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DIVIDE AND RULE: STATE PENETRATION IN HAZARAJAT (AFGHANISTAN) FROM THE MONARCHY TO THE TALIBAN

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Introduction

State building is often analysed in terms of institution building, the expansion of bureaucratic structures of territorial control and governance, and the development of a system for the delivery of benefits and services. While there is no question that this is an important aspect of edification of the modern state, there is a darker and messier side to state building which is often conveniently overlooked.

This paper will first try to explain how the Afghan monarchy, in its attempts to consolidate and expand the state presence across the country, established control over Hazarajat. It will examine the strategy and tactics that the monarchy used to conquer the region and maintain control once the rebellions were defeated. It will then present a comparative analysis of the Afghan state strategy to conquer the region in the 1890s and the Taliban war against the Hazaras in the 1990s. It is an exploration of the historical patterns and issues that remained at the centre of Afghan politics throughout the century.

How the monarchy established control over Hazarajat

Afghanistan is a heterogeneous country composed of several ethnic groups. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks are respectively its four main ethnic groups followed by other smaller ethno-lingual communities. Other than the Hazaras, who predominantly follow the Shiite sect of Islam, the major ethnic groups are mostly Sunni Muslims.[1] The other major Shiite populations are the Qizilbash, living in urban centres, and the Farsiwans, in the western parts of the country. The ethnic, cultural and lingual diversity of the terrain has often posed complex challenges in the development of a modern and unified state. Pashtuns have dominated politics and state for the past three centuries.

Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) is believed to be the architect of modern Afghanistan. It was under him that the present boundaries were defined and the country recognised as a 'buffer state' between the Russian Empire in the north and British India in the south. He managed to establish a delicate balance between the interests and ambitions of the two rival super powers to the north and south of the country. Both had reached an agreement to turn the country into a buffer zone in order to avoid direct confrontation in their quest for expansion of their territory. In return for conceding the foreign affairs of the country to the British Empire, the Amir gained a great level of autonomy and significant British subsidies

[1] There are no reliable population figures for Afghanistan. The Hazara estimates of the total population vary between nine and nineteen percent. Some figures area available through the CIA World Factbook (2000). This is available online at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html

for the running of domestic affairs and strengthening of state institutions. Under an agreement with British India he vowed not to establish any diplomatic relationship with any other power and that his external affairs would be managed through British channels. As such, he embarked on an ambitious plan of creating a state by building modern institutions and expanding his control over the previously semi-autonomous regions of the country.

However, the process of expansion and consolidation of state control over these regions resulted in extensive military confrontation with several regional, tribal and ethnic groups that refused to concede their traditional autonomy to the state. During the 1880s the process resulted into several military confrontations with local Pashtuns in the south and east of the country. The Amir broke the resistance of several tribal groups and local influential persons who defied his authority. He managed to subjugate all Pashtun tribes through several military and political campaigns that heavily relied on the ruthless use of force and the manipulation of local tribal and personal rivalries. Having successfully crushed tribal and personal foes among the Pashtuns, the Amir focused his attention on the other ethnic groups, confronting the Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Turkomans. However, this expansion of the war went through a dramatic change. Through this, the Amir mobilised tribal warriors and religious zealots of all Pashtun tribes so that they would fight the other groups on behalf of the state.[2]

Unification, Pasthunisation and Social Fragmentation

By the end of his rule in 1901, when he died, the Amir had effectively brought the entire country under strict government control. He had broken the resistance of all local tribal and ethnic groups and had established the military and political supremacy of the state. In sum, he created a country that had internationally recognised boundaries, was politically unified and was governed by a centralised government that was capable of exercising the ultimate authority over its population.

The policies and practices of the Amir later proved to be of paramount importance for the future course of developments in Afghanistan. The strategies and tactics he employed to unify the country produced mixed results. On the one hand, he unified the country and laid the foundations for the necessary institutions for a modern state. On the other hand, his heavy-handedness and exclusive reliance on the unlimited use of force gained him the reputation of the 'Iron Amir'. Furthermore, his exploitation of the ethno-lingual and religious diversity of the population as a tactic of defeating his foes and consolidating his rule resulted in the social fragmentation of the country. In fact, his entire approach toward building a unified state was deeply flawed in many ways. First and foremost, the Amir's strategy was purely centred on gaining political and military dominance as a way of centralising power, collecting taxes and exercising control without any plan of integrating the diverse ethnic make-up of the country into a unified nation. The creation and maintenance of a strong standing army was at the centre of his state building project. He viewed the army as the central state institution that could unify the country. Second, in his strategy to unify the country he extensively relied on a policy of manipulation of tribal, ethnic and religious diversity within the population in order to defeat his opponents.

[2] For a detailed account of this period of the Afghan history see Hazara, *Seraj-al Tawarikh* (Torch of Histories), (2006) and Mahomed Khan (1901).

However, the Amir placed himself above all political conflicts in the country and stated that his authority as the Amir emanated from God, a notion that justified the harshest punishments for his opponents as anti-Islamic rebels. He asserted that he was on a divine mission to build an Islamic state and to relieve the Muslim masses from the tyranny of their tribal feudal lords. Thereby, he added a new moral and universalist aspect to the traditional political, ethnic and tribal conflicts in the country. He resorted to the use of Islam and employed mullahs to justify his wars as *jihad* and to denounce his opponents as *kafirs* (infidels), *yaghis* (rebels), and *munifiqin* (hypocrites) (Canfield 1986: 90). As a result, the process that led to political and administrative unification of the country was accompanied by a tantamount process of social fragmentation of the population along ethnic, tribal and religious lines. The Amir relied on Duranis to defeat the Ghilzais, on Pashtuns to fight non-Pashtuns and on Sunnis to beat the Shiites (Farhang 1988: 423). In each war he sought to declare his war as a *jihad* and to accuse his enemies of heresy.

The decisive role of the Pasthun tribal militias in subjugating and controlling the other ethnic groups exposed both the character and dependency of the state on its ethnic and tribal support base. In order to expand this support base, the state tended to promote and support the resettlement of Pashtun communities in the northern and central regions of the country as a way of consolidating its support base and expanding its control. This created resentment and further embedded the ethnic character of the state. It also deprived it of the opportunity to cultivate a support base among various ethnic groups. [3]

Pashtun nomads turned out to be both crucial supporters and beneficiaries of the Afghan state. State control and sponsorship provided them access to valuable economic resources and pasture lands in what to them had previously been inaccessible northern and central Afghanistan. While the nomads served as a major military force for the state in times of war, they were never properly integrated into the national state structure and remained an external group in the administrative and legal apparatus of the state. In return to their services in times of war, they were exempted from government interventions in their internal affairs and obligations such as payment of tax and military conscription, at least at times of peace and stability. The state and nomads shared a common interest in maintaining control of the other regions of the country. The relationship was so close that under Amir Abdur Rahman, army generals were embedded among the Kuchis to organize their migration to northern Afghanistan.[4]

The Hazara resistance and integration into the Afghan state provides a good insight into the difficulties and challenges of state building in a heterogeneous society. Firstly, the Amir's war against the Hazaras resulted into a full-fledged war between two distinct communities. A large section of the Pashtun community was mobilised to attack the Hazaras for religious, ethnic and economic motives. Secondly, the Hazaras fought the longest and bloodiest resistance against the state.

