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Tanks or Tractors: US' Military Missions or Multilateral Regional Support for ...
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... 8 Persian articles



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English Articles 1-110

Persian Articles 111-292



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In the beginning all people were one nation (Holy Qur'an, 2:213)
Throughout human history, peace has always been the 'primary state' and war the 'accidental state'. Peace is beautiful, compassionate and constructive, while war is fearsome, merciless and destructive. Unfortunately, despite this, war has been one of 20th century's most major problems, and has proved to be the symbol of the beginning of the 21st century. As portrayed by the contemporary history of international relations, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, war is not the solution, nor is it constructive or helpful in solving problems; rather, it causes problems and is the root of the continuation of violence, instability and insecurity.

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5. Realistic understanding of the realities of the world.
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Articles

فهرست

Tanks or Tractors: United States' Military Missions or Multilateral Regional Support for Economic Prosperity and Peace in Afghanistan?
Seyed G Safavi [9-24]

بررسی گزارش بازنگری وضعیت هسته ای آمریکا و اثر آن بر امنیت ملی جمهوری اسلامی ایران
حسین علایی {۱۴۲-۱۱۷}

European Union and Iran's Shared Mutual Interests in Afghanistan
Mohammad Moadab [25-44]

معناگرایی هنجاری و امنیت‌سازی منطقه‌ای در خلیج فارس
ابراهیم متقی {۱۴۳-۱۵۱}

Ethnic Gap and Political Stability in Afghanistan (2001 to the present)
Habibollah Fazeli [45-68]

مکانیسم سازماندهی صلح و تعادل منطقه‌ای در خلیج فارس
زهره پوستین‌چی {۱۷۶-۱۵۹}

The relationship between poverty and violence in Afghanistan
Nabiollah Ebrahimi [69-86]

نقش تنش‌زدایی متوازن در امنیت منطقه‌ای جمهوری اسلامی ایران
طاہرہ ترابی {۱۹۴-۱۷۷}

The Active Role of the Iranian Geo-strategy, The Persian Gulf as a ground for Hot Debate
Mahmoud Haidar [87-110]

دولت‌سازی در افغانستان
مهدی جوکار {۲۲۲-۱۹۵}

Persian Articles [111-292]

رویکرد ایالات متحده در قبال افغانستان در دوران ریاست جمهوری باراک اوباما
یاسر میری {۲۴۱-۲۲۳}

بررسی مقایسه ای رقابت های منطقه ای و تحولات افغانستان
مهدی محمودی {۲۷۰-۲۴۹}

تحولات افغانستان؛ پاکستان و هندوستان
جهان حیدری - مختار صالحی {۲۹۲-۲۷۱}

Ethnic Gap and Political Stability in Afghanistan (2001 to the present)

Habibollah Fazeli
International Peace Studies Centre

Abstract

Afghanistan, after separation from what was considered the guarded domains of greater Iran in 1856, has been experiencing a perpetual alteration of governments and turbulent political instability that has led to poverty and underdevelopment. This paper, using a sociological approach, emphasizes that the underlying reasons behind Afghanistan's political instability are weak governments, social gaps, including ethnic divides. This paper accepts the basic premise that the main prerequisite of political stability and national development is the presence of a strong and publicly perceptible government that engages in distribution of opportunities and strengthens national spirit, morale, and cohesion. Afghanistan's new constitution is an agreement and a national pact that brings about a good opportunity to strengthen stability and security. Undoubtedly, it is necessary that government formation be accompanied with establishment of a powerful army to counteract and weaken ethnocentric lordships as well as the authority of traditional substructures.

In Post-Taliban Afghanistan a significant portion of contribution of foreign forces as well as the neighboring countries has been directed towards this goal of creating lasting stability, strengthening the central government and above all the country's army. In addition to a critical survey of the above developments in Afghanistan, this paper will review and analyze some of the theories of Afghan thinkers regarding the selection of an alternative name for Afghanistan, as well as theories that propose possibility of a federal system of governance.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Ethnic Gap, Political Instability, Federalism, Tribalism

Introduction

Afghanistan over the past century has gone through much sociopolitical developments. To be more accurate, Afghanistan has really gone through and put behind immense political crises that the study of these developments is critical from various angles. Widespread economic poverty, illiteracy, low social awareness, tribal sovereignty and the rule of ancient tribal traditions, rarity and deficiency of health care etc..., are considered the most important markers of social analysis when it comes to Afghanistan. On the other hand, the role of foreign powers, being geographically enclosed by dry land, and intensity of sociopolitical divides the most important of which is religio-ethnic divides are the most critical factors of political analysis when it comes to studying Afghanistan. Of course the sum of the above factors finds meaning when looked upon under the shadows of the presence weak and unstable governments in modern history of Afghanistan.

This paper distinctly looks at the ethnicity factor and the impact of ethnic divides on political stability of Afghanistan after 2001. This paper adopts a futurologist outlook and assumes that the most important resolution for future development of Afghanistan is to strengthen the national government since its leadership prepares the development platforms of the country. This development in anticipation requires debilitation of the ethnic divides and the effective traditional authorities and substructures. Firstly, this paper attempts to briefly

discuss the concept of social and ethnic divide; consequently, this paper applies its conceptualization of socio-ethnic divide to Afghan society and analyzes possible likely options for the future of this country.

