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By Arturo G. Munoz



About Tribal Analysis Center

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## Afghan Tribalism

The analysis of tribalism in Afghanistan, and the accompanying debate on the best ways to deal with Afghan tribes, is complicated by the lack of a standard definition of “tribe.”<sup>1</sup> This lack of precision in social science is reflected in certain confusion in the growing body of literature on Afghanistan, much of it written by people with first hand experience. Some declare that Afghanistan’s tribal system is dead, while others argue it is the only thing that matters.

At its most basic, a tribe is a form of social organization based on kinship and locality. Tribesmen usually consider themselves descendants of a common ancestor, but not always. Sometimes, living in the same locality is more important than descent. Often the debate on tribalism does not take into account the interplay of identity, social structure and culture. An individual or a community may have a tribal identity, but not live within a corresponding tribal structure or adhere to norms of tribal culture. For example, in the U.S. there are many Americans who identify themselves as Cherokee, or part-Cherokee, but have no experience with Cherokee tribal structure or culture.

Likewise, in Afghan cities, and in refugee camps, there are individuals with a strong sense of Pashtun identity, but little else related to a traditional Pashtun way of life. This raises the issue of cultural change. Tribal cultures are not static. They evolve over time, adapting to new conditions. Thus, a contemporary Pashtun may not behave the same way his grandfather would have in similar situations. This phenomenon has given rise to the term neo-Pashtun. There are important ramifications of these distinctions for counterterrorism and counterinsurgency: for example, neo-Pashtuns are willing to become suicide bombers, whereas traditionalists are not, viewing suicide both as being un-Islamic and against the Pashtun martial ethic of saying alive to fight another day.

For some analysts, tribes have largely ceased to exist or been irrevocably weakened. In *Anthropology Today*, Roberto Gonzalez notes that “Recent interest in Afghanistan’s ‘tribes’ appears to stem from an increasingly desperate political situation,” he argues. “Few anthropologists today would consider using the term ‘tribe’ as an analytical category or even as a concept for practical application.”<sup>2</sup> A U.S. army assessment concluded that “a singular focus on ‘tribe’ as the central organizational principle of Afghan society implies a need to identify leaders, institutions, and relationships that may not exist.”<sup>3</sup> This argument assumes that too much emphasis has been placed on tribes and tribal engagement in Afghanistan. A manifestation of this controversy can be seen in the reaction to Jim Gant’s article “*One Tribe at a Time*,” describing how he formed local tribal alliances against

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1. This paper was written for the 24-26 March 2010 University of South Florida “Symposium on Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Challenges and Opportunities of Governance and the Role of Regional Actors.”

2. Alberto Gonzalez, “Going Tribal – Notes on Pacification in the 21st Century,” *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 25, No.2, April 2009, pp.15-19; see also Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, *Working Paper No. 7 “Tribes” and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980-2005* (London: Crisis States Research Centre, September 2006), pp.1-22.

3. TRADOC G2 Human Terrain System, *My Cousin’s Enemy is My Friend: A Study of Pashtun “Tribes”* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army, September 2009), p. 24.

the Taliban, and making the argument that this is the only way counterinsurgency success will be possible in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> Critics chastise him for taking sides in local disputes, and more fundamentally, misusing the term tribe, when what he really meant to say was “village” or “community.”

What is missing in these arguments is an appreciation of tribal structure. Pashtuns are organized according to a patrilineal segmentary lineage system. This presupposes that the tribe will segment, or split, among multiple kin groups which will be rivals with each other most of the time. When a common enemy outside the tribe poses an existential threat, the different segments tend to band together – since they are related by common descent – until the emergency is over.

