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PERSPECTIVE

REFUGEE FLIGHT FROM AFGHANISTAN TO PAKISTAN: COMPELLING CAUSES

(b)(3)

[REDACTED]

Most of the nearly three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan fled Afghanistan because of the disruption of the rural economy caused by the war. Fear of fighting and conscription into the Afghan Army were other important reasons for choosing exile. Few refugees, however, fled because they were caught up in actual fighting. About 95 percent of the refugees are Pushtun farmers who live in refugee camps; members of ethnic minorities and refugees from the cities live outside the camps.

**Pushtun Farmers**

About 95 percent of the refugees are peasant farmers, largely, though not completely, Pushtuns from the provinces of Afghanistan that border on the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. They continue to live in the basic tribal or village units in which they lived in Afghanistan, either because they have sought out village or tribal members in the camps or because whole villages came out together.

In early 1983 [REDACTED] a survey of 705 refugee farmers from 605 villages living in the camps in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The survey showed that crop production in their homeland, especially wheat, the major food staple and agricultural crop, was down by perhaps as much as 80 percent from the period before fighting began. These refugees had left in good measure because farming had been severely disrupted. The collapse of subsistence farming had brought the possibility of starvation for most of the rural population.

Our survey showed that the whole infrastructure of farming had largely collapsed, particularly marketing, distribution of seed and fertilizer, and, especially important, water supplies. The sensitive systems of canals, including the underground ganats, are not being maintained, in part because of manpower shortages.

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Disruption caused by fighting also was often given as a reason for the decline in crop production. Refugees stated that crops were destroyed and sometimes fields burned in retaliation for guerrilla raids in the area. Others reported that helicopter gunships would sometimes shoot at farmers in their fields. More than a few said that the mujahadeen guerrillas would also steal or destroy crops. The villagers had also come to fear the forcible conscription campaigns by the Afghan Army. Men of military age (and that age range has become quite wide) either are drafted or flee to the mountains or to exile in Pakistan.

The present refugee flow, however, is also part of a movement that began before the present troubles. Peasant farmers have been leaving Afghanistan for the last several decades to search for work in other countries, largely Iran and the Arab Gulf oil states. Moreover, because subsistence farming is no longer viable, peasant farmers in Afghanistan, like their brothers throughout the Middle East, are leaving their farms to seek employment in cities.

Living conditions in the refugee camps are also better in many cases than conditions in Afghanistan. This point is no doubt communicated widely in Afghanistan and draws out some refugees who might not otherwise leave. It will also play a part in any eventual repatriation program.

#### Non-Pushtun Refugees

Non-Pushtun ethnic groups are composed primarily of Tajiks, Hazaras, and Turkoman, who feel they cannot live in the largely Pushtun-dominated camps. Ethnic antagonism between the dominant Pushtuns and the minorities is too old and deeply rooted to be overcome even by hatred of a common enemy.

The refugees who do not live in camps are denied full refugee status, particularly rations of food and other goods; the Pakistani Refugee Commissioner's Office, in agreement with the UNHCR, requires that a refugee must live in the camps to receive full benefits. Both the UNHCR and the Pakistani Refugee Commissioner's Office have largely ignored the ethnic differences among the refugees.

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Some of the non-Pushtun ethnic groups were also peasant farmers, mainly Hazaras and Tajiks, and left Afghanistan for the same reasons as the Pushtun farmers. Other groups, especially the Turkoman, but also many of the Hazaras and Tajiks, were traditional merchants or traders. The Turkoman, for instance, traditionally brought carpets from the north of Afghanistan to Kabul for market, but now bring their carpets to Peshawar and Islamabad. [REDACTED]

Some of the non-Pushtun groups live in camps but in general prefer not to do so. They consider most camps to be dominated by Pushtuns or located in undesirable areas out on the hot Indus plain too far from the Afghan border for their liking. [REDACTED]

#### Kabuli Refugees

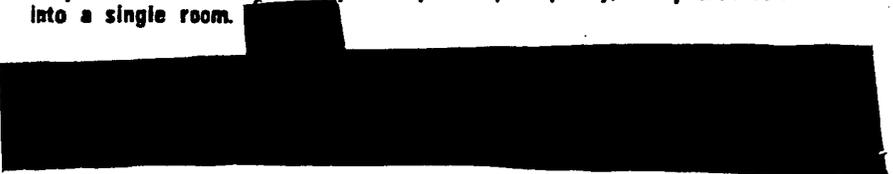
Another group of refugees who do not live in the camps are the urban dwellers primarily from Kabul. Although small in number (perhaps numbering between fifty to one hundred thousand), they are members of the emerging middle class. They were largely either bureaucrats working in the large Afghan Government agencies, teachers, university professors, or merchants. They will not or cannot live in the camps, in part because they no longer have the tribal or village connections around which camp life is based, and because camp life represents the type of traditional rural life from which their recent upward mobility has allowed them to escape. Because they do not live in the camps, they do not receive rations. Many live in substandard housing. Those who are able immigrate to the United States or Europe. [REDACTED]

In the summer of 1983 [REDACTED] a survey among the Afghan urban refugees living in Peshawar. [REDACTED] the vast majority had left because they feared for their lives or for the lives of their family. The second most frequent cause was the total interruption or serious disruption of their work. This was especially true for former Kabul University professors. The third major reason some had fled was the fear of military conscription for themselves and especially their children. Some Afghan parents, in fact, have stayed in Afghanistan but sent their children to Pakistan. Many of the cities of Pakistan,

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including Peshawar and Islamabad, have a large number of Afghan youths in their late teens whose parents have sent them out of the country to keep them out of the military. They live quite poorly, many crowded into a single room.



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