1. Reflections on Social Divides and Stability of Political Systems

How can one analyze the political developments and the category of political governance in a society? Why do different societies each have various features of political governance? What is political stability and how can a stable society be created? Can one assume and expect an ideal type of political stability or is political stability a pheromone and concept of objective concerns that can have different meanings depending on each time period and each society? What is the relationship between social divides and political stability?

One can only answer the above questions as well as hundreds of other important questions on the subject of political stability and social gaps within a political sociology framework and its respective divisions. Concisely speaking, one can only understand politics of each society and its political governance by analyzing diversity of groups with power and the corresponding social divides. This is because the government is not an independent or impartial institution that functions without any inclination to govern and manage public affairs. Every government is a product of the corresponding social fabric and it can only stand firm on a platform of its own vested interests as well as social interests; a government can only continue to exist when the minimum of the expected demands are fulfilled.

Influential groups and ethnic or religious representatives of various social divides attempt to take over the government and thereby exert their "social power." This social power is in actuality the perpetual influence and the possibility of influencing the government in order to gain "political power." This political power, in turn transposes to the power to enact disciplinary laws and regulations for all people in the entire nation. In fact, the symbol of political power is "criminalization."

It is after the process of criminalization that the government has the power to use different interpretations and designate some actions as deserving of reward and some other actions as deserving of punishment. Attractiveness associated with such a position of public authority arouses the desires of all groups, whether ethnic, religious and political for an effort to takeover this position of power. It is for this reason that the government is nothing but an institution built on social stratifications, built on the tangible and intangible lines of social divide. The more divided the societies, the less possible is the formation of social consensus on the basis of common aspirations; as such, an understanding of such consensus for everyone including the government becomes difficult.

If there is a conscious choice for social convergence, the more the social divides and conflicts, the more complex is the manner in which these diverse choices combine. Ultimately, more complex set of grouping and factions arise from these combining that might even employ divergent approaches in political governance and policy making. Accordingly, a society with less social divide is more likely to achieve political stability and incidences of power vacuum do not end in major crises.¹ European societies usually are not subject to social divides that might raise crises or they have dealt with such situations long before these societies entered the age of globalization and human rights, during a time that they still were living under the rule of absolutist states.

Political analysts group social divides according to their effectiveness into two groups of active and passive and according to quality of their occurrence into structural and historical, or accidental divides.²

Ethnic divides in Afghanistan are not accidental, arbitrary or artificial; they are rooted in the historical destiny and the historical developments of this country. As far as effectiveness is concerned, one has to say that social divides in Afghanistan are dynamic and active and with the support of the ethnic tribal lords these divides have become the most important determinant of the country's public policy and politics.³

Concept of tribalism and the role of ethnic lords appear in this paper because we need to emphasize that in our view, different ethnic groups in Afghanistan have not yet reached a full level of ethnic consciousness to make them an ethnic group or class with self-awareness, a class “in itself” as Marx would have said. This lack of class consciousness is of course a feature of all pre-modern societies in which ethnic elites are constantly trying to politically invest in widening of social divides to portray their own supporters as noticeably considerable in numbers. This is done so that these ethnocentric leaders might be able to have a worthier share of power within the networks of power relations. When one talks about the agency of various ethnic groups, ethnic divides, and its significance in Afghan society, one is undoubtedly referring to the tribalism of power thirsty ethnic elites and not the whole inhabitants of Afghanistan. The majority of Afghan people are not yet self-aware or conscious of an ethnic identitarian agency; they are yet to organize an ethnic struggle enforced by identity formation and identitarian hopes. For majority of Hazara people, Nooristanis, Tajiks, Pashtuns, etc..., the ethnic belongings of the health minister is of little significant, what are important priorities however, are the safety of their children, devastating poverty, infectious diseases, illiteracy, drought, etc....

Another premise of our analysis is that we accept that the quest for a mass group identity as a sociopolitical formation among the general populace is especially the characteristic of transitional times when societies are developing or have already become developed. The more the Afghan society becomes developed, the more likely it is for ethnic groups to demand public recognition of their identity; as such, in this transition the play on politics of identity will not merely be limited to the level of tribalism of ethnic elites.

If foreign forces cease finding pretexts to interfere in the domestic politics of Afghanistan, the current government of Afghanistan with the support and consensus of nationalist elites has the last historic chance to reduce the potential political power of ethnic lordships. Certainly, there are various ways that the government can achieve this goal.

Before further analyzing the Afghan society's ethnic divides, it is necessary to discuss briefly the developments of political history of Afghanistan from the point of view of transformations in management of the power of public and governance.

2. Afghanistan in the Mirror of Political History

Afghanistan like those countries which emerged from the heart of ancient empires, has inherited a very special ethnic and lingual diversity from its past history. In mid-nineteenth century British agitation and interference put pressure on Iran to give up Afghanistan from its greater territory and as such Afghanistan officially separated from Iran. Before this, Afghanistan was always an integral part of the guarded domain of Iran and the Iranian kings appointed its rulers. The Afghans attack against Iranian Safavid dynasty that ended up in siege of Safavid capital was virtually nothing but a revolt of an Iranian warrior and commander against the central government; keep in mind that revolts against the central powers are recurrent events in Iranian history.⁴ From the year 1856, in which Afghanistan was separated from Iran until 1970 several governors and rulers came to power and each of them engaged in seeking reforms subjecting this land and its people to various measures. The last of these rulers was king Mohammed Zahir Shah who was the last king of the Kingdom of Afghanistan. From 1979 to 1990 the country became an arena of a devastating war where on one side was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) alongside the pro-Soviet Afghan Communists and on the other side were rightwing Islamists or Mujahideen that mainly received financial and military support from United States. Some analysts believe that Afghanistan during these years was virtually an informal warzone for an armed encounter between U.S. and Soviet forces.