According to this view of tribal structure, competing identities of tribe, sub-tribe, clan, *qawm*, or locality are all within the overarching tribal system. A *qawm* is a unit of identification and solidarity, and could be based on kinship, residence, or occupation.<sup>5</sup> It is a flexible term that can be used to describe a clan or a small, isolated village, and is used to differentiate “us” versus “them.” Nonetheless, to say that Pashtuns in a particular area identify only with a particular valley in which they live as opposed to a tribe, suggests a misunderstanding of how a decentralized tribal system works. Tribalism is localism. There are many examples of segmented tribes which are deeply divided. But this does not make them any less “tribal.” Moreover, it would be a mistake to dismiss the overarching tribal identity – such as a Durrani or Ghilzai – because it remains important for most Pashtuns. Thus, each Pashtun individual or community can have multiple identities, from overarching tribal confederation to tribe, sub-tribe, clan, to the local village or *qawm*. A concrete example of this descending order of identity, which corresponds to tribal structure, could be the following: Pashtun – Durrani – Panjpai – Alizai - Kalozai - local village or *qawm*. We should also not dismiss the importance of an overall Afghan national identity.

Tribal structures have eroded over the last century due to a variety of factors.<sup>6</sup> Amir Abdur Rahman, for example, who reigned from 1880 to 1901, uprooted many tribal communities with the overriding goal of strengthening the central government and deliberately weakening the tribal system. Even though he was a Pashtun himself, the “Iron Emir” resettled various Pashtun tribes or sub-tribes, either as punishment for rebellion, or to use them as a counterweight against hostile non-Pashtun tribes or ethnic groups. He declared jihad against the Hazara and conducted a campaign of ethnic cleansing, which left pockets of Pashtun settlers in the north, where they remain today.<sup>7</sup> The 1978 rebellion against the communist regime initiated a cycle of warfare causing massive displacement among Afghan tribes. During the ten-year war against the Soviet occupation, millions of refugees fled to Pakistan and there was extensive internal migration within Afghanistan. Rather than restore peace, the departure of the Soviets in 1989 ushered in another civil war among competing Afghan factions. Since then, the tribal structure has evolved because of war, droughts, migration patterns, sedentarization, and other factors. (Sedentarization is the process in which tribes cease seasonal or nomadic lifestyles and settle down in permanent habitats.) The departure of the Soviets in 1989 ushered in another civil war among competing Afghan factions that triggered mass migration and further social and economic disruption.<sup>8</sup>

4. Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time* (Los Angeles, CA: Nine Sisters Imports, 2009).

5. David Phillips, *Afghanistan: A History of Utilization of Tribal Auxiliaries* (Williamsburg: Tribal Analysis Center, 2008), p.1.

6. Some of the best anthropological works on Afghanistan include Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Richard Tapper, ed., *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield, eds., *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1984); Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969).

7. Thomas J. Barfield, “Problems in Establishing Legitimacy in Afghanistan,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, June 2004, pp.263-293.

8. Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Roohullah Ramin,

Social instability today is pronounced in such areas as the Helmand River valley, where the U.S. government funded major infrastructure irrigation projects beginning in the 1950s, including the Kajaki dam in northern Helmand.<sup>9</sup> Masses of settlers were brought by the Afghan government from outside the region, upsetting the previous demographic balance. According to research conducted by Nick Cullather, “not only did [the Kajaki dam project] entail the forced displacement and resettlement of local populations, which caused serious conflicts, but it proved detrimental to the local economy, and also raised the salinity level of the soil.”<sup>10</sup> Natives and settlers alike fled en masse during the Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil wars. The result is that the traditional tribal structure presently in Helmand is absent in some areas or seriously weakened. However, this is not true for the entire province. In some places, the tribal system remains strong. This contrasting situation exemplifies the heterogeneity of Afghanistan and the sharp contrasts between regions and localities, which complicate efforts to make generalizations.

## Who are the Pashtuns?

The Pashtuns are the principal tribal group in Afghanistan, estimated to be 40 to 42 percent of the total population, which would number about 12.5 million people. In Pakistan, where they are also referred to as Pathans, Pukhtuns or Pukhtoons, estimates of their size range from 15 to 28 million. We consider the figure of 20 million to be credible. The main area inhabited by Pashtuns forms a crescent that curves down on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border roughly from Konar to Herat Provinces. There are also pockets of Pashtuns dispersed in various other regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, reflecting centuries of voluntary and involuntary migration. Moreover, many Pashtuns have immigrated to other parts of the world to seek employment. The worldwide figure is estimated to be 42 million.