Conquest and Forced Integration of the Hazarajat into the Afghan State (1890s)

The Hazara territories, presently known as Hazarajat, were among the last to be incorporated into the structures and realm of authority of the present Afghan state. Since the formation of a tribal confederation under the leadership of Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1747 in Kandahar, the Afghans gradually rose into power by expanding their military strength and territorial control.

[3] For a historical perspective on the state building process please see Shahrani (1986).
[4] For more on this see Glatzer (1983).

The process of Afghan political and military expansion consequently weakened their northern, rival Hazara neighbours, who were forced to gradually concede strategic and fertile lands to the rising Pashtuns and to shrink into the more inaccessible central mountains of today's Afghanistan.

Yet the mountainous and harsh climatic features of the region helped the Hazaras to effectively defy any external encroachment into their territories and to maintain virtual autonomy from the outside world by the early 1890s. At this point the Hazara resistance against attempts by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan to expand and consolidate state control over the region, until then known as *yaghistan* or 'the rebels land', led to a massive military confrontation.

In his efforts to extend his authority deep into the Hazara's homeland, the Amir pursued a two-pronged or two-phased strategy. The first prong of the strategy, which dominated his dealings with the Hazaras through the 1880s was to slowly extend his authority through the manipulation of tribal and personal rivalries of the Hazara *khans*. In his first such attempt, in 1881, he invited all Hazara *khans* to Kabul where he greeted them with respect, officially confirmed the leadership status of their respective regions and tribes, and secured their support for his government. During the meeting, he emphasised the Islamic bonds between the communities in the country and the need for cooperation between them and Kabul. This provided him an opportunity to establish contacts with an extensive number of Hazara *khans* that were bitterly divided among themselves and disposed for manipulation by external players. Hereby, the Amir centred his efforts on playing one *khan* against the other, mostly supporting the weaker ones in their attempts to challenge the stronger ones. He recruited many *sayeds* (religious figures) and neutralised some *khans* and tribal communities by promising them state support in their local rivalries. The Amir thus also became a source of patronage and support that could alter the balance of power among local players. Rebellious Hazara *khans* were often subjugated by fighters mobilised by other *khans* and Hazara *khans* were required to contribute fighters in similar wars in other regions of the country. For instance, towards the end of the 1880s, several loyal Hazara *khans* and their men fought for the Amir in northern Afghanistan, until then known as Turkistan, in his final attempt to pacify the region (Dawlatabadi 2006: 65-73).

The Amir turned to the second prong of his strategy in the early 1890s when he decided to tighten his grip over the region. At this point the gradual consolidation of his authority through manipulation of local *khans* had reached its ceiling. Many of the local *khans* felt squeezed by the growing and expanding presence and power of the Amir, his demand of total subjugation to his authority, and the excessive taxation and interference in what they considered to be their own domestic affairs. At this point, the Amir was also feeling strong enough to end his dealings with repeated Hazara rebellions. He had gained total control of the Pashtun areas in the south and Turkistan in the north. The tension soon resulted in a series of military attacks and rebellions (1891-1893), which rapidly intensified and escalated into one of the bloodiest conflicts in the country's history. As a result, the *khans* realised the need for a region-wide collective resistance. In 1892, a meeting occurred that included and represented most of the Hazara *khans*, culminating in a declaration of full war with the aim of overthrowing the monarchy in Kabul. The Amir reciprocated with a similar declaration of war, which was endorsed and propagated by the Sunni clerics against all Hazaras, accusing them of rebellions, heresy, infidelity, and spreading waves of anti-Shiite feelings and hostility across the country. This radically changed the nature of the war and its ultimate goals. Both sides mobilised tens of thousands of fighters on ethnic and religious grounds. While the

Hazaras aimed to overthrow the monarch in Kabul, the Amir aimed for a complete end of troubles to his rule caused by the Hazaras. The Amir declared Hazara men and women to be slaves and announced their lands and properties to be rewards for those participating in the war. About one hundred thousand troops and Pashtun tribal armies were mobilised in a military campaign that resulted into mass killing, lootings, displacement and forced subjugation of the Hazaras (Kakar 1973: 135). The government army and Pashtun tribal militias faced the fiercest resistance in their efforts to enter the region from four directions (Temirkhanov 1993: 208).

Once conquered, the region and its population were treated as infidel land. Despite Abdur Rahman's claim to be a modernist and a believer in disciplined regular armies, his reliance on tribal levies against the Hazaras came at a price, not only for the Hazaras but also for the plan to create a 'modern' Afghanistan.[5] As previously promised by the Amir, everyone involved in the war was allowed to enslave the Hazaras and to seize their property as war booty. By imposing a one-tenth tax on the sale of Hazara slaves and a one-fifth tax on the seizure of their properties, his government effectively turned the Hazaras into subjects of a burgeoning slave trade. Between July 1892 and June 1894 about nine thousand Hazara men and women were sold in the bazaars of Kabul and the government raised seventy thousand rupees as tax on the sale of Hazara slaves in Kandahar alone. The mass killings and enslavement at the hand of the conquerors, coupled with an exodus of locals as a result of persecution and famine followed by the destruction of shelters and agriculture into the then Indian sub-continent, Iran and central Asia, resulted in a considerable reduction in the population and territorial size of the region (Kakar 2006: 137). Some estimates suggest that the majority of the region was evacuated. Hazara inhabitants in Uruzgan and districts in today's Zabul province were completely wiped out and instead Pashtuns were settled.[6] In Uruzgan alone, twelve thousand Durrani and four thousand Ghilzai families were ordered to settle on formerly Hazara land (Farhang 1988: p. 404). The Behsud, a tribe that is believed to have suffered the least during the war, lost sixty eight percent of its total population.[7]

The government provided protection and economic incentives such as tax exemption and credit to Pashtuns to encourage them to settle into these and other fertile areas in the interior of the region. Pasture lands were converted into state properties and then granted to Pashtun nomads who had played crucial roles in the war against the Hazaras (Temirkhanov 1993: 148). This put the nomad in an extraordinarily advantageous position. In their seasonal migration to the region they also carried goods from the then Indian-subcontinent which they sold to the local farmers. They then transported local dry fruits and other products back to south. Local state support also allowed them to encroach onto the limited agricultural land. The support of the state and the mobility of nomads as traders enabled them to acquire cultivated lands as well, usually engaging the former owner to cultivate it as sharecropper. Often they coerced the local populations to buy their goods at comparatively high prices. This led to the development of a debt-credit relationship between the nomads and the local Hazara farmers throughout most of the century, which often resulted into penury and loss of land ownership by the latter (Allan 2003: 197).