Soviet withdrawal in 1990 did not translate to a return of peace to Afghanistan. In no time after the Soviet troops left Afghanistan, the fragile political coalitions of ethnic and religious elite that were built on their own ethnic and religious divides turned into conflict and widespread civil wars and ultimately the Taliban forces took power and defeated the central government in Kabul in 1994.

The domination and authority of Taliban in Kabul and almost everywhere else in the country, with the exception of eight percent of the northern part, came with bloody wars. In north the Taliban were fighting United Front (the Northern Alliance) who were mostly Tajiks and in other fronts they were fighting Uzbeks and Hazaras. Finally in 2001 an extensive American military operation brought the rule of Taliban to an end and consequently the political sphere of the country became available for a new government that is the current government of Afghanistan.

From the point of view of ethnic diversity and the ethnic divide in Afghanistan one can say that there are over ten major ethnic groups and thousands of tribes and clans. However, there are only four major ethnic groups that are politically significant and play a determinant role in political equations. Pashtuns comprise about 40-38 percent of the country's population and usually consider themselves to be the rightful politically sovereign rulers. Pashtuns reside over vast areas of land in Afghanistan, speak Pashto and are Sunni Hanafis. The Pashtun ethnic group consists of many different tribes and clans who sometimes engage in very strong competitions together; Durranis and Barakzais are two of the main tribes of Pashtun and they are considered rivals.

The second major ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Tajiks and it is said that they comprise 25 percent of the population and in the political equations of the country the Tajiks are ethnic rivals of the Pashtuns. The majorities of Tajiks invest in business projects and live in the West and North regions of the country. The cities of Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat and Nimruz are major Tajik populated cities. Tajiks are Persian speakers, they are an ancient Iranian group and there are both Shiite and Sunni Muslims with Sunnis being a majority among them. In the past century, in order to seize political power, Tajiks have on occasions engaged in serious wars with the Pashtuns the most significant of which was Habibullah's uprising against Amanullah Khan Pashto in 1929 which was suppressed.⁵ If one considers Gulbuddin Hekmatyar the most famous leader of the Pashtuns in past decade wars, the late

Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Northern Alliance people are the Tajik leaders.

Hazaras are the third major Afghan ethnic groups that comprise 19 percent of Afghanistan's population, according to a number of statistics. Hazaras are Persian speaking people, Shiite Muslims, and have been residents of central Afghanistan. Close linguocultural ties sometimes bring Tajiks and Hazaras together establishing coalitions. Hazara people by and large consider themselves to be a minority group, deprived of their fair share of politics and oppressed by other majority groups. However, Hazaras usually consider and evaluate their rightful share of public politics to be greater than its actuality. Linguo-religious differences with the Pashtuns have been noted as significant reason for hostile oppositional politics of Pashtun elites towards Hazaras. The Shiite Hazara massacre in the time of Amir Abdul Rehman (1880-1901) is one noted example in Afghanistan's history that is most famous and persists in historical memory. In the political developments of the past two decades, besides other ethnic groups Hazaras have also played a political role by forming partisan parties like Victory Organization for Afghanistan (Sazman-e Nasr-e Afghanistan) and Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan (Hizb-e Wahdat-e Melli-ye Islami-ye Afghanistan). Abdul Ali Mazari (1946-1995) who was killed by the Taliban was a founding member of Islamic Unity Party and he is now become a spiritual leader, a symbol of Hazara oppression, and referred to as martyr: Shahid Mazari.

Afghan Uzbeks are the fourth major ethnic group and they comprise about 6 percent of the population. They are Turkish people who speak Turkish and their famous leader is Abdul Rashid Dostum (b.1954) who has been supported by Turkey as well. Uzbeks cannot have a serious influence on the political equations of Afghanistan independently and so they have no choice but to accompany in coalitions with other ethnic groups. Uzbeks in recent political developments of the country under the leaderships of general Dostum fought along Islamic Mujahideen movement against the communist regime. Uzbeks are known for their significant military capabilities.

There are other ethnic groups in Afghanistan including Nuristanis, Baluchs Turkmens, and Hindus etc..., and they are considered among the less politically influential groups that are currently present. Each of the ethnic groups has assemblies called Jirga which function as councils and administrative/political forums. Central governments in Afghanistan have a strong, extensive, and organic connection with all Jirgas as well as the grand Jirga called Loya Jirga (Pashto term). One might even say that the central government is a continuation of these organic associations between itself, Jirgas and the Loya Jirga. In the rest of this paper we will discuss one of the most important characteristics of the politics of Afghanistan which is the lack of a legitimate government and its potential role in the transformation of this country.

3. Lack of a Legitimate Government and the Tradition of Political Instability

Overall one can say that sources of legitimacy for Afghan society are defined with three key traditional concepts:

- 1 - ethnicity and ethnic origins of ruling elite
- 2 - religion
- 3 - Loya Jirga.⁶

As this paper previously discussed the prevalence of active structural divides in Afghan society and the consolidation of ethnic and religious divides together have put the country through political instability and insecurity. It seems that until Afghanistan is divided on the basis of religion and ethnicity the country's political insecurity remains integral and Afghans will not experience political stability.