None of these population figures can be considered conclusive, however, since there has never been an accurate census of the Pashtun tribes. We provide them to illustrate the point that the Pashtuns represent a considerable number of people at the national level. In this respect, they are very different from tribal groups in other parts of the world, which often comprise far smaller populations. It is important to point out that we do not categorize most of the other principal groups in Afghanistan, to include Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Turkmen as tribes, but rather define them as ethnic groups. We will cover this crucial distinction between tribe and ethnic group in our discussion on Pashtun ethnic nationalism. There are also a range of non-Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan, such as Nuristanis in the Northeast.<sup>11</sup>

Qais Abdur Rashid is believed to be the ancestor of all Pashtuns, comprising about sixty tribes. According to tribal lore, the four principal lineages existing today, Sarbari, Batani, Ghargasht and Karlani descend from his four sons. Pashtun scholars like to point out that the first references to “Afghans” in historical literature are in reference to the Pashtun tribes. They also emphasize that the nation of Afghanistan was first united by a

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*Occasional Paper 2: Afghanistan: Exploring the Dynamics of Sociopolitical Strife and Persistence of the Insurgency* (Ottawa: Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, 2008), pp.1-38.

9. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 499-507.

10. Nick Cullather, “Damming Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol.89, No.2, September 2002, pp.25-30; Feliz Kuntzsch, *Afghanistan's Rocky Road to Modernity* (Universite Laval: Institut Quebecois des Hautes Etudes Internationales, July 2008).

11. See, for example, M. Nazif Shahrani, “Introduction: Marxist ‘Revolution’ and Islamic Resistance in Afghanistan,” in Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield, eds., *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1984), pp. 3-57.

Pashtun, Ahmed Shah Durrani, in 1747. Ever since, the kings and emirs of Afghanistan have tended to be Durrani Pashtuns, particularly Barakzai. Following this historic pattern, the President of Afghanistan today, Hamid Karzai, is a Durrani Pashtun, as are some of the top Taliban commanders seeking to overthrow his government.

## President Karzai Seen From a Pashtun Perspective

President Hamid Karzai is attempting to reconcile two contradictory aspects of the Durrani Pashtun heritage of Afghan leadership. On the one hand, he follows the tradition of the Iron Emir who sought to create a strong, centralized state at the expense of the tribes. The most obvious manifestation of this centralizing agenda is Karzai's power to appoint all the governors, as well as other government functionaries down to the district level. He has been described as an extreme micro-manager, involving himself in the resolution of local civil and criminal cases, depending on the personal petitions he receives, as an emir would have done in the past. Defending this concentration of power, Karzai reportedly has denounced Afghans who call for a federalist system as traitors.

At the same time, Karzai is very much attuned to the traditional Pashtun attitude against too much power in the hands of one man. The preference of Pashtun tribal *jirgas* usually has been to resist those who would be dictators, although there are plenty of examples of collusion for self-interest. According to tradition, the *loya jirga* that picked Ahmed Shah Durrani to be Afghanistan's first king did so because at the time he was the youngest and weakest of the candidates. The Afghans wanted a king, but not one who would be too strong and quash tribal autonomy. The concept of collective tribal authority is inherently opposed to war lords or other individuals who put themselves above the tribe.

