

8 Afghanistan

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On 20 August 2009, the Afghan President Hamid Karzai won a reelection by a sizeable majority. He did so only after winning the crucial support of the Shii Hazaras, a group that have gone from being a despised, unofficial caste in Afghanistan to self-described “king makers.”¹ In the largest sense, the story of this repressed ethnic group’s rise to prominence in a country long dominated by their Sunni rivals has widespread applications for understanding the often competing roles of Shiism and ethnicity in the Middle East and Central Asia. In a narrower sense, it is also the story of how Afghanistan’s most despised ethnic group has overcome tremendous obstacles to carve out a niche for itself in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Entry into the Hazarajat, the land of the Hazaras

The Hazaras’ homeland is readily visible from the Afghan capital. Looking westward from Kabul into the snow capped peaks of the Hindu Kush, one can see a mountainous zone known as the Hazarajat that has remained isolated from the surrounding lands for centuries. To access the Hazaras’ mountainous homeland, one must leave Kabul and drive northward across the Shomali plain, which is inhabited by the Dari-speaking Tajiks.² After about a three-hour ride, the traveler’s journey is blocked by a latitudinal spur—the Hindu Kush Mountains. Few travelers choose to turn left at this juncture and drive in a westward direction on a dirt road up into heartlands of the barren Hindu Kush. Tajiks and Afghan-Pashtuns have traditionally avoided the *kotals* (mountain passes) that cut into this land and have feared and despised its Hazara tribes.

In April 2007, the author made the journey up the Ghorband Valley and over the Shibar Pass to the mountain plateau of the Hazarajat. This journey took him away from a land known as Afghanistan and into the Hazarajat, a geographic term that has been deliberately erased from the map by the ruling Afghan-Pashtuns.

One begins along the dirt path that winds its way up the Ghorband Valley where the first Hazara villages appear. Rather than the ubiquitous blue burqa that women wear on the plains, women working in the fields wear bright dresses and head scarves, which are infinitely more lively than the drab burqas of the lowlanders. The women wearing them seem much freer to move about.

The physiognomy of the villagers begins to change. The mountain dwellers gradually began to display Mongol features, often with light green or blue eyes.³ While the dominant Afghan-Pashtuns pride themselves on their Aryan origins, these Hazaras were clearly from Central Asian Turco-Mongol stock.⁴ At evening prayer time, Hazaras belonging to the small Ismaili community can be observed praying in the fields.⁵

After seven more hours of a grueling drive through this idyllic landscape, one finally reaches the top of the Shibar Pass at 3,000 meters. Looking back down the approach, one can discern the ribbon-like pass that had been followed. The driver, a local Hazara who had taken the author on the second leg of his journey, waved his hand to the plains below and said, "Afghanistan." Then, gesturing to the surrounding windswept, barren peaks, he smiled and pointed at himself and said, "*Hazara watan!*" (the Hazara homeland). After ten hours of driving, we had finally left Afghanistan and were now entering the mountain plateau homeland of the Hazaras.

From the Shibar Pass, we continued for several hours westward across a windswept plain to a ravine that descended into a valley. There we encountered one of the most beautiful vales in Afghanistan and the center of Hazara culture, the Valley of Bamiyan.

As the sun set on the valley, the author looked to the mountain wall on the northern side of the valley and saw the two dark niches where Bamiyan's famed stone Buddha statues had stood for centuries. In March 2001, the Taliban shocked the world by bombing these magnificent stone sentinels to rubble after having them declared "heathen idols."

That evening, as the author ate rice pilaf and flat *naan* bread with his Hazara hosts, he asked them what they thought about the recent return of the Pashtun Taliban in the lands of the south. Afghan military and intelligence officials with whom the author had met in Kabul had informed him that the Taliban insurgents were for the first time infiltrating mixed Pashtun-Hazara lands in the southern Hazarajat. This seemed to bode ill for the Hazaras who had thus far been spared the horrors of the Taliban insurgency.⁶

Over and over again the same sentiment came forth loud and clear in my interviews. The Hazaras of 2007 were not the Hazaras of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. If the Taliban came to their lands again, they would resist them. Their days of meekly submitting to Afghan-Pashtun repression were behind them, and they would use their weapons to prevent such a tragedy from ever occurring again. The Hazaras' experience of one hundred years of Afghan misrule, combined with the recent subjugation by the Sunni Pashtun Taliban, had taught them what to expect should they ever surrender their weapons again.