There have been different interpretations of political stability; this paper's take is that political stability comes with acceptance of the legitimacy of political sovereignty and transformation of political hostility and rivalry to civil campaigns within the formwork of a national government in which all people regardless of religion and ethnicity are accepted as equal citizens.⁷ With this paper's definition, so

far Afghanistan has not been experiencing an ideal form or even the possibility of political stability. This is because in Afghanistan political actors and the political elite either assume themselves to be representatives of what they consider the superior race and ethnicity (the Pashtuns) or they perceive themselves to be custodian of a transcendental society and defenders of a very particular religious truth and as such worthy of being the leaders of the society (the Taliban). In fact, the interests of ethnic elites from various ethnic groups in Afghanistan are not merely limited to commercial exchanges; the ethnic elites have public and political interests including claims to the integrity and sovereignty of the governing body and claims to the identity of Afghan society.

The current government of Afghanistan that came to power after the U.S. intervention in 2001 is interested in security of society and orients towards achieving political stability. The new government tries to rely on the new constitution and declare itself as a supra-ethnic (beyond ethnocentrism) authority and a national government. However, this exposition and declaration has not been all effective. This strategy has proved to be working inadequately at least in Hmid Karzai's government that has no choice but to attend to the traditional ethnic and tribal frameworks. In post-Taliban period, the Pashtuns have had greater share of politics compared to other ethnic groups. Pashtun currently dominate even in the arena of designating and defining a linguistic identity for Afghanistan which has always been Persian. Karzai had no choice but cooperate with some Pashtun groups when it came to choosing the official language of the country. These groups advocated a dual identity Persian-Pashto official language and ultimately they hope to advocate an only Pashto official linguistic identity for Afghanistan. An evident example of this strategy is the policy to create "national terms" which a Russian linguist initially proposed to the former king of Afghanistan Mohammed Daoud Khan (1909-1978). This linguistic project proposed that every new word be a combination of two Persian and Pashto languages and that many important names of cities and villages be changed to Pashto.⁸

The important thing here is that one should not compare and compeer Hamid Karzai's power and influence with other "third world" governments. It seems that Karzai's government does not secure features of a "modern and powerful government" namely attaining a distinguished administrative and political authority in a particular land. So far, Karzai's government even needs relying on foreign powers to keep his own government's power. Certainly, if foreign powers choose to leave Afghanistan before formation of a powerful national army and before desirable weakening of Taliban, the current Afghan political system will collapse. The idea of the current political system and its coveted goals were cultivated and germinated in another land to be later on transplanted for further growth in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still not ready to support this transplanted political system, this new national government. Power thirsty ethnocentric lordships are still much strong to easily put aside their political claims.

The presidential election of 2010 was a good opportunity to examine the political stability of Afghan society as candidates competed for presidency. The rest of this paper attempts to look at this presidential election from an ethnic angle and will analyze the corresponding ethnic circumstances.

4. Presidential Elections in the Context of Ethnic Developments

Election is the most important mechanism of circulation of social and political elites and a symbol of political stability and civil culture's maturity. In an electoral system citizens' votes and ballots decide the ruling group and their plans for a specified period of time instead of bullets and military powers determining such process. In Afghanistan ethnicity, religion and to some extent fame and social reputation have been determining factor for election of candidates. Usually, agreements between ethnic leaders are considered fundamental political interactions in selection of political leaders. However, the influences of tribal councils and traditional ethnic elites in the recent 2010 presidential election have decreased slightly when compared to previous elections. Nevertheless, the present conditions of Afghanistan

make it impossible for non-Pashtun ethnic groups to be selected for political leadership.

The power transition to other ethnic groups or representatives of non-Pashtun origins is an exceptional circumstance and depends on conditions like the personal charisma of such possible candidate coming from other ethnicities, the trust invested in such candidate by Afghan society in general, and the number of Pashtun candidates competing with the non-Pashtun candidate in the elections. The above conditions did happen to some extent in the most recent presidential election.⁹

In the circumstances of the 2009 Afghan parliamentary elections the main competition was between Hamid Karzai of Pashtun origins and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah of Tajik origins. The two candidates each attempted various ethnocentric strategies to choose their deputies from other minorities to gain majority status in the ballot counts. Hazaras and Uzbeks, in the election, virtually played the role of the balancing weight in the scale of power where their tendencies to each side of the scale increased the probability of election of a Tajik or a Pashtun president.¹⁰

As we mentioned earlier in the analysis of political developments in Afghanistan one should make a clear distinction among people belonging to a particular ethnic group and the ethnocentric elites. Various ethnic groups have lived together in Afghanistan for centuries; the majority of Afghan people have harmonious mutual relations in this multiethnic society. What is happening these days in Afghanistan, however, is the utilitarian abuse of linguocultural differences by the ethnocentric elites in order to use various belongings in their personal favor to seize political power. In 2009 elections, the power driven ethnic leaders' utilitarian abuse of ethnocentrism became apparent to a detestable degree that some voters responded against ethnocentric expectations. For example not all Tajiks voted for Dr. Abdullah Abdullah as their president, Pashtuns from the Northern regions of Afghanistan selected candidates other than President Hamid Karzai in

some ballot boxes, and Dr. Abdullah obtained many votes among Hazaras, Nuristanis and other ethnic minorities.¹¹

