



Note on the Structure and Operation of the KhAD/WAD in Afghanistan 1978-1992

Introduction

1. This Note is issued by UNHCR in the context of the need to assess the eligibility for international protection for Afghan asylum-seekers who were members of KhAD/WAD.¹ It has been prepared by UNHCR using information gathered through research by the Office on KhAD/WAD over the past seven years (2001–2008), including recent interviews with knowledgeable sources, among them persons who were associated with KhAD/WAD at the time; and discussions with one leading academic expert² on Afghanistan and particularly KhAD/WAD. Unless sourced separately, all information in this note is based on that research.

2. The Note provides information on (1) the origins of the KhAD/WAD; (2) its structure and staffing; (3) linkages between these services and the Afghan military and militias; (4) the distinction between operational and support services; and (5) rotation and promotion policies within the KhAD/WAD.

I. Background on origins of KhAD/WAD

3. After the coup d'état of April 1978, the newly created AGSA (in Pashto, *Da Afghanistan da Gato da Saatane Adara* or “Afghan Agency for Safeguarding National Interest”) assumed intelligence responsibilities.³ That agency was replaced by KAM (*Komite-ye Amniyat-e Melli* or “Committee for National Security”) in September 1979, when Hafizullah Amin ousted President Nur Mohammad Taraki.⁴ Both agencies were tasked with propaganda as well as countering opposition within the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

¹ KhAD stands for “Khadimat-e Atal’at-e Dowlati”, i.e. State Information Service; WAD stands for “Wezarat-e Amniyat-e Dowlati”, i.e. Ministry for State Security

² Dr. Antonio Giustozzi is an academic, currently affiliated with the Crisis States Research Centre of London School of Economics, and is an expert on the communist regime in Afghanistan in the period 1978 – 1992. He has published extensively on issues relating to this period in Afghanistan, and his expertise has been used in court proceeding in several countries.

³ Adamec, Ludwig W., *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, London, 1991, p. 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

4. The origins of KhAD can be traced back to a 1,200-strong group inside the PDPA which, after the arrival of Russian troops in December 1979, took over intelligence responsibilities from KAM. That group, comprised of *parchamis*⁵, was active from December 1979 until March 1980, and was known as “the activists”.⁶ It was led by a smaller group, headed by Dr. Najibullah and Dr. Baha,⁷ who worked on designing and establishing the structure which would be known as KhAD. The Government of Babrak Karmal officially announced the creation of KhAD, with its internal structure of multiple Directorates, on 10 January 1980.⁸ In 1986, KhAD was upgraded to Ministry level and from then on was known as WAD (*Wezarat-e Amniyat-e Dowlati* or Ministry of State Security).⁹

II. Structure of the KhAD/WAD and staffing issues

5. At the high point of its development, after 1982, the KhAD/WAD was sub-divided into a number of functional Directorates. Some of these have been identified in, for example, several reports from the 1990s¹⁰, but sources consulted by UNHCR¹¹ have provided additional information on the existence of Directorates in the KhAD/WAD, as follows:

- Directorate of Administration and Finance
- Directorate of Cadre / Personnel
- Directorate of Interrogation
- Directorate of Intelligence and Afghan Diplomatic Missions Abroad
- Directorate of Post and Parcels
- Directorate for Operative Activities for Internal Control of KhAD/WAD Personnel
- Directorate for Economy and Anti Corruption
- Directorate for Counter Rebellion:
 - Two Sub-Directorates covering 16 provinces each
- Directorate for Surveillance of Foreign and National Suspects

⁵ The PDPA was divided between a largely Pushtun *Kalq* (“masses”) movement led by President Nur Mohammad Taraki and Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, and a more urban and moderate *Parcham* (“flag”) wing under Babrak Karmal, a Soviet protégé. See: Richard P. Cronin, *Afghanistan: Challenges and Options for Reconstructing a Stable and Moderate State*, Report for Congress RL31389, 24 April 2002, p. 14, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/10093.pdf>.

⁶ See: <http://runeed.blogfa.com/> (in Dari language)

⁷ These two individuals were members of the Central Committee of PDPA at that time.

⁸ Bradsher, Henry S., *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, Oxford, 1999, p. 137.

⁹ Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Torture of Political Prisoners*, ASA/11/04/86, November 1986, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=47fdfaf10>, p. 6.