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[5] For more information, see Rahman's biography, by Mahomed Khan (1900).

[6] As a result of the mass displacement caused by the war and subsequent seizure of properties by the Amir's army, there are significant Hazara communities in Quetta city of Baluchistan and other places in the Sindh province of Pakistan. Similarly, in the Khorsan province of Iran, Hazaras constitute a considerable population. Others who fled to central Asia and other parts of the sub-continent have disappeared and have been assimilated into local communities.

[7] Out of 2000 families of the tribe, only 6400 survived. (Temirkhanov, 1993: 261).

It appears that the ultimate goal of the Amir was to completely annihilate the religious, political and economic potential of the Hazaras as a distinct community, in order to create a unified Sunni and Pashtun-dominated state. Following the conquest of the region, he ordered his government and army to round up all Hazara *khans* and religious leaders, including those that had not participated in the war, and to send them to Kabul. Thousands of *khans* and religious figures and their families were removed from the region, killed, placed under house arrest in Kabul or sent into exile in other provinces (Temirkhanov 1993: 245). This was pursued in conjunction with the policy of 'de-Shiitisation' in the region that aimed to forcefully convert the Shiites, including non-Hazaras, into Sunni Islam. He instructed his government to appoint Sunni judges and scholars in all Hazara districts to settle legal affairs according to Hanafi jurisprudence. Hanafi mosques were built in several parts of the region and Sunni mullahs officially designated to convert and educate the locals into Sunni Islam. Despite this, most Hazaras persisted and practiced *taqiyyah*, a Shiite principle that allows its followers to conceal their religious beliefs in order to avoid persecution (Temirkhanov 1993: 258). By doing this, the Amir institutionalised a Sunni and sectarian state system that was inherently discriminatory and repressive towards the Hazaras.

'Independence' and Kabul's attempts to re-establish control

To many Hazaras, the Marxist coup of April 1978 and the resulting regime change in the country heralded a new era in their history. The ideas of the proletariat and peasant revolution and the associated land and social reforms of the new regime appealed deeply to the grievances of the largely poor urban and rural peasant Hazaras. However, before the programmes could deliver tangible benefits on the ground, the regime faced spontaneous rebellions organised by the Hazara *khans* and religious notables in the face of indiscriminate attacks and persecution by the new regime. Within a year of the coup almost all of the rural districts fell into the hands of local *mujahedin* leaders who, for the first time since the 1890s, enjoyed and exercised virtual autonomy from the PDPA (People's Democratic Part of Afghanistan) regime until its collapse in 1992.

From 1980, being focused upon other strategically more important regions, the Kabul government and the Soviet army, who were deployed to support the government, refrained from large scale military offensives in the region. Yet while the Soviets and the Kabul regime had ceased major military incursions into the Hazarajat, they did attempt to infiltrate various resistance organisations. This was done mainly through KhAD, the intelligence agency. The national reconciliation programme announced by President Najibullah in early 1987 was intended to weaken the opposition by instigating factional rivalries and buying in the support of one or the other of the *mujahedin* organisations engaged in factional infighting. Although no significant Hazara organisation or military commander publicly joined the process, many local commanders did establish contact with the government. Military Division 96 in Ghazni and Brigade Number 520 in Maidak Wardak were exclusively Hazara units created to coordinate with the local Hazara *mujahedin* commanders that had secretly joined the government. The military and financial assistance offered by these units were highly valued by the local rival commanders, who were suffering from declining Iranian assistance. However, due to the weakness of the Kabul regime particularly, after the announcement of the withdrawal of the Soviet army in 1980 no good prospects for publicly shifting towards the government existed. To do so would risk the loss of credibility both within the Hazaras and in relation with the majority Sunni resistance groups based in Peshawar.

The national reconciliation programme provided a unique opportunity for like-minded Hazaras in opposition and government. It was through this initiative that the first link between Hazara officials of the government and many resistance leaders was established. The bleak prospects of survival of the Kabul regime in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal and increasing political alignments along ethnic lines both within the government and amongst the *mujahedin* prompted many to plan optional strategies for their survival as individuals, as well as for the common interests of their ethnic communities.[8]

1989-1996: the search for new allies?

The Shiite-Sunni religious divide proved to be a major fault-line of the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance organisations. None of the several organisations managed to offer a multi-religious platform that could cater support to both communities. The Shiite organisations were predominately based in and sponsored by the officials of the Shiite Islamic republic of Iran whilst the Sunnis were based in and sponsored by the neighbouring Sunni Pakistan. Despite their different social power bases and foreign sponsors, their relationship was mostly peaceful during the years of jihad.[9] Yet this changed when each organisation sought to present their vision of an Islamic government and their own role within it. Negotiations on the nature, composition and system of future government towards the end of 1980s revealed major contradictions and inconsistencies in the politics of Afghan resistance organisations (Dorronsoro 2005: 223-227).

The powerful Sunni organisations denied the Shiites any meaningful role in the negotiations and formation of the Interim Islamic governments (IIG) that took place in Pakistan towards the end of the 1980s. Many of them disregarded and overlooked the Shiites and viewed them with contempt. This once again invigorated the Hazara historical sense of exclusion and injustice, prompting them to organise collective and forceful bargaining at the national level. In 1989, all Hazara *mujahedin* factions abandoned their internal rivalries and factional interests by uniting under *Hizb-e Wahdat*, a new political party that centred its platform on the elimination of historical discrimination against the Hazaras. The formation of this new party represented a radical change in the direction of Hazara politics. Its clerical leaders toned down their religious language as Shiite politics was seen too risky in the majority Sunni country. Instead, they developed a more nationalist approach and attempted to explore common interests and strategies with the other communities.