To understand the Hazaras' transformation from a race that was once described as "meek and submissive" to a powerful force that fought for the Afghan capital in the 1990s, one must make a journey into their past. It is only by understanding the Hazaras' ethno-religious origins and their subjugation by the Sunni Afghans that one can understand how they were shaped by war and Ayatollah Ruhollah's Khomeini's revolution.⁷

Origins and conquest

While Hazara intellectuals have tried pushing their people's roots in the region back to the era of the stone Buddhas of Bamiyan (which were built from the fifth to seventh centuries CE by Indo-European Kushans or Tokharians), the Hazaras' Mongol complexions indicate a later ethnogenesis. In all likelihood, the Hazaras are the descendants of a tribe of Mongols who migrated to the region when the Mongol Il-Khanate rule in Iran collapsed in the mid-1300s.

Later, when Iran was converted to Twelver (Imami) Shiism by the Safavids in the 1500s, the Hazaras made the fateful decision to convert as well. This made them the enemy of their Sunni neighbors, the Pashtuns and Uzbeks.

In the succeeding centuries, the Hazaras' Sunni neighbors gave up on trying to conquer their mountainous homeland. But for all their ferocity in battle, a U.S. explorer named Josiah Harlan, who visited the Hazaras in the early nineteenth century, found them to be more moderate in their Islamic beliefs than their Sunni Afghan neighbors. For example, he found their women to be comparatively free and described the Hazaras as "a merry, unsophisticated race fickle, passionate, and capricious."⁸

In the mid-1700s, the Pashtun (i.e., Afghan) tribes united under the Durrani Dynasty and began to expand into neighboring areas. Having established their capital at Kabul, the Afghan-Pashtuns moved along the southern flank of the Hindu Kush and captured the Iranian city of Herat. From there, the Pashtuns conquered the Badakhshani Tajiks to the east and in so doing completely encircled the Hazaras in their mountains. Then in the reign of Abdur Rahman, the "Iron Amir" (1880–1901), the Sunni Afghans moved to definitively conquer the Hazarajat and include it in their state. Abdur Rahman did so by sending an army of over 100,000 men into the Hindu Kush on a "religious crusade" against the "godless Shiia Hazaras."⁹ In lieu of other resources to economically motivate his soldiers, the Afghan-Pashtun fighters were promised Hazara women and children as slaves.

By 1893, the last of the Hazara "rebel" *mirs* (chieftains) had been captured and executed and the Hazaras lay supine before their Sunni enemies for the first time. With thousands of their fighters dead, their leaders massacred, and their *qalas* (walled fortifications) overrun, they were at the mercy of Abdur Rahman and his Pashtun holy warriors.

In the stunned aftermath of their conquest, however, the Hazaras resisted efforts on the part of Abdur Rahman to convert them to Sunni Islam. In the twentieth century, the Hazaras continued to rebel against the Afghan government, which taxed them at a higher rate than the Pashtuns, but these local rebellions had no external support and were easily suppressed. For all that the Hazaras emulated the Shah of Iran and often hung his pictures in their houses, the Shah's regime was based on Iranian nationalism, not pan-Shiism. As such, it had little interest in Mongol Hazaras.

With few schools in their mountains and no access to universities in Kabul, the Hazaras seemed destined to live as second class "citizens" in a country that

did not want them, except as a class of laborers. But their fate was soon to be altered by the rise of an Afghan communist government and the subsequent emergence of a nationwide anti-communist insurgency.

The Hazara awakening

While the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is often depicted as a catastrophic war on Islam, the advent of communism in Afghanistan actually enabled the Hazaras to regain their former independence. Their position was alleviated somewhat by the 1978 Saur (April) Communist Revolution which led to the overthrow of the Pashtun nationalist, President Muhammad Daoud Khan. Taking a page out of the Soviets' manual on ethnic manipulation and "positive discrimination," the new Afghan communist government sought to mobilize persecuted minorities to support the revolution.¹⁰ The impoverished and comparatively secular Hazara laborers of western Kabul made ideal recruits for the communist party.

But not all Hazaras embraced the communist government. In the isolated heartland of the Hazarajat, the response was more based on conservative Islamic traditions. In the mountains, the Hazara villagers reacted with horror to the communist government programs, which were seen as overthrowing God's order.