Karzai complies with this Pashtun tradition by seeking to rule by consensus. He manipulates tribal politics and rivalries to his advantage, rather than forcibly imposing himself. His policy is to co-opt tribal leaders and war lords, giving them positions in his government, or other benefits. Dispensing patronage, which Western observers define as corruption, is a key aspect of his ruling style, designed to avert conflict and gain the loyalty of powerful individuals, and interest groups, who might otherwise oppose his regime. The manner in which Karzai, a Populzai Durrani, handled his biggest potential political rival, the Barakzai Durrani Gul Agha Shirzai, is instructive. Even though they both belong to the same Zirak Durrani confederation, the Barakzai have always seen themselves as superior to the smaller and weaker Populzai. Accordingly, Shirzai, who had long thought he should hold the reins of national power, planned to run in the 2009 presidential elections. Karzai made a backroom deal to convince him to drop out of the race. Today, Shirzai is Governor of Nangarhar Province, controlling multi-million dollar development projects being implemented there by the international aid community.

Another example of Karzai's attempt to rule by consensus and co-opt those who might oppose him has to do with women's rights. Given his education and cosmopolitan background, Karzai probably is inclined personally to go along with the feminist agenda. In this regard, he supported the Western-imposed requirement that a certain percentage of legislators in the National Assembly had to be women. However, the women's rights campaign is being met with a strong push-back from conservative Islamist sectors. Thus, Karzai signed the law which the Western media immediately

dubbed as the “marital rape law” in order to appease the largely Hazara Shiite clerics who wanted it. This law codifies existing social norms relating to treatment of women which the Western community strongly opposes, but Islamist conservatives strongly support. Since Karzai not only seeks to reconcile competing tribal interests, but also competing international interests, he buckled under to foreign pressure and is now attempting to modify the law or rescind it, in order to please his foreign patrons.<sup>12</sup>

A similar situation occurred previously when Afghanistan’s Islamic court arrested an Afghan who had converted to Christianity and threatened him with the death sentence. Since the convert was unrepentant, the Islamists, and many ordinary Afghans as well, adamantly backed his prosecution for the crime of apostasy. As was to be expected, Karzai’s foreign patrons were aghast. Again, the legitimacy of Afghanistan as a country worth sending troops to die for was questioned. Although Karzai publicly stated he would not interfere with the judicial process, his regime adroitly resolved this impasse. The Islamic judges declared the convicted convert to be insane. Under Islamic law, as in Western law, insanity is a defense. Cleared of culpability by reason of insanity, the convicted convert was deported to Italy.<sup>13</sup>

Karzai’s ability to continue his balancing act, reconciling competing interests, and co-opting potential rivals, is being undercut by repeated accusations against him made primarily by foreign politicians and officials accusing him of corruption, incompetence and electoral fraud. These accusations have been accompanied by perceived insults, such as Senator Joe Biden (before becoming Vice President) throwing down his napkin at a dinner in anger and stomping out, because of Karzai’s unsatisfactory responses to the corruption issue.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps most damaging of all, leaked memos from Ambassador Eikenberry argue that Karzai’s erratic behavior and corruption jeopardize the U.S. program in Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> Irrespective of whether these criticisms are true, under the norms of the *ghayrat* (personal honor/self-respect/dignity) aspect of the *pashtunwali*, the law of the Pashtuns, Karzai’s honor has been offended publicly. He must respond, or be seen by his own people as a spineless weakling. From the Pashtun perspective, Karzai’s recent outbursts against his foreign patrons, specifically saying he refuses to be treated as a puppet any longer, and culminating in a threat to join the Taliban, are justified.

The perceived insults to Karzai’s honor have been aggravated for years by the lack of response to his increasingly strident condemnations of civilian casualties caused by air strikes and his calls to end this tactic. In May of 2009, General James L. Jones, President Obama’s Security Advisor, responded to Karzai’s public admonition that the U.S. would lose the “moral fight” against the Taliban if it kept killing civilians. In an ABC interview the General declared: “We’re going to take a look at trying to make sure we correct those things we can correct, but certainly to tie the hands of our commanders and say we’re not going to conduct airstrikes would be imprudent. We can’t fight with one hand tied behind our back.”<sup>16</sup> This American acceptance of collateral damage as an unavoidable part of military operations in Afghanistan played into the Taliban propagandist machine, another example of Karzai being dismissed by his masters as a puppet, even when the issue was the killing of his own countrymen. All public opinion polls indicate unambiguously that civilian casualties caused by air strikes are the single biggest complaint

