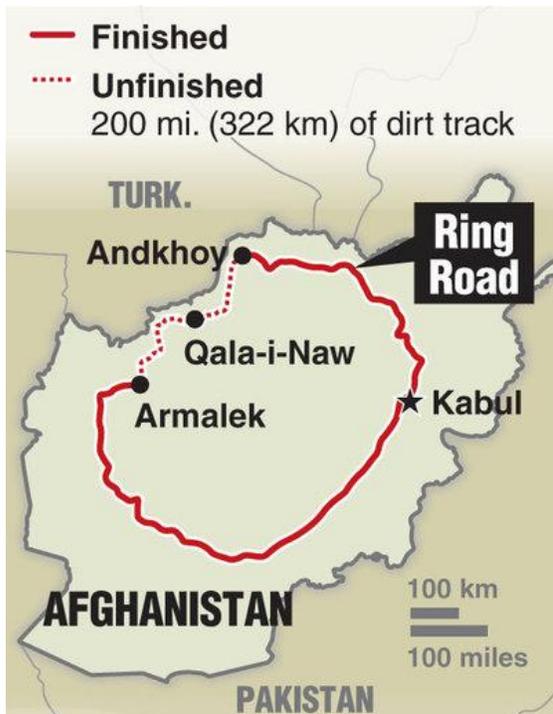


- Troops of the Peshawar Field Force are seen in the photograph advancing through the Khyber Pass, using the road built during the First Afghan War, 1839-42, by Colonel Mackeson (1807-53).

The following of charts and maps relating to Afghan roads:



Topology of Afghanistan, demonstrating the difficulties of physically building roads to cross the country. Also demonstrates that once they are done, how big a role they will play in uniting the country



• When completed, the Ring Road will measure 1,900 mi. (3,050 km)



© 2009 MCT
 Source: The Atlantic, McClatchy Washington Bureau
 Graphic: Melina Yingling