The vocal disregard of this party by the Sunni leaders, most of whom were Pashtuns, confirmed fears that the historically Pashtun-dominated and repressive central state would be restored. In view of this, *Hizb-e Wahdat* devised a new strategy that aimed to unite non-Pashtuns in a coalition to prevent the revival of Pashtun domination. This view was to some extent shared by the Tajik and Uzbek leaders and was at the core of an alliance of the *Hizb-e Wahdat, Shuray-e Nizare Shamal* (Supervisory Council of the North (SCN)) and the previously pro-government Uzbek militia of General Dostum that later became *Junbesh-e Milli Islami*. Senior representatives of the three organisations signed an agreement in Jabalu-Serraj in Parwan province known as the '*moa'hedah jabal-u serraj'*, or '*jabal-u serraj* agreement', which provided for collective bargaining of the three organisations for future

[8] Since the mid 1980s, representatives of key mujahedin leaders from Hazarajat were secretly visiting high level Hazara officials in the government in Kabul and had apparently discussed possible scenarios after the likely collapse of the regime in Kabul. (Personal interview by the author with former Hazara government officials and mujahedin leaders, Kabul, June 2006).

[9] For more on Sunni-Shiite relationship during the early periods of Jihad see Ibrahimi (2006).

political arrangements in the country. However, the alliance did not last long as the member organisations failed to cooperate in taking control of the capital and in sharing power once they obtained it. The SCN, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, dominated all of the key government institutions and emerged as the most powerful in the capital. It refused to share power in any meaningful way with its allies or with the predominantly Pashtun *Hizb-e Islami* of Hekmatyar. What followed was a civil war of all against all. The Rabbani government faced military attacks by *Hizb-e Islami* and concurrently engaged in bloody conflicts with *Hizb-i Wahdat*, which controlled western parts of the city. This caused a dramatic reconfiguration of the political alignments.

The Mujahedin government (1992-1996)

Several rounds of negotiations among the Peshawar-based *mujahedin* organizations failed to produce an inclusive national government. Political and ideological disagreements, factionalism and thirst for power prevented the *mujahedin* from forming a legitimate government at a time when the government in Kabul was on the eve of its collapse. The pace of development in Kabul forced the *mujahedin* to form a caretaker government for a period of two months. In April 1992 a new government headed by Sebgatullah Mojaddadi, the moderate and weak leader of the Afghan National Liberation Front, took control in an official ceremony in the capital. It reported to a fifty one member strong leadership council (*Shuraye Qiadi*). During the two months of his rule, Mojaddadi was severely constrained as head of the state. His party was politically and militarily one of the weakest and he faced the daunting task of having to create a delicate balance among several much larger and powerful political and military organisations. During his period in office he reached some agreements with *Hezb-e Wahdat* in Kabul. As part of this, he offered four ministerial posts and eight seats in the leadership council under his own leadership. However, *Wahdat*'s demand for a key post in the government remained unresolved. Soon, a four day armed conflict erupted between *Wahdat* and *Ittehad* led by Rasul Sayaf, a predominately Pashtun party aligned with Rabbani. During the conflict *Wahdat* displayed its military capabilities and strength in the capital which resulted into a new agreement that provided that the key ministry of national security be granted to *Hezb-e Wahdat*. In late June that year he was replaced by Rabbani, leader of *Jamiat Islami*, a Tajik from northern Badakhshan who took the office for another period of four months.[10]

The collapse of Najibullah's government in 1992 symbolised one of the most fundamental changes in the country's history. After nearly three hundred years of dominance and superiority, the Pashtuns lost control of the capital. Both Mojaddadi and Rabbani were non-Pashtuns. Hekmatyar, leader of the main Pasthun *mujahedin* group was unable to enter the capital. Moreover, the state institutions that had served to maintain and promote Pashtun hegemony collapsed. The capital and entire country were divided among several political and military organisations which were developing different ethno-lingual, religious and regional constituencies.[11] The discredit of the central government favoured the fragmentation of central power to the benefit of armed groups of various kinds. *Hezb-e Wahdat*, as the most powerful and united Hazara organisation, offered protection and a role for the Hazara members of the regime who, in return, played key roles in establishing its control over the strategic western section of the capital. Military depots and weapon caches were handed over to the *Wahdat* commanders that later proved to be vital in the ensuing civil war. Control of almost half of the capital placed *Hezb-e Wahdat* in a position to be reckoned with and enabled

[10] For more see Harpviken p.111-114 (1995)
[11] For a historical background, see Ahady (1995)

the organisation to play an important role in all major conflicts and political and military alignments of 1992-8.[12]

Having experienced virtual autonomy and deep socio-political transformation over the previous fourteen years, the Hazaras had grown more self-confident and forceful in their relations with the centre and with other ethnic groups. Outside its headquarters in Bamyan, *Hezb-e Wahdat* asserted itself as a significant political-military player in the capital as well as in the provinces. In Ghazni for instance, its leaders had persuaded the local Pashtuns to concede fifty percent of their provincial positions to the Hazaras.[13] They demanded a quarter of the positions of power in central government, official recognition of Shiite jurisprudence in their areas and proposed a federal system in the country with Bamyan being one of six major provincial capitals.[14]

In June that year, Rabbani sponsored a grand Islamic council (*Shuraye- Hal Wa A'aqd*) in Kabul which extended his reign for another two years. Rabbani's strategy towards the Hazaras illustrates some aspects of the complexity of Afghan politics. He vowed to put an end to the Pashtun tribal monarchy and ethnic hegemony in the country and called upon the country's other ethnic groups to support his government (Muradi 2006: 112). This slogan resonated well across the non-Pashtun communities who threw their support behind his government in the first few months. However, Rabbani's government was unable to maintain their support as negotiations over distributions of positions of power failed to produce mutually satisfactory agreements. As a result the Rabbani regime itself was open to accusations of ethnic monopolisation, the key players within it being all Tajiks. Its key players refused to share control of the powerful security, interior and defence ministries with its allies as well as with its arch-rival, the predominantly Pashtun *Hezb-e Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Despite brief alliances with many other organisations and the symbolic presence of figures from other ethnic groups, it essentially remained a Tajik-dominated government and the forces that fought to protect and defend it in Kabul were primarily the former *mujahedin* of Massoud.

What followed was a civil war of all against all. The Rabbani government engaged in bloody conflict with *Hezb-e Wahdat*, which controlled western parts of the city, eventually pushing it to ally with *Hezb-i Islami*. One of the main sources of controversy between *Hezb-e Wahdat* and the Rabbani government was the demand by the former for a key government ministry to facilitate the Hazara's participation in day to day affairs of the country. *Wahdat*'s leader, Mazari, wanted one of the key ministries: interior, defence or national security. The Ministry of National Security was initially offered to *Hezb-e Wahdat* under Mojaddadi, but was downgraded to a department under Rabbani, who then turned down General Khodadad, *Wahdat*'s nominee for the position and former PDPA official (Dawlatabadi 2006 : 492).