In the 2009 election there were ten Pashtun candidates who participated and this is indicative of the power driven interethnic competitions among Pashtun leaders. The Pashtun candidates adopted political stances against Hamid Karzai of the same origins, this attests to a lack of ethnocentric convergence of view points, slow break down of the tribal council systems, and the lessening of opportunism of ethnic leaders in Afghan society.¹² The 2004 constitution of Afghanistan recognized ethnic pluralism and permitted participation of all ethnic groups and their right to maintain their ethnic identity in the political arena and the elections, only if such activism is compatible with Islam and only if they avoid ethnocentric propaganda and racist tendencies. Certainly if the government did not have the support and presence of foreign forces, it could not have held the election in much of the country. The power driven opposition ethnic lords, authoritarian warlords, remnants of Taliban, and various militia groups of insurgents were among those protesting and opposing the processes of election by all means.

5. Party-System Politics, Ethnic Parties and Political Stability

Presence of political parties and party-system politics are considered indicators of stable societies. Political parties are some of the most important organizations of civil societies as they act as an interface between citizens and the raw and naked state power. Presence of actual “real” political parties with organizational commitments is a signs that the socio-political elites have accepted to pursue and follow even their military conflicts through political and civil institutions. Obviously, presence of multiparty systems, plurality of political parties, or even the party-system in itself does not render political stability and democracy. One of the main features to be looked upon to anticipate if political parties present in a system are capable of bringing political stability, is the overall national political orientations of such party-system. Undoubtedly, if the numbers of political parties that favor

personal and ethnocentric interests over the public interest are substantial, this is indicative of the instability and lack of sociopolitical integrity of such party-system.

Presence of active and dense social divides in Afghan society reinforces formation of various political parties around these divides to an extent that currently there are 105 registered political parties in this country that have received official certificates.¹³ Many of these political parties are openly advocating ethnocentric stances. Some of these parties although appear to be supra-ethnic and working beyond the ethnocentric norms, in actuality they do obey such norms and practice ethnocentrism. The history of formation of political parties in Afghanistan goes back to the reform policies of Mohammad Zahir Shah in the 1940's onward. The first coherent organized political party was a Pashtun nationalist party known as the Afghan Mellat. Gradually, from early 1980 onwards parties like People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Islamic Party of Afghanistan (Jamiat-e Islami) also emerged in the political scene.¹⁴

Soviet influence and the emergence of Marxist ideas in Afghanistan gave rise to Marxist parties with prominent leaders such as Nur Muhammad Taraki (1917-1979) of PDPA, Hafizullah Amin (1929 - 1979), and Khalq-Parcham Marxist party with the leadership of Babrak Karmal (1929-1996). The dominant ideology of these groups was a sort of an ambiguous Marxist-Leninism. Rightwing Islamist political parties were also present and they were essentially ethnocentric in practice and were influenced by other Islamists movements like the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Akwan). Prominent leaders of the Islamist parties were Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (b.1947), Burhanuddin Rabbani (b.1940) and Ahmad Shah Massoud (1953-2001). The leaders of Shiite political parties were mostly educated in Iran and influenced by politics of Iran, the most significant example of these Shiite leaders is Abdul Ali Mazari (1946-1995).¹⁵

Formation of political parties around ethnocentric tendencies and with emphasis on elements of race and ethnicity is often a resultant of attempts by ethnic lords or ethnic elites to find room for their own political agendas in the party-system. For example, the Afghan Mellat

Party is grounded primarily on ethnic supremacy and racial superiority of the Pashtuns. Mellat Party's secularism and avoidance of religious ideology is more of an emphasis on the nationalist identity of the party and marginalization of religion comes out in a process of idealization of nationalist dispositions. Mellat Party tries to advocate superiority and supremacy of the Pashtun ethnic group in all its political positions and as such has gained a powerful place today.

Al-Nasr (literary victory) is another ethnocentric organization that tries to advocate and protect the rights of Hazara minority group and relies on ethnic supporters of the party to be active in the political sphere. Al-Nasr changed its name to The Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan (Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan) in 1989 (1368 Solar Hejri). Islamic Unity Party is more theocentric and puts more emphasis on religion compared to Mellat Party; it is also less ethnocentric compared to Mellat Party of Pashtun origins. Islamic Society of Afghanistan (Jamiat-e Islami) is another Islamic political party formed around advocacy for Islamism and theocentrism which identifies with the revolutionary Islamic ideals of Muslim Brotherhood. Jamiat-e Islami considers itself to be supporter and advocate of the interests of Tajik ethnic groups. Ethnocentric tendencies often dominate in political parties of Afghanistan and are also apparent in other political parties.¹⁶

Afghan society is very cynical towards political parties and they are generally distrustful of party politics and partisan activities. Afghans have not benefitted from political parties, as all these parties have brought upon the people in contemporary times is more agitation, social divides, ethnic stratification, and prolonged wars. The general Afghan public's perception of a "political party" is a group that follows and advocates its own interest and is after utilitarian abuse of the general public in order to attain the group's interests. This mistrust of the partisan politics of Afghan parties and the general mistrust of the party-system is one reason that limits outreach and influence of these organizations beyond their offices.