¹⁰ See, for example, Amnesty International, *Reports of Torture and Long-term Detention Without Trial*, ASA 11/01/91, March 1991, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=C2DE80B3F0BD70A3802569A60060097C>

¹¹ This overview is partly based on a report written by Dr. Antonio Giustozzi, see above footnote 2, *KhAD/WAD: role, organisation and the circumstances surrounding its activities*, dated 6 March 2006 (unpublished), which was prepared to assist in a court proceeding. Dr. Giustozzi based himself, among others on: S. Fida Yunas, *Afghanistan: organization of the Peoples Democratic Party Afghanistan/Watan, Party, Governments and Biographical Sketches (1982 - 1998)*, Peshawar, Pakistan: Shinwari Press.

- Directorate of the Press and Educational Institutions¹²
- Directorate for the Protection of the Government and its Representatives
- Directorate of Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda
- Directorate of Telecommunications and Decoding
- Directorate for Activities Linked to Infiltration of *Mujaheddin*
- Directorate of Logistics
- Directorate for Agents and Informers
- Directorate of Analysis and Reporting
- Military KhAD/WAD
- Police KhAD/WAD.

6. The last two Directorates – the Military and Police KhAD/WAD – were structures situated respectively within the Ministries of Defense and the Interior, responsible for counter-intelligence and prevention of infiltration by enemies of the regime, in particular *Mujaheddin* groups. They maintained their reporting lines to KhAD/WAD.

7. At least until November 1986, when Dr. Najibullah became President,¹³ advisers from the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) were present inside all KhAD Directorates, and no important decision was taken without their consent.¹⁴ Significant changes in the structure of KhAD were introduced when, after the approval of the National Reconciliation Policy in 1986¹⁵, it became the WAD.

8. At the provincial level¹⁶, each provincial department of the KhAD/WAD was headed by one officer with two or three deputies, responsible for (1) urban areas, (2) rural areas and (3) counter-rebellion. The provincial structures comprised:

¹² The Head of the Seventh Department at the Ministry of State Security (WAD) was reportedly responsible for surveillance at the university. According to one professor interviewed by Asia Watch, agents posing as students were identifiable because although they carried student cards, they had not passed the entrance examination. Interview with Kabul University professor during visit to campus, on 25 July 1990, as reported in: Human Rights Watch, *The Forgotten War: Human Rights Abuses and Violations of the Laws Of War Since the Soviet Withdrawal*, February 1991, Chapter 4: Human Rights in Areas of Afghanistan Under the Control of the Republic of Afghanistan, http://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/afghanistan/4AFGHAN.htm#P188_37571.

¹³ Rubin, Barnett R., *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Oxford, 2002, p. 146.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 122 and 133; Kakar, M. Hassan, *The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, available at <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft7b69p12h/>. The sources consulted by UNHCR assert that, after gaining that position, Najibullah was less in need of KGB advisers to thwart opponents inside PDPA.

¹⁵ The policy of National Reconciliation represented a shift towards more conciliatory terms with the *Mojaheddin*, in view of the announced withdrawal of Soviet troops. Its main points were: a six-month ceasefire, an end to armed struggle in order to resolve political differences, just representation in the political structure and economic life of Afghanistan of political groups other than the PDPA, a general amnesty, protection and consolidation of historical, national and cultural traditions, and respect and observance of Islam. See Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Unlawful Killings and Torture*, May 1988, ASA/11/02/88, p. 1, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=47fdfafc0>.

¹⁶ Afghanistan was composed of 29 provinces before 1978. The number of provinces increased to 32 after the establishment of the PDPA-led Government of Babrak Karmal. At the moment, Afghanistan is divided into 34 provinces, as two more were created in 2004 through a presidential decree. See: Afghanistan

- Administration and Finance
- Cadre / Personnel Directorate
- Surveillance of foreign and national suspects
- Interrogation
- Post and Parcels
- Operative activities for internal control of KhAD/WAD personnel
- Propaganda and counter-propaganda
- Economy and Anti-Corruption
- Press and Educational institutions
- Logistics
- Counter-Rebellion (2 Sub-Directorates covering 16 Provinces each)
- Protection of the government and its representatives
- Telecommunication and Decoding
- Activities linked to infiltration of Mujaheddin
- Agents and Informer Unit
- Analysis and Reporting
- City District Offices
- Rural District Offices.
- Military and Police KhAD/WAD within the respective ministries' structures.