Rabbani was also unwilling to meet *Wahdat*'s wider demand of a quarter of cabinet positions and continued to use a mix of negotiation and warfare in order to force *Wahdat* to reduce its demands.[15] Nonetheless, *Hezb-e Wahdat* continued to retain control of significant portions of the city and insisted on its demands. Between May 1992 and March 1995, the western part of the capital dominated by the Hazaras was the scene of at least twenty seven battles, making it

[12] Interview with former Wahdat officials, Kabul, 2006
[13] Interview with Ustad Fekrat, Ghazni, 2007
[14] For details of Wahdat's political demands see Rahbar-e Shahid Foundation (2000)
[15] This information stems from a personal interview with a former senior official of Hezb-e Wahdat, who was engaged in negotiations with Rabbani government in the 1990s, Kabul, March 2007.

the main battlefield of the country's civil war. The consecutive battles also made *Hezb-e Wahdat* one of the major players and contestants of power at the national level. Rabbani's security services attempted tricks other than military confrontation to divide and overcome its opposition. Manipulation of differences within opposition groups and the provision of support to smaller factions against the bigger ones came into the play once again. One of the major functions of the organisation, led by Qasim Fahim, was to instigate conflict among the other warring factions and ethnic groups in order to prolong its own rule.[16]

In February 1993 Afshar, a predominantly Hazara district and a stronghold of *Hizb-e Wahdat*, came under a surprise attack from different directions. This was led by Masoud and Ittehad-i Islami of Sayaf, a largely Pashtun organisation that was known for its conservative and anti-Shiite orientation. *Hizb-e Wahdat* forces were quickly overwhelmed as a number of its military commanders of *sayed* background switched sides, as the Rabbani government left the neighbourhood and its residents were prey to massive destruction, pillage and looting. The area was reduced to ruins and hundreds of its residents, including women and children, were killed and captured. This effectively pushed the Hazaras into a new alliance. *Hizb-i Wahdat, Junbesh* of Dostum, *Hezb-i Islami* and *Jabha-e-Milli-e Nejat* led by Mojaddadi entered into a new alliance, called '*shuray-e a'ali hamangani'* or 'the supreme council for coordination'. This lasted until 1996 when the Taliban took control of the capital.[17]

Wahdat lacked solid internal unity and was exposed to external manipulation. It was created to unify at least nine Hazara organisations that had fought against each other because of ideological differences and competition for power throughout most of the period of *jihad*. Despite their unification under *Wahdat*, the organisations had retained separate identities and networks, as well as a memory of their several years of infighting.[18] The party experienced its first major split in Kabul in September 1994. The split followed the old factional division of the 1980s, that which *Hezb-e Wahdat* was meant to alleviate. At the heart of the internal rivalry that led to the split was the disagreement on whether to join the Rabbani government to prevent the restoration of Pashtun dominance. Mohammad Akbari, the former leader of *Pasdaran-e Jihad-e Islami* and chairman of *Wahdat*'s central committee, emerged as leader of the pro-Rabbani faction within the party. Mazari, a former leader of *Sazman-e Nasr* and Secretary-general of the party, led the majority with his insistence that *Wahdat* be conceded a quarter of political power and direct participation in all decision making levels of the country. The Rabbani government was promoting Akbari as a more reliable ally within the Shiite community. It supported his faction financially and militarily to consolidate and expand its hold over territories in Hazarajat. Similarly, *Harakat-e Islami* of Shaikh Asif Mohsini joined the Rabbani government and accused Mazari's faction of unnecessary warmongering and bloodshed. The party clashed with *Hezb-e Wahdat* on several occasions for territorial control and influence in western part of the capital.[19]

The Taliban's re-conquest

The Taliban emerged at a time of chronic instability, unbridled anarchy and pervasive insecurity caused by the failure of the *mujahedin* to agree on a power sharing mechanism and the subsequent civil strife. They quickly established a greater level of stability and security in

[16] Interview with former NSD official, Kabul, March 2007
[17] Personal notes provided by Ustad Babah, a former Hezb-e Wahdat Official Ghazni (2005). Also see Muradi (2006), p. 74.
[18] For more on the Hazara mujahedin and the civil war in the Hazarajat see Ibrahimi (forthcoming)
[19] Interviews with former Harakat and Wahdat commanders, Kabul, 2007

areas under their control by dismantling the irresponsible armed groups and removing militia check-posts that were extorting and abusing travellers on highways. Their initial agenda of disarming irresponsible armed groups, establishing security, ending the conflict and facilitating the formation of an Islamic government gained them a remarkable level of popular support. Even though the nature and ultimate objectives of the movement remained a mystery for most of the population, their practical and clear agendas and their capacity to deliver results in areas they controlled earned them the image of the only potential saviours of the country.

The Taliban, drawn predominantly from the Pashtuns, also galvanised Pashtun nationalism. After nearly 300 years, the Pashtuns had lost the control of the capital to the country's other ethnic groups who were in an equal, if not superior, political and military position in a power bargaining process (Rashid 2000: 2). The Taliban's quick victories revived the hope that a new, albeit conservative and backward, Pashtun force was on its way to unify the country under a Pashtun rule. Furthermore, the movement was seen as a temporary force that could facilitate the formation of a Pashtun-dominated state by crushing and disarming other groups. This view was further strengthened by the Taliban's own denial of its intentions to form a government.[20] In view of this, the Taliban enjoyed the backing and tacit approval of secular Pashtuns, including former communists, who joined the regime to runs its small air force and military artillery and tanks.

However, the rapid expansion of the Taliban surprised all *mujahedin* organisations. Deeply engaged in incessant hostility and destructive civil war, none of the *mujahedin* organisations, including *Hizb-e Wahdat*, were prepared to respond to the fast-growing movement from the south. The Rabbani government saw the Taliban as a potential Pashtun ally against its long standing rival, *Hizb-e Islami Hikmatyar*. In view of this, they provided considerable financial and military support to the movement in its early days. The Taliban disarmament of *Hizb-e Islami* and other organisations in the Pashtun provinces was greeted with optimism and with the hope of elimination of its adversaries. Another predominantly Pashtun party, *Ittehad-e Islami*, led by Rasul Sayaf, had instructed its commanders in the south to avoid confrontation and negotiate possible agreements with the Taliban (Muzhdah 1382: 26-27). Contrarily, *Hizb-e Islami* saw the movement as an immediate challenge to its political authority and *Hizb-e Wahdat* viewed it with great deal of suspicion and distrust. As the movement began to advance towards Kabul, both parties deployed armed forces from Kabul in the southern Ghazni province to prevent its further expansion. The Taliban, supported by pro-Rabbani forces in the province, easily defeated the militias and forced them to flee towards Hazarajat and Kabul. Government planes supported the Taliban assault on Chaharasyab, the main stronghold of Hekmatyar in the southwest of the capital.[21]