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12. Boone, Jon. “Karzai Bows to International Calls to Scrap the Afghan ‘rape’ law,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/05/afghanistan-shia-rape-law-scrap>

13. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/afghan\\_03-29-06.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/afghan_03-29-06.html)

14. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/08/world/asia/08iht-karzai.2.20013296.html>

15. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/08/world/asia/08iht-karzai.2.20013296.html>

16. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/11/world/asia/11karzai.html>

among Afghans against Coalition and U.S. forces, a complaint echoed by the President of the Republic, to no avail.<sup>17</sup> After General McChrystal assumed command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in July of 2009, he did take Karzai's complaints seriously and issued new guidelines for air strikes, designed to avoid civilian casualties. Statistics indicate such deaths have gone down since the new rules were implemented. However, the public relations damage to Karzai and to Coalition and U.S. forces had already been done. This is another factor justifying Karzai's recent attacks on his Western patrons, in Pashtun eyes.

Similarly, Karzai has followed Pashtun tribal norms in offering peace negotiations to his Taliban enemies, from the time he took power, to the present, the most recent example being the regional peace *jirga* proposal. Since Western powers currently are eager to begin withdrawal from Afghanistan, they now support these initiatives. At the beginning of the intervention in 2001, the attitude was different. According to the study, "*Pashtun Reconciliation Programs*," published by the Tribal Analysis Center, Karzai had sought in 2001 to reconcile defeated Taliban commanders, hoping to avert a prolonged guerrilla war. This peace initiative, at the time when the Taliban leaders were most vulnerable and receptive to peace talks, was scuttled by the U.S. administration:

"The general 'instincts' of the Pashtun leaders in Afghanistan have generally proven to be superior to that of the western leaders when negotiations were considered. They know the natural flow of negotiations from their historical relationships while the leaders in the West must rely upon their personal backgrounds that are poorly suited to function in tribal situations. Perhaps the best example involves the surrender of Kandahar and the possibility of ending the fighting completely in late 2001. Hamid Karzai had been able to rally reinforcements inside Afghanistan and move toward Kandahar from the north as Gul Agha Shirzai's Barakzai force was moving toward Kandahar from the east. Finding their position untenable – and US air strikes daunting and unstoppable – the Taliban entered into negotiations by sending Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani to meet in person with Hamid Karzai, the new leader of the Afghan Interim Government. During the negotiations with Abdul Wahid, Hamid Karzai took the normal Pashtun approach toward an enemy and offered terms that allowed the Taliban to return to their homes with dignity rather than to continue the fighting... *CNN* reported: "Karzai has been heading a tribal military force that has been one of the forces circling the city of Kandahar over the last week or so. (Mullah Muhammad Omar is the leader of the Taliban, who is to turn over control of the city.) All the details of the surrender -- the negotiation terms and what this means for the Taliban and what they expect in return -- were announced by the Taliban's former ambassador to Pakistan. There are some key things to look at in the terms of that surrender. Number one -- the implications that the Taliban leaders can go free, can go home." Hamid Karzai had also been communicating with a key leader in the Kandahar region. Mullah Naqib, of the powerful Alikozai tribe, was a fellow Durrani Pashtun and had a large militia. Mullah Naqib was also close to the Taliban Defense Minister, Mullah Obaidullah, a fellow Alikozai, and the two felt that Karzai's offer of amnesty for all Taliban leaders was something they could accept. *Time Magazine* reported: 'Kandahar sources say that the Taliban defense minister Mullah Obadullah has sent out feelers to Karzai, offering to hand over the city to him and to Mullah Naqib, a respected former Soviet war commander residing in Kandahar with a large tribal following.' Around this time, the Taliban withdrew from Kandahar and retreated to nearby Pakistan as Mullah Naqib combined Karzai's approaching force. The Taliban leaders, especially Mullah Obaidullah and Abdul Wahid, individuals most closely involved in the surrender negotiations with the approaching leaders, expected to be able to return to their homes peacefully – as Hamid