Since 2004, some small non-Pashtun political parties showed tendencies and inclination to form political coalitions and alliances in order to prevent dominations of Pashtuns and Pashtunization of the national Government. The National Democratic Front, a coalition of thirteen political parties, Jabahai Tafahim Millie or National Understanding Front was an alliances of eleven distinct parties, and Payman-e Kabul (Kabul Pact) formed with an alliance of a number of leftist parties.¹⁷ Social condition of Afghanistan is still not prepared for the formation of national supra-ethnic parties that are willing to move beyond ethnocentric stances and act towards assigning Afghan public's interest as a preferred priority. Powerful ethnocentric leaders not only apprehend and deny such supra-ethnic understanding of partisan politics, but they actively oppose such measures as they find supra-ethnic inclinations against their immediate interests and ideals. On the other hand the general public in Afghanistan does not trust partisan politics and the processes associated with politics of parties; a mistrust that is rooted in the bloody contemporary developments of this country.

So far, this paper attempted to give an overall picture of the condition of social divides with emphasis on the ethnic divides in Afghanistan. This paper showed that these ethnic divides have lead to political instability and crisis that is evident to everyone. The rest of this paper discusses the important solutions that the intellectual and scientific communities have proposed to build political stability and assist with Afghanistan's development.

6. Problematics and Solutions

One of the characteristics of the Afghan academia and postsecondary education is that research and teaching curriculums are less focused on domestic indigenous issues and the developments in the country. Especially, the academic studies of humanities are less serious about studying Afghanistan's domestic issues and knowledge production in this field does not go beyond a series of moral recommendations for establishing a desirable society. Most of our analysis in this section is based on our research on the writing of Afghans on the Internet and

dialogues and interviews with Afghan intellectual community as well as Afghan students. These groups of people each have tried to criticize the status quo in Afghanistan and in some cases have proposed guidelines and solutions in their websites or weblogs. For the purposes of this paper we have tried to focus on solutions and guidelines that are more prominent in the totality of articles, interviews, or talks that we have critically looked upon.

One of the points that we must emphasize is that the common conventional patterns and theoretical frameworks in sociology are insufficient for analysis of Afghan society.¹⁸ However, this does not mean that social strategies and patterns experienced by other countries is of no use; lived experiences of some “third world” countries as well as European societies is certainly applicable to Afghan society. These pattern, frameworks, and experiences can be applied and implemented with some modification and optimizations according to specific conditions in Afghanistan.

If we consider societies that are going through developmental transitions as a category including a range of countries, undoubtedly Afghanistan’s transition is belated and has had an uncertain commencement. Afghanistan currently does not bear all the essential intermediary conditions needed for this transition towards development and the formation of a national government. Essential conditions and tools such a powerful army, national bureaucracy, common cultural products, mutual cultural mythology and themes for a national consensus, strong supra-ethnic political parties etc..., are all considered necessary for this transitional period and the current government is lacking them. Afghanistan tired from war and conflict, unlike many societies in similar conditions such as South Africa, India, and Iran lacks a charismatic leader that can unite nation together or build some form of national unanimity. India’s Gandhi, South Africa’s Mandela and Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, with the dignity of charisma, were all able to converge in unity people of their diverse society for national causes and consensus. It seems that the strength of various social and ethnic divides and the everlasting conflicts among multitudes

of ethnocentric leaders prevent the emergence of a charismatic leader even among religious leaders in Afghanistan. The emergence of such a charismatic figure abided by all who seeks national reconciliation, equality, and social unity can be beneficial to the divided and stratified Afghan society. In general Afghanistan has a severe disadvantage when it comes to publically trusted and respected figures.¹⁹

6.1. Renaming Afghanistan

Today, critics of ethnic identitarian politics and nationalists blame the ethnic fundamentalism, monopolization of ethnicity, and ethnocentric politics of the Pashtuns for the ethnic divide, instability, and constant chaos and conflict in this country. These critics propose promotion of social equality, advocate an Afghan society for its entire citizens as appose to ethnic stratification, and a restoration of a national identity which is representative of the “real” identity of Afghanistan. The term Pashtun in the domestic linguistic context specifically denotes “those living in the country called Afghanistan” and as such different ethnic groups in Afghanistan consider the term Afghan as equivalent to the term Pashtun. Essentially, inland culture only calls people from Pashtun origins, Afghans. Therefore, the name of the country Afghanistan is considered by non-Pashtun ethnic groups as term describing the belonging of Pashtuns to this land, exclusively. This notion of the name of the country being associates with only one ethnic group’s sense of belonging is the point of departure for many Afghans thinkers. These critics argue that if all Tajiks, Hazaras, Hindus, Uzbeks and Pashtuns, and other ethnic groups were to live in this land with a sense of belonging, there should first be attempts to restore the original name of “this land” and changing the name “Afghanistan” to its ancient historical name Ariana or Khorasan. This argument works on the premise that the term “Afghanistan” ignores the belongings of non-Pashtun ethnic identities that are citizens of this land.²⁰ Critics argue that the renaming of Afghanistan that occurred in 19th century and changed the ancient historical name of the land of Khorasan to the current name was a British colonial scheme to thereby agitate internal conflicts and chaos. This group also proposes that the secret to eternal

peace and restoration of belonging and dependence of all citizens to this land is to change the name to its original name, Khorasan, if necessary even through a referendum.