Hizb-e Wahdat and the Taliban in its early days

The Hazaras were in a situation of fatigue and disarray when the Taliban rose as political player on the national landscape. Their strategy of building a non-Pashtun alliance had not worked. Once in Kabul, they found themselves fighting a Tajik-dominated government that – like the Pashtuns – refused to give them a meaningful share of power. The conflict wore down the military, financial and human resources of *Hizb-e Wahdat* and the party suffered a major split as a result of disagreement on whether or not to join the Rabbani government as a more workable alternative to the historically Pashtun-dominated state. The first contact

[20] Interviews with former mujahedin commanders, Ghazni and Kabul, 2007; Muradi, 2006: 156
[21] Personal interviews with former mujahedin commanders, Ghazni and Kabul, 2007 and Muradi p. 156

between the Hazaras and the Taliban occurred in Ghazni in October 1994. Mawlawi Ehsanullah Ehsan, a senior representative of the movement, held a detailed discussion with local leaders of *Hizb-e Wahdat* and *Harakat*. Here he stressed that they would refrain from any military encroachment into the Hazara territories and that in future they aimed to officially recognise the Shiite jurisprudence, distribute power based on the population figures of all ethnic communities and to grant autonomy to the Hazarajat. He impressed the Hazara delegates, who communicated his message to their senior leaders in Kabul. His messages echoed across the political spectrum of the Hazaras. As a result, the Taliban faced no considerable resistance by the Hazaras in the provinces. The *Hizb-e Wahdat* forces deployed from Kabul were rejected and attacked by the local Hazaras well ahead of the Taliban arrival. This was further strengthened by the obvious military supremacy of the Taliban. Most *Hizb-i Watan* leaders in Ghazni were convinced that an armed resistance would antagonise the Taliban and leave them in a situation of military confrontation and limited capacity to resist. After the Taliban captured the provincial capital, they removed all Hazara officials from their offices but did not attempt to disarm or persecute them.[22]

The Taliban and Hazara war and re-escalation of the sectarian divide

This optimistic view of the Taliban by the Rabbani government and many Hazara leaders changed as the Taliban displayed their highly ambitious plans, advancing towards the capital, Kabul. At this point *Hizb-e Wahdat* still controlled the western part of the capital, but was severely weakened as a result of conflict in Kabul. *Hizb-e Islami*, its ally in the conflict against the Rabbani government, had lost almost all of its territory, including strongholds in and around Kabul, to the Taliban. Desperate to readjust to the new political configurations, Abdul Ali Mazari entered into a negotiation process with the Taliban. On 15 March 1995, during a trip to the district of Chaharasiab, Mazari and nine other senior figures of *Hizb-e Wahdat* were killed by the Taliban. While the circumstances of the killings remain unknown, this sent shock waves through the entire community and revealed the Taliban attitude and future policy towards the Hazaras. The body of Mazari was carried on foot from Ghazni to Mazar-e Sharif where he was buried after a week of procession. His killing strongly contributed to the renewal of the Hazara historical sense of victimhood.

The success of the Taliban finally created the conditions for *Wahdat, Hezb-i Islami* and *Junbesh* to join the Rabbani government in a new alliance called *Jabhe Muttahed* (the United Front). Karim Khalili was selected to lead *Wahdat* in its stronghold of Bamyan, where the party was in the process of recovering after suffering a series of major blows by the Taliban and the Rabbani government. In preparation to fight against the Taliban, Karim Khalili reorganised the party and asserted its control over most of the region. He managed to take most of the territory controlled by Akbari's faction. His *Hizb-e Wahdat*, having the benefit of popular support of the Hazara who strongly distrusted the Pashtun Taliban, successfully fought back several Taliban incursions at southern and eastern fringes of the Hazarajat.

In retaliation, the Taliban imposed an economic sanction on the region by blocking all the entry routes around it. This devastated the fragile local economy which was traditionally dependent on remittances from the cities and foreign countries. Prices of basic food stuffs sky-rocketed in the local Hazara bazaars with multiple increases in comparison to areas outside the region. Many starving families started to eat wild vegetables in order to survive. In addition to its overwhelming economic impact, the embargo caused enormous

[22] Interview with Ustad Fekrat, January 2007

psychological pressure on the local communities.[23] The region and its population were totally cut off from Kabul, as well as from the south of the country that connected it to the outside world through Pakistan. It was only connected through rugged mountainous terrains to the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif, which was becoming the main anti-Taliban resistance headquarters and an important political and economic centre after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban (Rashid 2000: 67). Mazar was lost to the Taliban in 1998, after their first attempt to take it had failed due to a popular revolt where the main protagonists had been the Hazara community living in that city. Thousands of Taliban fighters were caught in the hostile streets of Mazar-e Sharif. Hundreds were killed while fleeing and hundreds of others captured and later suffocated to death inside containers. This was seen as a major blow to the Taliban and a dramatic victory for the Hazaras. Emboldened by the success of this revolt and the internal bickering within *Junbesh*, they took control of most of the city and surrounding areas, virtually establishing themselves as the major enemy of the Taliban in the north.

As a result, the Taliban leadership harboured an immense animosity towards the northern Hazaras whom they blamed for their defeat and high casualties. After less than a year, in August 1998, they were able to action this deep animosity. They swiftly moved towards Mazar –e Sharif after persuading Uzbek militia commanders to surrender through bribes and securing the cooperation of local Pashtun population. The Hazara troops, numbering two to three thousand, suddenly found themselves attacked from all directions. Their resistance was quickly crushed, most of them being killed in battles or after being captured. The Taliban army was now able to take out their full scale revenge. They waged a campaign of killing Hazara civilians which can best be described as an act of genocide at full ferocity. It is estimated that around five to six thousand civilians were massacred in two days and hundreds of Hazara women were raped or taken as sexual slaves by the victorious Taliban army officers. The Taliban clearly aimed to cleanse the north of its Hazara Shiite population. The killings were partly in response to the Taliban defeat and deaths of hundreds of their soldiers in May 1997 in Mazar, but there was also a strong sectarian component in the Taliban's thinking. Immediately after they captured the city, Mullah Manan Nayazi, the newly installed Taliban governor, condemned Shiites as infidels who should either convert to Sunni Islam or face death and forced removal from the country. [24]

The Taliban's final conquest of the north made it extremely difficult for *Hizb-e Wahdat* to continue resisting in the Hazarajat, a region now surrounded by the Taliban from all sides and cut from ground supply routes. In September 1998, Bamyan, the headquarters of the party fell into the hand of the Taliban. This development significantly diminished any hope of resistance by the Hazaras in other parts of the region. This development which triggered disintegration of the political and military structure of the party across the region remains a matter of great controversy. It is claimed that the Taliban with the assistance of the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence had persuaded some high level officials of the party to give up resistance in return for an offer of substantial cash. What has fuelled these speculations is the circumstance in which the city fell without any significant military resistance.[25] Beyond Bamyan, local resistance groups and populations were totally demoralised after enduring the

[23] For detailed analysis of the embargo see Iesha Singh (2001)

[24] For more on this please see The Massacre in Mazar-e Sharif, Afghanistan, November 1998, Human Rights Watch http://www.hrw.org/reports98/afghan/.