9. While it is not possible to provide a reliable breakdown of the number of officers and non-commissioned officers, the strength of the KhAD/WAD, at the peak of its capacity, comprised a total of about 1,000 persons per province, with some provinces having more than others. Of these, about one quarter are believed to have formed the personnel of Support Directorates. In addition, the organization may have had up to 20,000 personnel at its Headquarters in Kabul, an undetermined number of agents and informers depending on location, and a further undetermined number in its military wings. In total, KhAD/WAD may have had between 15,000 and 30,000 staff at the height of its development¹⁷, the figure being between 60,000 and 90,000 if agents and informers are also taken into account.¹⁸

10. From a budgetary point of view, the KhAD and the WAD were the largest Government Departments in Afghanistan from 1982 to 1990. In terms of manpower, only the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defense were larger.

Information Management Services (AIMS), *Map of Afghanistan Administrative Divisions*, April 2006, http://www.aims.org.af/maps/national/political_divisions/political_divisions_34.pdf, and AIMS, *Afghanistan Administrative Divisions*, May 2002, http://www.aims.org.af/maps/national/political_divisions/political_divisions_32.pdf.

¹⁷ Bradsher, see above footnote 8 at p. 137, cites 15,000 as a minimum; Kakar, see above footnote 14 at p. 3, suggests 30,000 as a maximum.

¹⁸ As indicated by local sources consulted by UNHCR.

III. Linkages with military/militia

11. The KhAD/WAD structures included several military components:

- The Directorate for Counter-Rebellion had three military battalions with soldiers based mainly in Kabul City, tasked with operations including arrest and preliminary investigations;
- Fighting forces of KhAD/WAD tasked with carrying out military operations were composed on an *ad hoc* basis of operative officers of different Directorates, and sent to the front lines;
- As of 1988, the National Guard was established,¹⁹ headed by the fourth Deputy Minister inside the WAD structure, who had himself three deputies: for propaganda and counter-propaganda, operational and logistics affairs respectively. It had more than ten units, each composed of 500 to 700 officers and soldiers, covering ground operations and air defense. The National Guard was tasked with offensive military operations, but was not part of security and intelligence operations.

12. KhAD/WAD had also some level of control on the Kabul Garrison that was the main military unit in charge of the city's security and army recruitment. The Garrison was under the overall authority of the Deputy Minister of Defense, and was managed in close consultation with senior officials from the Ministry of Interior, the Attorney General's Office, and the KhAD/WAD.

13. At the same time, other armed forces or groups were supported financially by KhAD/WAD. They fought in coordination with, and maintained close relationships with the KhAD/WAD, while not being part of its structures. These included:

- *Mufreza* forces (tribal and surrendered opposition militias), tasked to participate in military operations but not part of security and intelligence operations. They were known to be involved in human rights violations such as theft, burning of convoys and homes, kidnapping of civilians, extorting funds from civilians, and facilitating forced marriages. They were often undisciplined and frequently clashed with police or KhAD officers. The *Mufreza* militia commanders tended to resist supervision by the KhAD. As a result, it is not possible to say whether human rights violations by *Mufreza* were at their own initiative or were directly instructed by KhAD.
- Generals Dostum and Amanullah Gelam Jan, who were to become important Generals in the National Army in 1988, were KhAD collaborators during the 1980s. In 1988, their militias were incorporated into the army,²⁰ although they continued to entertain relations with the WAD.

14. Finally, it should be mentioned that KhAD/WAD officers often infiltrated Mujaheddin groups and fighting forces as commanders, tasked with supporting Afghan Government military operations by weakening the Mujaheddin capacity, exposing

¹⁹ Rubin, see above footnote 13, p. 157.

²⁰ Rubin, see above footnote 13, pp. 158 and 160.

Mujaheddin military plans, destabilizing Mujaheddin groups and paving the way for government military action against the Mujaheddin. They were authorized to use any necessary strategies to maintain their cover and not disclose their identity as KhAD/WAD officers.

15. The functions and tasks of the KhAD/WAD and its much smaller precursor organizations changed significantly over time. After the National Reconciliation Policy was decided upon by President Najibullah in 1986²¹, relationships with militias evolved. Prior to 1987, KhAD would provide allied militias with political and financial support. From 1987 onward, several opposition militia groups, responding positively to the National Reconciliation Policy, also joined forces with KhAD/WAD, forming a number of KhAD/WAD military wings. After 1989, important changes were introduced: the WAD was entrusted to coordinate and carry out military operations following the withdrawal of the Soviet troops.