Pashtuns and Pashtun descent thinkers however, argue that the name Afghanistan has a history of thousands of years and claim that pro name-change groups and their thoughts are under the influence of Iranians, the Russians, and the British, that is the “enemies” of the Pashtun people. Ethnocentric Pashtuns make a political distinction between Dari, the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan with that of Persian spoken in Iran (Farsi) and Tajik’s Persian spoken both in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Pashtuns deny the linguistic groupings of all these Iranian language within the Indo-Iranian branch. This political distinction occurs in an attempt to assimilate Persian speakers of Afghanistan within the dominant Pashtun fabric and to deny the relatedness of this group to Iran and Iranian languages. This assimilation attempts happens even to an extent that Pashtuns consider the popular use of common Iranian terms and use of the words spoken in Iran a betrayal of Dari and Afghans. Debates on this conflict of “word choice” and “using Iranian terms” are a very dynamic in Afghanistan’s media today.²¹ The “national reforms” that we mentioned earlier promotes the usage of Pashto in official and bureaucratic correspondences as an effort to establish dominance of the cultural and linguistic identity of Pashtuns. Karzai’s government and Karzai, himself, try to not comment on this Pashtunization and have adopted a politics of silence whereby they do not publically announce any particular position on this linguistic domination.

6.2. Ethnocentric Federalism and Political Stability

Afghan thinkers to end the political instability while keeping the ethnic diversity of this land and respecting identities of all ethnic groups, propose a form of an ethnocentric federalism rather than the current centralist political system that is based on ethnic and linguistic divides. Advocates of ethnocentric federalism argue that this strategy not only will bring political stability but it will also work against the

Taliban and domination of Pashtun nationalist and supremacist sentiments of those seeking exclusive power.

Hazaras, Turkmens and Uzbeks are among ethnic groups that support this strategy and it seems that the ethnocentric leaders of these groups who have not yet achieved their expected share of political power believe that federalism is the best way to reach their destination goal. The late Abdolali Mazari of Hazara origin was the first political leader to propose this federalist approach. However, Hazaras do not support claims for federalism currently. The latest political statements of Hazaras emphasize that they support national unity and equality of all ethnic groups within Afghanistan's constitutional framework.²² General Dostum is another ethnic leader who in recent years has stressed and supported the proposition of Afghanistan becoming a federal state.²³

Those who endorse federalism argue that the world is moving towards globalization and democracy and that Afghanistan needs to become democratic in order to join the global arena which is only possible by way of federalism. Furthermore, the proponents of federal systems argue that it is only by this way that the political stability of Afghanistan, recognition of various ethnic identities, and economical progress of the country is achievable all in one. The experiences of federal systems in India, Belgium, and Switzerland represent a good model in this area. Pashtuns are one ethnic group who mostly oppose this proposed project of federalism and argue that there are disguised foreign hands behind this project and it is an attempt for disintegration of Afghanistan.

6.3. The Struggle for an Optimum Model: Strengthening of the Government

Social divides, the great number of key power players has resulted in a divided powerful social fabric and a weak government which is the first cause of the present and future problems of Afghanistan. Renaming the country might be a desired progressive action; however, it is not a permanent remedy to the country's political instability. Federalism could also lead to strong social divides by way of which the country

might possibly face disintegration. Undoubtedly, only the sort of federalism might be successful in Afghanistan that is advocated and supported from a position of power so far as its objective requirements and cultural context is ready to accept this political system. Federalism in Afghanistan leads to lawlessness, chaos, weakening of the current Afghan government, and disintegration of the country which will be accompanied by civil war.

In this paper we argue that one needs to make a clear distinction between ethnic people, regular citizens whose priority is to claim their basic rights and the power seeking ethnic lords who are always keeping the ethno-supremacist political consciousness alive and dynamic. Counteracting the authority of the ethnocentric lords and traditional substructures is the first effort to strengthen the national government and this in itself requires the formation and strengthening of an extensive and powerful army. Currently, establishment of a powerful military whose members are selected from the diversity of the strata of society, especially those in the margins who are non-partisan affiliates of various groups, is an undeniable necessity and prerequisite of all other developments in Afghanistan. In other words, the stronger the national government becomes the less is the power of various social strata within the greater country and this seems to be the only feasible direction for the transition of Afghanistan towards development. It seems all various groups and individuals with power in “third world” countries prefer polarizations. The more the government supports a strong army, the more forceful can government policies be implemented and this translates to greater legitimacy for the national government weakening the legitimacy of traditional substructures and norms. Considering the cultural fabrics of Afghanistan, I believe that the government has an opportunity to strengthen religion and religious authorities which can in turn sometimes be transformed into an ideology that can overshadow the problematic of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan. Afghan society is religious to its core and using religion as a common ground can assist with unifying this society. In addition, emphasis on religion ultimately counteracts both ethnocentrism of politics and the racial supremacist tendencies.

Strengthening public education of the Persian language is another strategy that actually can lead to stability in this country since thereby one can strengthen the collective identity of Afghanistan. Pashtuns and Uzbeks and other non-Persian ethnic groups can easily speak Persian and this is a very valuable opportunity and a desirable instrument for unifying Afghan society that can be taken advantage of. The Afghan government should establish good relations with states like Iran, Pakistan and the United States and convince them to replace unofficial negotiations with ethnic leaders with direct political talks with the national Afghan government instead. And finally, the Afghan government does not have high revenue sources to end poppy cultivation and therefore, it would be a good strategy to accept eradication of opium cultivation and the narcotics business on the condition that the western states invest in Afghanistan or provide substantial amounts of funds to that country.