[25] Given the sensitivity of the issue, it is hard to verify these claims. During my interviews, a number of high ranking former *Wahdat* officials hinted that fall of the city was not a purely military development but declined to give further details. See Dari translation of this section of Rana's book *in Daily Afghanistan*, Issue 503, 19 May 2008. Available : http://www.dailyafghanistan.com/archive/1387-2-30/ma/maghalat/index.php.

devastating economic embargo for almost two years and the downfall of their headquarters forced them to seek peaceful ways of surrendering to the Taliban. As a result, the frontline resistance commanders in Ghazni, Wardak and Parwan negotiated a bloodless surrender to the Taliban.

1998-2001: Resistance or Collaboration?

The collapse of Bamyan in the hand of the Taliban marked the end of the Hazara resistance against the superior Taliban forces. *Hizb-e Wahdat*, their chief political and military organisation, disintegrated and most of its political and military cadres fled into the neighbouring countries. Some of its commanders who surrendered were removed from the region and placed under house arrest in Kabul.

The Hazara strategy towards the Taliban was constrained by internal rivalries and factional politics, resulting in a lack of coordination and even armed confrontation. Broadly speaking, those who decided to collaborate with the Taliban were mostly former members of *Pasdaran-e Jihad Islami* and *Harakat-e Islami* of the main Shiite anti-soviet organisations in the 1980s. *Pasdaran* had merged into *Hizb-e Wahdat* in 1989 and dominated the breakaway faction. The most notable was Mohammad Akbari, the former leader of *Pasdaran* and the breakaway faction of *Hizb-i Watan* after the split in the party in 1994. On the contrary, the resistance leaders were mainly from the rival *Nasr* organisation. Mazari and Khalili, who respectively led the main body of *Hizb-e Wahdat*, and Mohaqiq, who led the anti-Taliban battles in the north, were former members of *Nasr* in the 1980s. [26] While the Taliban were advancing towards the capital, the two factions of *Hizb-e Wahdat* were involved in conflicts over political leadership and territorial control. Akbari and his forces were receiving financial and military assistance from Massoud to maintain his control of the central province and prevent it from becoming the headquarter of a revitalised Wahdat under Khalili. On the other hand, Khalili concentrated all his efforts and forces to reclaim control of the province as a political and military centre of the Hazaras, a key aspect of his strategy to reassert his party's role in the politics of the country (Muradi 2006: 167).

Furthermore, Akbari was an ethnic Qizilbash and the ideology of his group was centred on Shiite Islamism as compared to the *Nasr*'s adoption of Hazara nationalism in the 1990s. Having lost control of most of the territory to Hazarajat in the battles with Khalili's forces, he was not regarded as an immediate threat by the Taliban and therefore he was not confronted by them militarily. Less than a month after the conquest of Bamyan, Akbari surrendered to the Taliban. To find an appropriate place within the Taliban structure, Akbari held talks with the moderate officials of the regime in Kabul. However, in a highly centralised system of leadership under Omar, the Kabul authorities were unable to negotiate on such important issues. Instead, Akbari and a large delegation of Hazara commanders were flown in to Kandahar to negotiate their demands with the Taliban leader. The negotiation was, however, not taken very seriously by the Taliban leadership. The delegation of Hazara commanders was in a weak and demoralised negotiating position, negotiating well after the Taliban had militarily pacified the region. Furthermore, those forming the delegation were of no significant political relevance. The fact that the Taliban leader held only a half an hour meeting with the delegation was telling: they members could only outline their demands without attracting much attention from Mullah Omar.[27]

[26] For more on the Shiite mujahedin organizations in the 1980s, please see Ibrahimi (2007).
[27] Interview with member of the delegation, Kabul, July 2005.

Deals negotiated with local Hazara commanders were not rare. Hussain Sangar Dost, a local commander of a breakaway faction of *Harakat* in Behsud, led by Sadiq Modabber and Dr. Shah Jahan in Ghazni, negotiated peaceful surrenders. Mohammad Ali Sadaqat in Daikundi and Arif Dawari in Shahristan, former commanders of *Pasdaran*, reached similar agreements.[28] However, none of these men held any official position in the Taliban military or administrative structure. The only Shiite official of the Taliban was Sayed Gardizi, a Shiite Sayed from Gardez in the southeast of the country. He was appointed as the district governor of Yakawlang. The Taliban relied on these local allies to maintain control, collect intelligence on opposition activities and identify weapons caches in the villages. They appointed Pashtun officials in the districts that controlled and supervised the local collaborators with a few dozen Taliban soldiers in each district.[29]

A climate of distrust and suspicion dominated the relationship of the Taliban with the collaborators which can also be attributed to the intolerance and exclusiveness of the Taliban leadership in the multi-ethnic country. This became a major weakness of the movement as they failed to win the confidence of other communities beyond their birth place in the south. For instance, Akbari was only recognised as a community elder by the Taliban after several rounds of negotiations. This was a symbolic recognition with no real authority. He was only allowed to maintain a small group of armed men for his own security and was in return expected to cooperate with the regime in securing control of the province. He was suspected by the Taliban leadership of pragmatically siding with the Taliban and of working in coordination with the Rabbani government to prevent *Hizb-i Watan*, his rivals, from taking control of Bamyan. According to the Taliban's interpretation, Masaud had assigned Akbari to cooperate the Taliban in order to prevent the Bamyan from becoming a resistance centre which would diminish Iranian support for the Rabbani government (Muzhdah 2004: 166). As a result, Akbari and other pro-Taliban commanders were mainly used as a source of intelligence against their local rivals. They proved to be instrumental in helping the Taliban carry out an effective disarmament process and preventing opposition activity.

