

Nickum's conclusion: "further economic growth and accompanying institutional

change" are more likely to relieve China's water woes than to aggravate them.

Afghanistan's Agony

"Afghanistan under the Taliban" by Barnett R. Rubin, in *Current History* (Feb. 1999), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

Once a bloody battlefield in the Cold War, Afghanistan under the murderous Taliban is now an arena for regional rivalries—and still ravaged by warfare, writes Rubin, author of *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (1995).

Pakistani-Iranian competition is the main outside force fanning the flames of civil war in Afghanistan. Pakistan has the closest and strongest ties to its northern neighbor. Historically, Islamabad worried about the Pashtun tribes that occupy both southeast Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan. But dur-

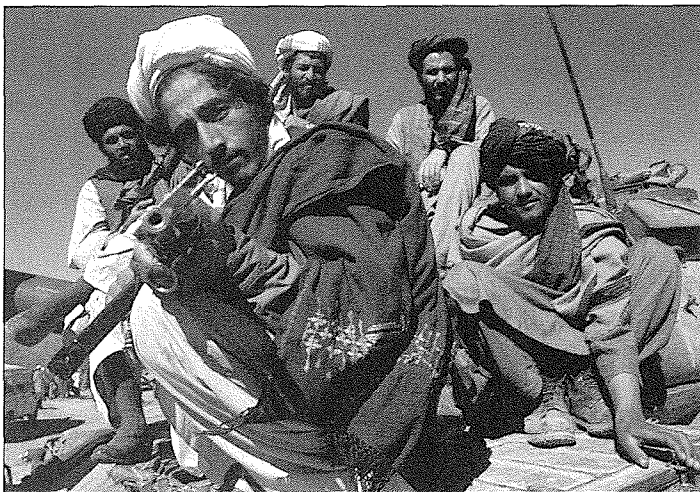
"Upon capturing Mazar," Rubin says, "the Taliban killed thousands of civilians, mainly Shia Muslims from the Hazara ethnic group." Eight Iranian diplomats and an Iranian journalist also were slain, prompting Tehran to post troops on the Afghan border and threaten military action. Tehran is the main supplier of fuel and weapons to the half-dozen or so groups fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, Rubin says. It's not just solidarity with their coreligionists that motivates the Iranians. They also worry

about, among other things, rival Saudi Arabia's influence in Afghanistan.

Until last summer, the Saudis supplied fuel and money to the Taliban through Pakistan. But Saudi-Iranian relations have warmed since the election of Iranian moderate Muhammad Khatami as president. The fact that the Taliban has been harboring wealthy Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, who has funded militant Islamic groups in Afghanistan,

Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, also gave Riyadh second thoughts. The Saudis, Rubin says, have terminated, or at least scaled back, their aid.

Ever since pro-Soviet communists came to power in a bloody coup in 1978, Afghanistan "has moved from one stage to another of civil war and political disintegration," Rubin observes. The Afghan groups arrayed against the Taliban in the National Islamic United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan appear united in name only. But thanks in part to its neighbors, Afghanistan's agony appears far from over.



Welcome to Afghanistan

ing the jihad against Soviet forces in the late 1970s and '80s, many Pashtuns rose to leadership positions in Pakistan, Rubin says, and Islamabad came to welcome Pashtun rule "of the right kind" in Afghanistan. It was largely military aid from Pakistan that enabled the radical Islamic Taliban movement—led by Mullah Muhammad Umar and other Pashtuns from Qandahar—to seize control of that city in southeast Afghanistan in 1994, then expand its authority until, with the capture of the northern city of Mazar-i Sharif in August 1998, it controlled virtually the entire country.