Conclusion

Every state is built on a system of interests and social divides and the political system of Afghanistan is not an exception to this rule. The Afghan government in actuality is in an organic relation with the ethnic and religious divides and it is an extension of social formations around these divides. This paper makes a distinction between the ethnocentric leaders and the public ethnic consciousnesses. This distinction is significant because it is the ethnocentric lords that invest in and agitate ethnic divides and shape public ethnic identities and consciousnesses in antagonism with other ethnic groups. However, ancient Afghan society still possesses strong awareness and strong belief in religious faith and people from various ethnic groups in the nation do not consider other ethnicities as enemies. Of course, the same principle does not hold when it comes to real politics and among competing leaders those with ethnocentric preferences advance. This paper showed that the social diversity and quality and quantity of structural divides in Afghan society lead to creation of a powerful stratified society and a weak state. This is despite the fact that development of Afghanistan needs this relationship of state and society to be reversed. Strengthening an extensive military, weakening of ethnocentric leaders and warlords,

creating a pervasive bureaucracy and finally utilizing foreign investment and funds are our proposed solutions to be considered in this paper. The final result of all these proposed solutions is the ultimate goal of creating relative political stability and public security in Afghanistan.

Endnotes

¹ Hossein Bashiriyeh, *Political Sociology: The Role of Social Forces in Political Life* (Tehran: Ney Publishers, 1995), 41-50.

² *ibid*, 95.

³ For further analysis on this see Mary Louise Clifford, *The Land and People of Afghanistan*, Trans. Morteza Asa'di (Tehran: Elmi-Farhangi, 1989).

⁴ Habiballah Fazeli, "A Critique of the Principles of National Identity," *The National Studies Magazine (Majala-e Motalea't-e Melli)* 39 (2009): 131-120.

⁵ Bashiriyeh, 287.

⁶ For further analysis of this see Abdolqayum Sajjadi, *Political Sociology of Afghanistan: Ethnicity, Religion, and State* (Qum: Bustan-e Ketab, 2001/1388 Solar Hejri), 120-126.

⁷ For more debates on political stability with particular emphasis on Afghan society see Ahmad Qassem Shayaq, *Afghanistan's Political Stability: A Dream Unrealized* (London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009).

⁸ For further reading see Kawa Gharji, *The Jirgas that Bring War*, 14 October 2010, kawagharji.wordpress.com/2010/06/10/%D8%AC%D8%B1%DA%AF%D9%87-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF/

⁹ For further analysis see: www.dw_world.de/dw/Article/584..html and: www.hazarapeople.com/fa/?p=1067

¹⁰ Barnett R. Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (2007): 65.

¹¹ Alireza Ghaznavi, "The Role of Hazaras in the 2009 Afghan Parliamentary Elections (Naqsh-e Hazara-e ha dar Entekhabat-e 88 Afghanistan)," *Hazara Network*, 14 October 2010 www.hazaranetwork.com/forum/topics/578942 (August 19, 2009).

¹² For various reasons, among the several Pashtun candidates none of them became a serious rival of Hamid Karzai. In the above proposition when this paper talks about "lack of ethnocentric convergence" it is really speaking of "the expected convergence" among the ethnic elites and ethnic lords of Pashtun tribes or other ethnic groups in Afghan society. This paper is not arguing that tribal and ethnic belongings have diminished in Afghanistan.

¹³ See: www.afghansami.com/ausgabe5/mir20%0HusainImelat_thm.2009/11/5

¹⁴ Nikki Keddie and Norris Pippa, *Political Sociology and Social Divides*, Trans. Parviz Dalirpour and Alireza Samie Isfahani, (Tehrn: Ney Publishers), 149.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 154.

¹⁶ See: www.Afghanasamai.com/Afghanasamai20%/mir/Article/htm

¹⁷ Nikki kiddie and Norris Pippa, 161.

¹⁸ For further analysis of the various sociological patterns as they apply to Afghan society see Abdolqayum Sajjadi, *Political Sociology of Afghanistan: Ethnicity, Religion, and State* (Qum: Bustan-e Ketab, 2001/1388 Solar Hejri).

¹⁹ For more analysis on this lack of a charismatic figure see Abbas Pouya's article: www.Afghanasamai.com/mir/Article/htm

²⁰ For more on this proposal of name-change for Afghanistan, see Kamjo Basir's article:
archive.khawaran.com/kamjoBasir_TaghirNameAfghanistan.htm

²¹ For more analysis on Pashtun intellectuals' stance on this proposal for renaming Afghanistan see Zackary Yousefzi's article "The Historical Name of Afghanistan in the Span of History:"
www.ariananet.com/name/Artikle/op=6340 Or:

afghanistanhistory.net/home/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=3

²² For a glance at the position of Hazara intellectual in diaspora regarding federalism, see this political statement of Hazara residents of Germany:

www.babamazari.com/index.php?underside=commemorate/12th_Anniversary_monchine.htm

²³ See: kawagharji.wordpress.com/p557600/htm

مجله بین المللی مطالعات صلح و امنیت

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