IV. Operational vs. support services

16. At both the national and the provincial/district level, certain Directorates were engaged in active security operations, during which many human rights violations occurred. These were above all the Directorates for Operative Activities for Internal Control of KhAD/WAD Personnel, for Counter-Rebellion, for Surveillance of Foreign and National Suspects, for the Protection of the Government and its Representatives, for Activities linked to Infiltration of Mujaheddin, the Directorate of Interrogation, as well as the Police KhAD/WAD, and the corresponding functional units at provincial and district level. The military KhAD/WAD was present throughout the armed forces' structures down to at least battalion level, according to their functional and geographical structures, but still reported to KhAD/WAD.

17. However, the KhAD/WAD also included non-operational (support) Directorates/Units at the central, provincial and district levels, as follows:

- Administration and Finance
- Cadre / Personnel
- Post and Parcels
- Propaganda and counter propaganda
- Logistics
- Telecommunications and Decoding
- Press and Educational Institutions
- Agents and Informers²²

²¹ See for some background on the adoption of the National Reconciliation Policy: *Afghanistan: Afghanistan since 1973 – Civil war, communist phase (1978–92)*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-21412>.

²² The Agents and Informers Directorate, and its provincial Units, is classified as a Support Directorate. As the Directorate and its Units were involved (through the relevant operative officers who recruited them) in collecting oral and written reports, passing these on to relevant Operational Directorates, keeping track of productivity, paying out financial rewards, keeping personnel files updated etc., the Directorate and its

- Analysis and Reporting.

Information available to UNHCR does not link these Support Directorates to human rights violations in the same manner as the operational units.

18. The KhAD/WAD maintained 32 interrogation units, one in each of the provinces of Afghanistan. Reports of torture exist for the provincial centers in Bamian, Ghazni, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Lashkargah, and Pol-e Khomri.²³ In addition, KhAD/WAD is reported to have practiced torture in the following locations: near Dar-ul Aman palace in Kabul; in Shashdarak area north of Kabul; in two locations, one in Bibi Mahroo in the north-east of Kabul, and the other in Wazir Akbar Khan, near the city centre; and a large building complex in central Kabul known as Sedarat, which also housed the WAD headquarters and the Special Court of National Security.²⁴

19. The 1986 National Reconciliation Policy had an impact on the functions and activities of the KhAD/WAD. These were considerably reduced, both inside and outside of the country. Afghans who were not members of the PDPA were appointed to key government positions, including in the KhAD/WAD, and the institution was involved in negotiations with Mujaheddin groups. The previous authority of individual KhAD/WAD operative officers was reduced, for example in carrying out arrests, as they were from then on obliged to confer with local police, *shuras*²⁵ and the provincial and district offices of the Attorney General.

V. *Rotation and promotion within the KhAD/WAD*

20. All positions within the formal KhAD/WAD organigramme were ranked military positions. Rank was determined by the level of education, and promotions in rank were based on military law²⁶, largely based on the years of completed service. In addition, officers who demonstrated particular loyalty, such as gathering valuable information concerning State security, or disclosing important covert networks and organizations, were promoted. Officers who were killed while conducting such “acts of loyalty” were also promoted posthumously in order to enable their families to receive financial benefits and housing provided by the State. During the last five years of the KhAD/WAD’s existence, promotion of officers also took place not necessarily because of the officers’ length of service or loyalty, but because of the huge turnover of staff when many abandoned their posts or left the country, fearing the political changes ahead. Once ranked in a KhAD/WAD military position, one could leave the service only for reasons of health or through transfer

provincial Units were not instructing agents and informers to commit human rights violations. Any instruction to the agents and informers was given by the operative officers.

²³ Amnesty International, quoted in: Laber, Jeri, & Barnett R. Rubin, *A Nation is Dying: Afghanistan under the Soviets 1979-87*, Evanston, 1988, p. 83.

²⁴ Amnesty International, *Reports of Torture and Long-term Detention Without Trial*, see above footnote 10.

²⁵ *Shuras* are local councils of elders and other power brokers in charge of community organization and justice in most Afghan villages.

²⁶ *Law of Personal Affairs of Military Forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan – 1362* (1983), *Law on Remuneration and Rights of Cadre and Experts of Universities, Academies, Faculties and Armed Military Forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan – 1366* (1987).

to the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defense.²⁷ Agents and informers were recruited based on experience and the personal references of two KhAD/WAD officers.