17. see ABC-BBC-ARD Poll December 2009, augmented 2010 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8448930.stm>



Karzai offered. Unfortunately, US policy toward the Taliban was soon set in Washington, D.C., by someone who knew nothing about *Pashtunwali*. The US Defense Secretary soon reversed Hamid Karzai and left the simultaneous disastrous impression that the new head of the Afghanistan Interim Government was an American ‘puppet.’ Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said the US would not stand for any deal that allowed Omar to remain free and ‘live in dignity’ in the region.”<sup>18</sup>

The *New York Times* reported the following: “Hamid Karzai, the Pashtun tribal chief who was named at Afghan peace talks in Bonn to lead an interim Afghan government, said that Taliban militants would turn over their arms and ammunition to a council of tribal elders and would be allowed safe passage to their homes. That process, he said, should be completed within a few days... In Islamabad, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaef, a Taliban spokesman and former ambassador to Pakistan, announced the surrender agreement had been reached to save civilian lives. ‘Tomorrow the Taliban will start surrendering their weapons to Mullah Naqibullah, a famous commander... the Taliban were finished as a political force,’ said Mullah Zaef, adding, ‘I think we should go home.’ Mullah Zaef said that Mullah Omar would be allowed to live in Kandahar under the protection of Naqibullah.”<sup>19</sup>

Not only did Rumsfeld publicly disavow the peace settlement negotiated by Karzai, but he stated the intention to continue military operations in Afghanistan, even though the Taliban had been defeated. Echoing the White House declaration that “those who harbor terrorists need to be brought to justice,” Rumsfeld threatened Karzai with withdrawal of assistance if he persisted in trying to negotiate peace. If any Afghan anti-Taliban leader made a deal with Mullah Omar, Rumsfeld noted pointedly, “our cooperation would take a turn south.”<sup>20</sup> As result, Mullah Omar fled into hiding and continues to be the spiritual leader of the insurgency, nine years later. Mullah Zaef, who had announced that the Taliban should go home, was detained by the Pakistanis, turned over to the Americans and spent two years in Guantanamo. (He has since returned to Kabul and published two books on his experiences, both highly critical of U.S. policies.)

## Pashtun Ethnic Nationalism

Tribes and ethnic groups may both claim a common ancestry, history, language, and culture. However, ethnic groups, often formed by a past amalgamation of tribes, lack a tribal structure. Ethnic groups, for instance, usually do not have councils of elders making decisions for the entire group. Most importantly, the self-identity of an ethnic group, which has been described euphemistically as “a quest for an imagined community,” is much larger in scope than a tribe. Rather than the local orientation typical of tribal people, ethnic groups can aspire to create their own nation-state.<sup>21</sup> This crystallizes the difference with a tribe, which is a non-state form of social organization. The struggle to form an ethnically-based nation-state, particularly when religious affiliation and ethnic identity become fused, can lead to tremendous bloodshed, as occurred in the breakup of multi-ethnic

18. “*Pashtun Reconciliation Programs*,” <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/Research-Completed.html>

19. [http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/07/news/07iht-attack\\_ed3\\_\\_7.html?pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/07/news/07iht-attack_ed3__7.html?pagewanted=1)

20. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/WAR+ON+TERROR:+END+OF+TALIBAN:+GIVE+US+OMAR%3B+U.S.+demands+the...-a080625065>

21. See Connor, Walker. *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; and Munoz, Arturo. *Amazigh: The Berbers of Morocco: From Tribalism to Ethnic Nationalism*. Richardson (Texas): Tribal Analysis Publishing, 2009.

Yugoslavia. Nationalist agitation, however, is not intrinsically violent. Examples exist in which ethnic groups achieved their goals without fighting, such as in the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the Czech and Slovak republics. Also, most ethnic groups in the world do not have their own homogeneous nation-states.