The deal also allowed Akbari to maintain his influence over Panjab and Waras districts, his traditional strongholds. He successfully lobbied the Taliban officials at the Ministry of Defence in Kabul to temporarily halt the harassment of the populations of the two districts by the nomad militias of Na'iem Kochi. This redeemed him to the population that blamed him for providing his cooperation for no tangible benefits.[30] In early 2000, in a bid to gain the ultimate confidence of the Taliban in his loyalty, Akbari mobilised hundreds of militants to fight alongside the Taliban forces against the opposition in Parwan. This was to little avail.[31]

Hazara resistance was not totally suppressed in the region. In some areas commanders affiliated to the *Hizb-e Wahdat* under Karim Khalili carried on fighting Taliban troops. The two most notable areas of their activities were Balkhab and Dare-i suf districts that for the most part remained outside the Taliban control until 2001. Yakawlang district continued to be contested after its takeover by the Taliban in September 1998. In 1998 Khalili's forces even managed to repel the Taliban from the district and briefly took control of the provincial capital Bamyan. In January 2001, heavy fighting occurred for the control of Hazarajat between the Taliban and Wahdat. After the Taliban recaptured Yakowlang, they massacred

[28] Interviews with former mujahedin commanders, Bamyan, 2006.
[29] Personal interview with former Hezb-e Wahdat commanders and intellectuals, Bamyan, summer 2006 and Kabul and Ghazni 2007.
[30] Interview with aid worker, Bamyan, July 2006.
[31] Interview with Bamyan intellectual, Kabul, September 2007.

210 civilians. *Wahdat* recaptured Bamyan town on 13 February but quickly lost it in a Taliban counter-offensive. In March 2001, in what might have been punishment or an attempt to further instil fear into the Hazaras, the Taliban blew up the two ancient statues of Buddha in Bamyan. The destruction was ordered by Mullah Omar on religious grounds, to eliminate a remnant of Buddhist history. For the Hazaras it felt like more than a pure religious act. It deprived them of one of the world's most stunning sites of historical heritage that for centuries had attracted tourists and world attention into their region.

Conclusion

The Afghan civil war and the political anarchy that plagued the country in the 1990s exposed deep fault-lines at the heart of power politics and inter-ethnic relations within the country. After a century of efforts to consolidate state control and to unify or subjugate the country's multi-ethnic population, the state authority and its national institutions collapsed and the country returned to its status of the late 19th century. A conservative Islamic ideology was once again at the heart of a unification campaign by a largely Pashtun force.

The Taliban's military and ideological campaign against the Hazaras reveals historical trends and dynamics of state building processes in the country. Interestingly, the Taliban's military campaign against the Hazaras was in ways comparable to that of Amir Abdur Rahman's a century earlier. Hazaras and Pashtuns were at the same dangerous crossroads they had been at a century earlier. The mutual distrust and historical grievances, legacies of the Afghan Hazara war of the 19th century, deeply influenced the course and tactics of the new conflict. Both the Taliban and the Abdur Rahman launched a *jihad* against the Hazaras, denounced as infidels by Sunni clerics. Both mobilised a largely Pashtun force to fight political and economic wars against the Hazaras, which subsequently acquired strong sectarian dimensions. Hazarajat's claim for regional autonomy was seen as a threat to the central authority of the state. As Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, did, the Amir claimed the title Amir from a congregation of Sunni clerics, signifying the increase in power of the Sunni clerics in state affairs and as a source of legitimacy for political power. The notable difference in this comparison relates to the intention of the Hazara. The 19th century Hazara *mirs* totally rejected the authority of Kabul, whilst *Wahdat* sought only a greater role in the central government and restructuring of the Afghan state in a way that would reduce their fears of being subjected to further discrimination.

The role of Pashtun nomads in the forefront of the assaults on the Hazarajat further highlights the parallel. Concurrent to state collapse in the region in 1979, the nomads also lost this privileged status and were unable to enter into the region due the local hostilities that had been accumulated against them for decades. The local Hazara *mujahedin* organisations used the opportunity to reclaim the right to pasture lands and to reject the nomads' claim of ownership over the farms. High demographic pressure and the scarcity of cultivable lands also forced the local farmers to turn the pasture land into farms. For twenty years of war most Kuchis were unable to venture into the region to collect the arrears on the lease of their land. The Taliban war against the Hazaras provided them with another opportunity to return to the region. The nomads formed a large chunk of the Taliban forces in the Hazarajat, as they hoped that the conquest of the region would once again allow them to return and collect accumulated arrears. Na'iem Kochi, a Pashtun nomad now allied with the Taliban, organised hundreds of his tribesmen into the Taliban army that invaded Bamyan. Immediately after they took control of the region, Kochi and his followers attempted to force the local farmers in Panjab and other districts of Bamyan to pay their share of the harvests for the years of war. Convoys of nomads moved towards the region. For most of the Hazaras, the arrival of

Kochis under the auspices of the Taliban was a reminder of their troubled past and an ominous sign of a murky future. The nomads' claims over land in the region could spark another crisis resulting from scarce and invaluable resources such as land and water.[32]

A decree by Mullah Omar, apparently released by the Taliban intelligence department in Kandahar in spring 1997, reveals the ultimate goals of Taliban policy towards the Hazaras. The decree addressed Kuchi leaders, and describes the Hazaras as the religious and historical enemy of the Pashtuns. It urges them to mobilise under the leadership of Mullah Na'iem Kochi in a bid to reassert their historical role in the Hazarajat and to gradually force its inhabitants to evacuate their lands. It calls for strict military measures to disown Hazara tribes from their lands, a complete economic embargo on the region, the destruction of Mongolic historical remains and the initiation of an anti-Shiite propaganda campaign.[33] The order to destroy Mongolic historical remains and the stated intention to forcibly occupy Hazara lands either reveals that despite the Taliban's strong religious rhetoric there were also strong ethnic and economic components on their agenda, or that their plans were opportunistic. This decree, compared with Amir Abdur Rahman's fatwas and statements with regard to the Hazara, shows how both the Taliban and Abdur Rahman waged sectarian wars that mobilised tens of thousands of Pashtun tribal levies for ethnic and economic motives.

Neither Abdur Rahman nor the Taliban governments provided any political space for Hazara defectors and collaborators once the war ended and the region was brought under central government control. This demonstrates one of the major weaknesses of Afghan governments: the lack of capacity or political will to accommodate and include the opposition through a political settlement. Kabul has historically favoured military confrontation towards its opponents and has lacked the political will to move towards a more inclusive political order.

In sum, Afghan society repeatedly proved itself vulnerable to manipulation from above, and exploitation of its fragmentation and rivalries among local communities. Such manipulation has occurred at different levels, sometimes pitting one ethnic group against another and at other times splitting local communities of the same ethnic background. The emergence of political organisations in the second half of the twentieth century altered the pattern only to a limited extent, as such organisations suffered from the impact of social segmentation as often as they succeeded in bridging it.

[32] Extensive discussion was held on this point through personal interviews with former Hezb-e Wahdat leaders, Hazara intellectuals and aid workers in Bamyan, summer 2006.

[33] The document titled as Decree 11 of Mullah Omar, has been obtained by this author and appears to be a Taliban's internal memo.

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