As Hazara *mullahs* legitimized the holy revolt against the "infidel" regime, a new brand of Shii militant ideology began to penetrate the isolated hamlets of the Hazarajat. The seeds for this development had actually been planted long before. The origins of this movement are traceable back to the initial subjugation of the Hazarajat by the Pashtuns in the late nineteenth century. In the aftermath of their conquest, many Hazaras fled to Mashhad and Qum in northeastern Iran and a sizeable exile community developed there. By the 1970s, this community was led by clerics who began to participate in the struggle of Iran's clerics to overthrow the Shah. Many of them were inspired to share the heady revolutionary message of Khomeini with their kin back in Afghanistan. Numerous Hazara clerics who had been trained by Iranian ayatollahs in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq as well as Qum, returned to their homeland, determined to awaken their people.¹¹

But not everyone supported their revolutionary message. There were powerful forces in the region that rejected the calls for the establishment of an Iranian-style fundamentalist theocracy. The main opponents were members of the old established landed class (the *khans* or *mirs*). These local leaders moved to arrest or kill the young Iranian-trained radicals who called for the establishment of *sharia* law and overthrow of the established elites.

The *mirs*, however, were weakened by their ties to the discredited Afghan government and were unpopular on account of their harsh taxation policies. As the *mirs'* authority crumbled, the Hazaras' traditionalist clergy, the *sayyads*, began to increasingly promulgate laws and fill in the ruling vacuum. These religious figures played a key role in the establishment of a *shura*, or council, which was set up to expel communist forces from the region. Under the *shura's*

leadership, communist outposts were quickly taken, and the government's presence was eventually limited to a garrison in Bamiyan.¹²

By 1979, the *shura* had essentially freed the Hazarajat of Afghan government forces for the first time since 1890.¹³ Having expelled the communists from the Hazarajat, the *shura* gradually moved to further undermine the power of the secular *khan* or *mir* class.

In this, the *shura* had the full backing of Iran's revolutionary government which saw these "co-opted stooge" leaders much as it had the Shah of Iran. This process expedited the "Iranization" of the Hazara *mujahideen* resistance and gradually weakened the most secular-nationalist element in the Hazarajat.¹⁴ In so doing, clerics gradually began to take control of the Hazarajat for the first time in its modern history.¹⁵

The Iranian government, however, was neither satisfied with the traditionalism of the *sayyad*-dominated *shura* nor confident in its loyalty to Khomeini. The *shura*, for example, failed to recognize Khomeini as Supreme Leader and to establish proper ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The conservative *sayyads* were not social revolutionaries and did not necessarily want to overthrow the old order. Far from being Shii radicals, they represented the traditional village Islam of their people.¹⁶

To overcome this obstacle, Tehran began to direct two Hazara political-military parties led by young clerics who had trained in *hawzes* (religious seminaries) in Qum to overthrow the *shura*. With approximately two million Afghans (the majority of whom were Hazaras) living as war refugees on its soil, Iran had a perfect recruitment pool for propagating the message of the Islamic Revolution. As these exiles began to disseminate Khomeini's message in books, pamphlets, and rallies in the Hazarajat, the Hazaras experienced a tremendous social change.

This "mini-revolution," when combined with a lack of support among Hazaras for the unpopular *shura*, gave one of the Iranian-backed clerical groups known as *Nasr* an opening to move on the traditionalists. *Nasr*, which has been described as "an effort by Iranian Khomeinists to gain control over Hazara nationalism," began to attack the *shura* governing council in 1982.¹⁷

But the Iranians came to be disappointed with the *Nasr* group as well. Its forces were not considered zealous enough to overthrow the *shura* and were said to be driven by Hazara nationalism as much as Shiism. Lacking the full support of Iran and the Hazara people, *Nasr* was unable to destroy the *shura*, which continued to hold out in many outlying provinces.