Following our categorization of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmen as ethnic groups, rather than tribal groups, it should be emphasized that there are nation-states associated with the Tajiks (Tajikistan), the Uzbeks (Uzbekistan), and the Turkmen (Turkmenistan). Pashtuns present an analytic challenge because they satisfy the criteria as an ethnic group, as well as a confederation of tribes. The Pashtun population is large and diverse, reflecting very stark contrasts in levels of education and urbanization. Consequently, a continuum exists among Pashtuns ranging from a very localistic, village level orientation, to agitation for a nation-state. There is a strong case to be made for Pashtun ethnic nationalism, evidenced by long standing campaign for the creation of an independent Pashtunistan.

The most famous exponent of Pashtunistan, or Pakhtunkhwa, comprising Pashtun-populated regions on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border was Gaffar Khan, also referred to as Baacha Khan. He joined Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence movement for the independence of India (which then included Pakistan), forming the Army of God, also known as the Red Shirts, to stage peaceful demonstrations against the British. He was imprisoned and his followers suffered severe repression, to include air strikes. When independence was achieved, India and Pakistan split. As a resident of newly independent Pakistan, Gaffar continued to agitate for Pashtunistan and was imprisoned by the Pakistani authorities for his separatism, as well as his ties to India. He eventually died in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, where he was buried. A contemporary of the famous jihadist guerrilla leader, the Fakir of Ipi, Gaffar never deviated from Gandhi's principles of non-violence and his memory is revered today as a saintly leader of the Pashtun nation.

Gaffar's son, Wali Khan, who founded the nationalist Awami Party, uttered the well known phrase, "I have been a Pashtun six thousand years, a Muslim, one thousand three hundred years, and a Pakistani, twenty-five years."<sup>22</sup> The Awami Party was disbanded under government pressure, but resurfaced as the Awami National Party (ANP) ultimately headed by Wali's son, Asfandiyar Khan. In 2007, Asfandiyar led an ANP caravan to a commemoration at the tomb of his grandfather, Gaffar, in Jalalabad. At the border he was met by festive crowds of Afghan Pashtuns who chanted: "Pukhtoons on both sides of the Durand Line are Afghans" in reference to the Pashtun nationalist custom of using Pashtun interchangeably with Afghan.<sup>23</sup> President Karzai, who maintains good relations with Asfandiyar, came to meet him and gave a stirring Pashtun nationalist speech.

Karzai also maintains good relations with another key Pashtun nationalist in Swat, Afzal Khan Lala, member of Wali Khan's original Awami Party and a life-long advocate of Pashtunistan. When the Taliban took control over Swat temporarily in 2009, they drove out most of the big landowner *khans*, but Afzal, protected by his own armed militia, refused to leave his compound, successfully defying the Taliban. Already very influential as a dynamic 90-year-old tribal leader, always at the front of the Pashtun cause, his prestige has soared in the wake of the Taliban retreat. He participated in the campaign to change officially the name of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Khyber Side of the Land of the Pashtuns). It seems this change will happen, but final approval is pending. If it does go through, it will be an indication of the growing influence of the Pashtun ethnic nationalists on the Pakistani side of the border.

22. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khan\\_Abdul\\_Wali\\_Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khan_Abdul_Wali_Khan)

23. See <http://intellibriefs.blogspot.com/2007/04/asfandiyar-wali-khan-crosses-durand-line.html>

On the Afghan side of the border, Pashtun ethnic nationalism seems confined to speeches. President Karzai himself embodies this ambivalence. He has given Pashtun nationalist speeches to Pashtun audiences, but his concrete policies have been very careful to avoid the impression that he favors Pashtuns over other ethnic groups. On the contrary, his regime strives to be all inclusive. Fervent ethnic nationalists criticize Karzai on this score, saying that he has given the “minorities” – Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmen – too much power. The only real Afghans are the Pashtuns, they argue, and the Western experiment in Afghanistan has failed to take that key point into consideration. Afghanistan is Pashtunistan. Based on his circumspect behavior on the ethnic issue, it seems that Karzai believes this form of extreme Pashtun nationalism could plunge Afghanistan into civil war, which would not benefit anyone.