Figure 1: Donor-Funded Regional and National Highways in Afghanistan

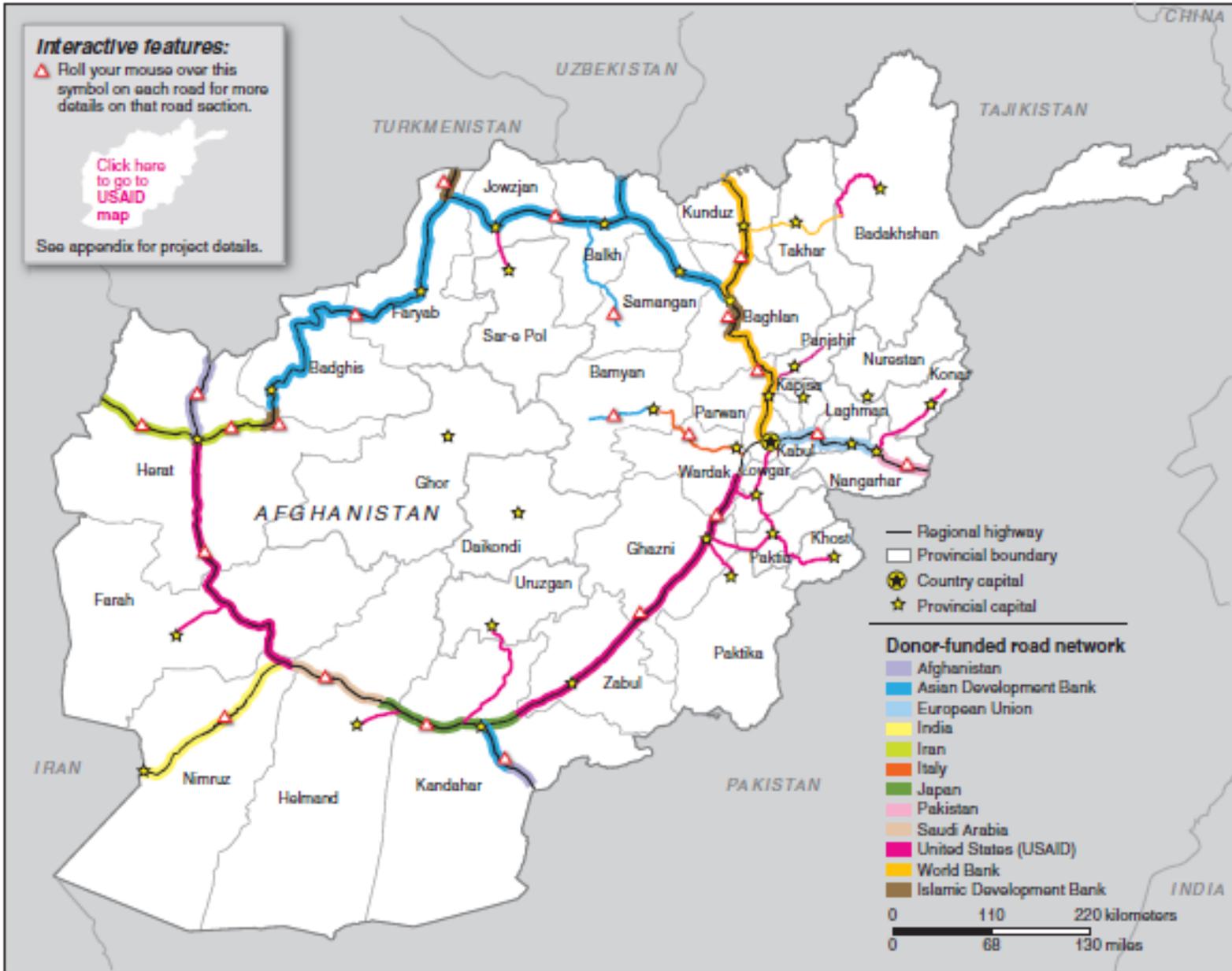
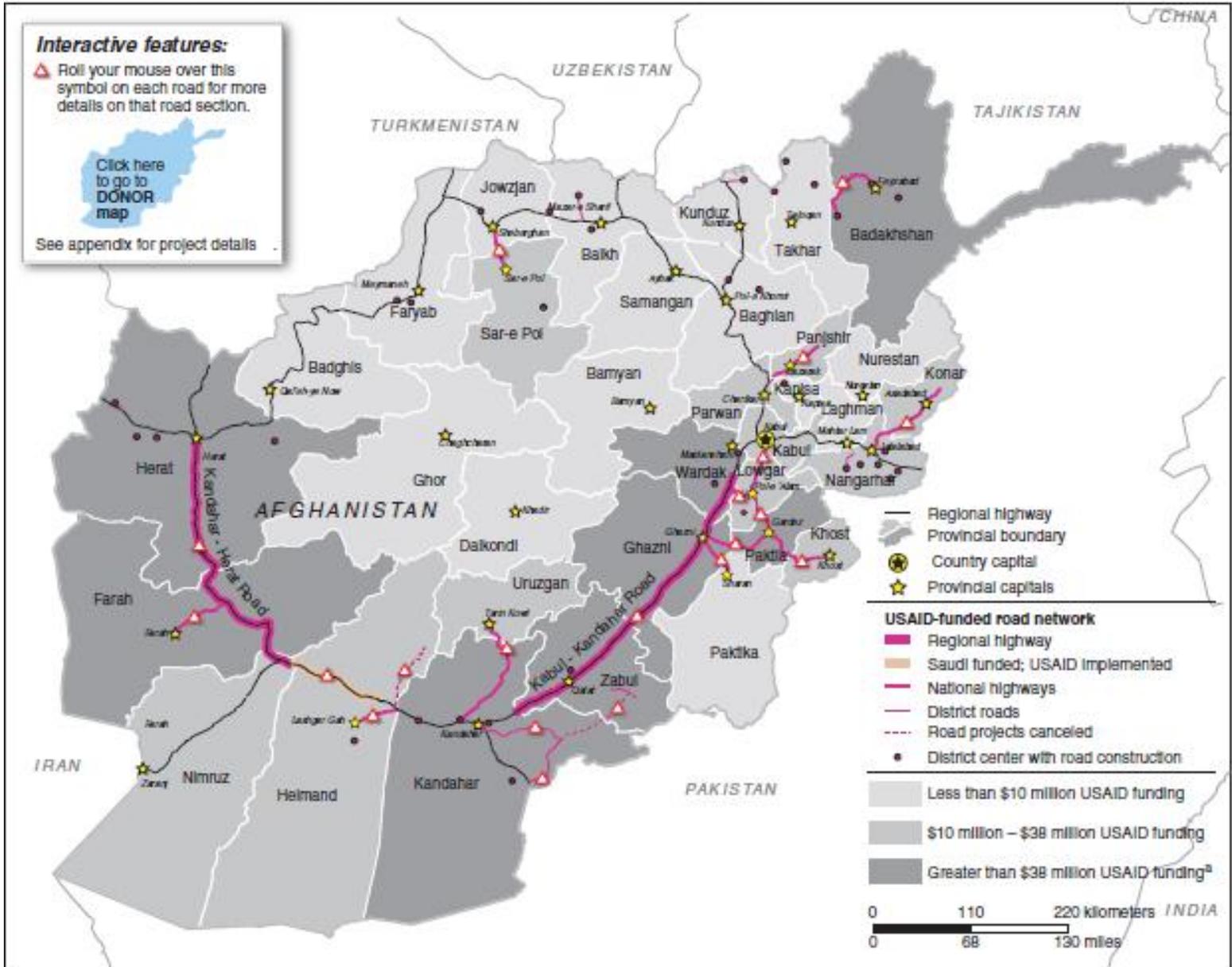
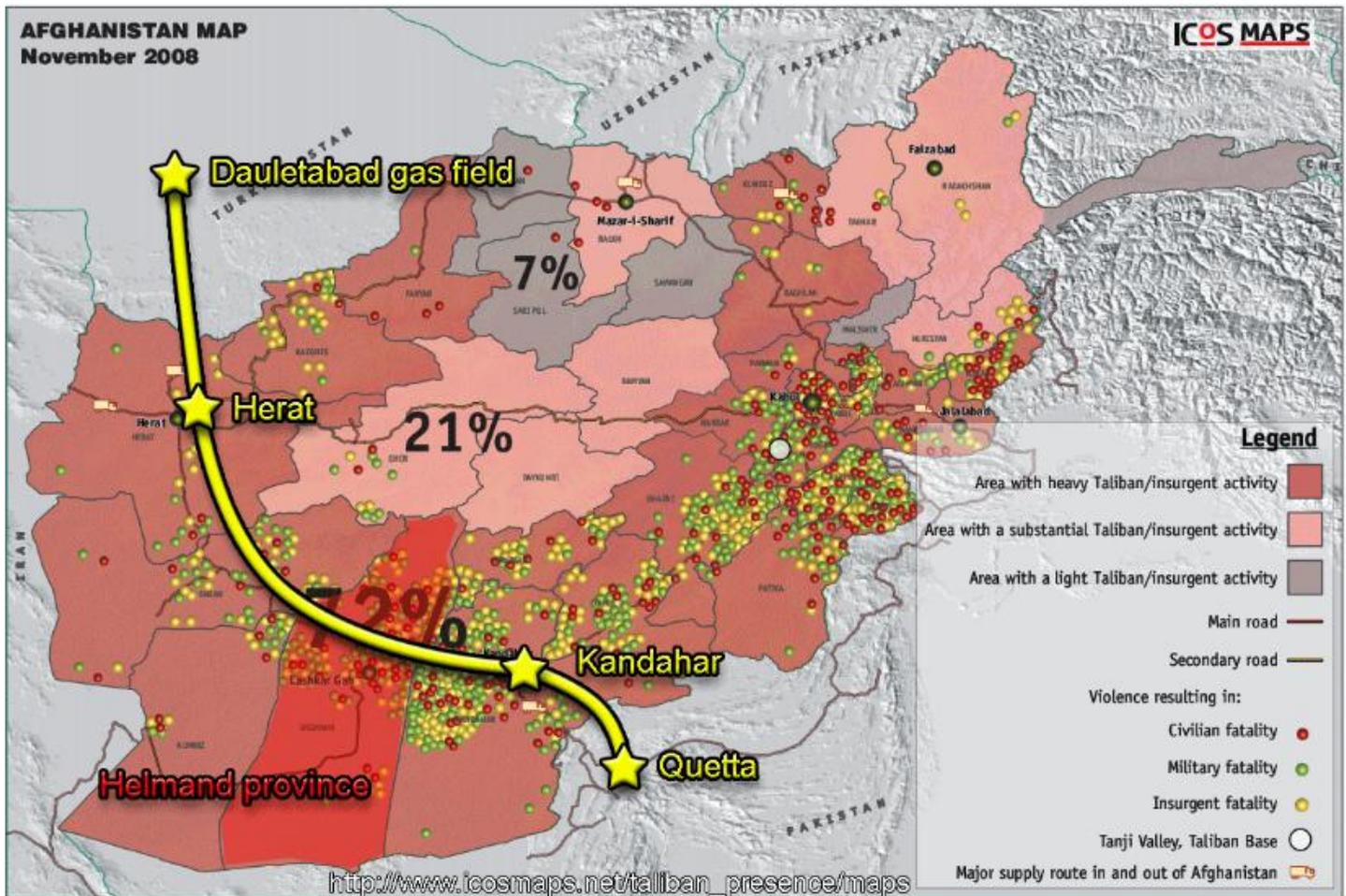


Figure 2: US AID-Funded Roads in Afghanistan and Funding Levels by Province





The golden route above shows where the TAPI natural gas pipeline is planned to be built. Comparing this image with the image above it can be seen the importance of making and securing routes for Afghan and the completion of the pipeline. Additionally it shows the Insurgents and Taliban have realized the importance of the roads if they succeed, knowing they need to prevent the successful accomplishment of the roads to prevent the nation from fully developing and Afghanistan getting an identity of nationalism therefore severely destroying the host body in which the Taliban feed and survive upon.

The following are additional images of importance to Afghan roads:



Soviet Invasion Era

The limited Afghan road network had to support an extraordinary level of military and civilian traffic. In many cases, the roads could not sustain such usage. The rugged terrain, the climate, dramatic extremes in weather, and ambush and mining operations by the *mujahedin* complicated the problem and created the need for engineer forces organic to tactical units and LOC construction units, called highway troops.



Afghan nomads moving along a new US-aid highway. Feb 27, 1963

Photo: James Burke/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

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