21. Future KhAD/WAD officers had to be PDPA members and therefore needed to gain party membership (*asli* in Dari) through a series of stages. These included *Parwareshi*, a training for youth in primary and secondary school who entered woman or youth organizations of the PDPA, and *Azmayeshi* or testing, which included an advanced stage of ideological indoctrination.

22. For all officers of KhAD/WAD, a mandatory training course was conducted at the KhAD/WAD training centre in Kabul. The training included logistics, recruitment, defamation techniques, organization and identification of covert meetings and networks and training in the use of small networks. Training for middle rank officers (i.e. first lieutenant to lieutenant colonel) was equally mandatory, and was organized in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). Unlike the mandatory training for all KhAD/WAD officers, it included training on interrogation and criminal investigation techniques. Training for high-ranking KhAD/WAD officers (from the rank of colonel upwards) was conducted in Moscow. This training included management and policy issues as well as financial affairs. There is no information available on the number of participants in these courses.

23. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs report on the security services in Afghanistan during 1978-1992²⁸ states that “*As a first assignment, NCOs²⁹ and officers were posted to KhAD and WAD sections actively engaged in tracking down ‘elements that posed a threat to the State’.*” Other sources affirm that this practice was limited to KhAD/WAD officers and NCOs of the Operational Directorates listed in paragraph 16 above, and that the term “tracking down”, when translated from Dari, means surveillance, information collection and investigation. The tasks of KhAD/WAD officers and NCOs in

²⁷ If officers would try to leave, they were punished in accordance with the *Law of Military Crimes* of 16 Hamal 1365 (5 April 1986), approved by the President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. This law was changed and amended several times by Dr. Najibullah. The law and its amendments can be found (in Dari) at http://www.afghanistantranslation.com/Laws/Law--Military_Crimes_OG_876_2006_DO_DO.doc. This law was applicable to all personnel of the Ministries of Interior, Defense and KhAD/WAD. The law considered as military crimes actions against the security of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, against the defense capacity of the armed forces and against the set discipline for the military service. According to Article 15 of the law, desertion (*Farar*) meant leaving the unit or place of service, or certain other forms of unauthorized absence, by military personnel. It was punished with a sentence from five years to 15 years imprisonment, or death. If the same action was committed during an emergency, the perpetrator would be sentenced from 10 to 20 years of imprisonment or death.

²⁸ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Veiligheidsdiensten in communistisch Afghanistan* [“Security Services in Communist Afghanistan (1978-1992). AGSA, KAM, KhAD and WAD”], 29 February 2000, http://www.minbuza.nl/nl/actueel/ambtsberichten,2003/05/afghanistan_veiligheidsdiensten_x_29_02_0_0.html. This report was translated into English in the context of CIREA, and is available as a Council of the European Union document dated 26 April 2001 at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=467006172>. Another report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not been translated into English; see: *Afghanistan – politie* (“Afghanistan – police”), 4 September 2002, available at http://www.minbuza.nl/nl/actueel/ambtsberichten,2002/11/afghanistan_politie_x_04_09_02.html, which deals *inter alia* with the police in Afghanistan in the period of 1978-1992.

²⁹ Non-commissioned officers.

practice included these aspects, in as far as preliminary investigations were concerned. However, beyond preliminary investigations, interrogations and further prosecutions were the responsibility of officers working at the Directorate of Interrogation and in Provincial interrogation units, and the Attorney General's office.

24. UNHCR is not able to confirm that there was a systematic rotation policy inside KhAD/WAD. Sources consulted by UNHCR affirmed that rotations within the KhAD/WAD structures were largely based on expertise and experience. In emergency situations, staff may have been shifted to work on a given operation, but within its area of expertise. Military personnel operated within its rank and levels of expertise. One expert³⁰ stated that, in his view, there was no mandatory rotation; he believes that people could change jobs within the KhAD/WAD, but that it was not a rule or requirement. In the view of that source, such a rotation policy would have gone against any sense of professionalism within the institution. Other sources state that the activities of KhAD/WAD officers were regulated by a number of principles, one of which was confidentiality. For this reason, they believe that the KhAD/WAD could not resort to a general rotation policy, as this would have risked disclosure of information from one Directorate to another.

UNHCR
May 2008

³⁰ Interview dated 19 April 2008 with Dr. Antonio Giustozzi, see above footnote 2.