The Taliban, for their part, are also very ambivalent about ethnic nationalism. Some of their propaganda is unabashedly nationalistic, for example, the Pashtun nationalist songs in the background in jihadist videos, boasting about beating the British and the Russians, and now the Americans. There is a yearning, moreover, among a minority of extreme nationalists for a revolutionary movement. If the Taliban signaled that they are that movement, extremist Pashtun nationalists probably would join eagerly. However, the Taliban official line has always been that it is NOT a Pashtun movement - even though most members are Pashtuns – and that it welcomes all ethnicities and tribes under the banner of the Islamic Emirate. Islam trumps ethnicity. Besides doctrine, there are practical political and resource issues dictating a multi-ethnic approach. If the Taliban were limited only to Pashtun support, it would be much more difficult to take control over the entire nation again, which is the stated goal of the insurgency.

For the time being, Karzai seems committed to continuing his balancing act. However, it would behoove analysts to listen to all his speeches and reflect on the context and what he is trying to communicate. In closing, we cite an excerpt from his 2007 speech in Jalalabad in honor of Gaffar Khan: “No one can keep the Pukhtoons separated on both sides of the Durand Line. Now we have identified our enemies, and no one will deceive Pukhtoons anymore.”<sup>24</sup> The explicit enemies in that speech were the Taliban, for their insurgency splitting the Pashtun people and making Pashtuns suffer more than anyone else. Unmentioned, but implicit, was the Pakistani government for supporting the Taliban and working for generations to prevent the dream of Pashtunistan from being fulfilled. It can also be taken as a general warning to all those playing the Great Game in Afghanistan, not to run afoul of the Pashtuns.

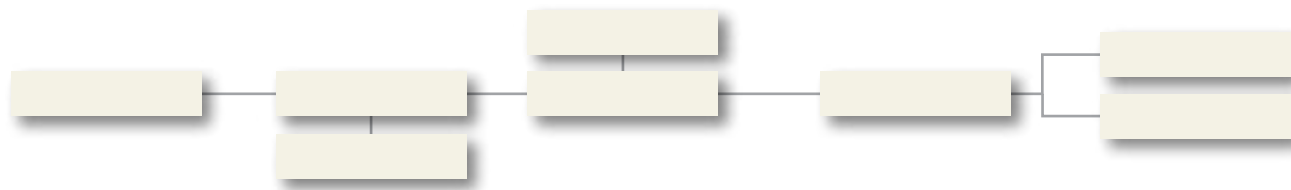
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24. See <http://intellibriefs.blogspot.com/2007/04/asfandyar-wali-khan-crosses-durand-line.html>

# TRIBAL ANALYSIS CENTER

Traditional anthropological research conducted among tribes inhabiting remote areas where insurgents and criminals operate has become increasingly difficult to implement. Studies carried out among people living in small-scale societies now are nearly impossible due to the physical dangers associated with the civil and religious unrest found in those areas. Swat, for example, has become so dangerous that Frederick Barth's studies only could be repeated at the risk of the investigator's life. Similar research is not feasible among Burma's Rohingya tribes located on both sides of the border with Bangladesh, as well as with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan's interior and within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where even Pakistan's army enters with reluctance.

Given the difficulties of conducting direct fieldwork in conflictive areas, the Tribal Analysis Center utilizes an indirect approach. Using multidisciplinary research, we seek to collect and analyze data obtained from a wide variety of sources, both current and historical. In the absence of new ethnographic fieldwork to update our base of knowledge, the Tribal Analysis Center compiles and summarizes existing research and documents on tribal societies, combining this material with contemporary press reports and articles. We assume that much can be gleaned from well-informed observers who are not anthropologists, ranging from journalists and travelers to government officials.



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