In response, Tehran worked to create a second Hazara party known as the *Sipah e Pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guard) which would be more in line with Khomeini's revolution. The *Pasdaran* was seen as even more extreme in its rejection of traditionalist rule and in its strict adherence to principles of Khomeini's revolution than the *Nasr* was. Many members of the *Pasdaran* had also been trained to fight in Iran and some of them had fought on the side of Iran in the Iran-Iraq War. In his article, Emadi Haifzullah sheds light on this little explored example of Hazara participation in Iran's wars:

Iran permitted an estimated two million Afghan refugees to work at various construction sites and established training centers in Taibad, Gilan, Qum, Sabzwar, Zahidan, Tehran, Zabul, Birjand, Turbat-e-Jam, Sirjan and other cities in Iran, where members of the Afghan Shiite organizations received military training for six months. During the first three months the trainees received 6,000 Rials (Iranian currency) and 20,000 Rials during the remainder of the training period. During the Iran-Iraq War the Iranian government also dispatched a segment of the trainees to the battlefield, and promised to pay each of those trainees 30,000 Rials.¹⁸

Scholar Gilles Dorronsoro further states that Hazara militants traveled to Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine and fought against Israel prior to this.¹⁹ Such military experience and logistical support gave the Iranian-backed militants an edge over the traditionalist *shura*. Together, the *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* were able to seize considerable territory from the *shura* and finally push it out of its capital, Waras, in 1984.

That achievement seriously weakened the more conservative elements in the Hazarajat and resulted in their gradual replacement with revolutionary representatives. By the mid-1980s, Iran had seemingly overthrown the old order among the Hazaras and created a revolutionary proxy government in the center of Afghanistan. Iran now had a militant group in Afghanistan that could, in theory, act as a surrogate in its struggles with regional enemies ranging from the Soviets to the U.S. "Great Satan."

One should not make the mistake, however, of overstating Iranian influence among the Hazaras. The traditionally moderate Hazara villagers did not necessarily identify with the militant ideology of the Khomeini-inspired militias. This was best demonstrated by the fact that thousands of Hazaras died in the infighting between traditionalist Hazaras and Iranian-backed revolutionaries before the *shura* was finally crushed in 1984.²⁰ Many Hazaras, especially those with a traditionalist, secularist, or nationalist orientation, clearly resented the rise to power of the Iranian-backed clerical groups.

This Hazara-on-Hazara violence prevented them from attacking their common enemy, the Soviet invaders. Far from striking at the communists in the plains, the Hazaras on occasion plundered the caravans of Sunni jihadi groups crossing their territories.²¹ This tendency led to the exclusion of the Hazaras from the overall *mujahideen* alliance based in Peshawar, Pakistan.²² The seven Sunni *mujahideen* parties based in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province did not trust the Hazaras or their links to Iran. Not surprisingly, the United States did not trust the Hazaras' links to Iran either. Very little U.S. aid or assistance was forthcoming to Hazara *mujahideen* groups based in Quetta, Pakistan.²³

Ultimately, U.S. policy only served, however, to increase Iran's influence over the Hazara parties, who came to rely on the Iranians for financial, military, and moral support.²⁴ The level of Iranian assistance for the Hazaras did not, however, match the level given to that of the Sunni parties by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Olivier Roy

claims that the Iranians were more circumspect in arming the Hazaras than Hizballah for fear of upsetting the Kremlin.²⁵ Tehran feared that if its support for the Hazara *mujahideen* became too obvious, the Soviets would respond by increasing their military support to its Iraqi enemies.

But as the end of the war appeared to be in sight following the Soviet troop withdrawals in 1989, Tehran became increasingly concerned by the lack of unity among the splintered Hazara *mujahideen* parties. In an effort to unify them for the impending power struggle with the Saudi-backed Sunni fundamentalist *jihad* parties in Pakistan, the Iranians pushed for the creation of a Hazara umbrella group.²⁶ As the Sunni *mujahideen* marched on Kabul in 1989, the Hazaras finally united and forged the *Hezb e Wahdat* (Unity Party). It was under the Iranian-backed *Hezb e Wahdat* Party that the downtrodden Hazaras were to wage a desperate battle to keep their autonomy alive.

The Hazaras empowered: 1992–98

While the *Hezb e Wahdat* Party has been simplistically defined as "the instrument of the interests of the Iranian regime in Afghanistan," it quickly became obvious that it was motivated as much by Hazara nationalism as by Iranian foreign policy.²⁷ This was in part a reflection of the fact that even as the Hazaras mobilized on an Iranian-backed Shii ideological basis, they increasingly came to identify themselves on the basis of their *qaum* (tribe or nationality).²⁸ In fact, the Hazaras were the first non-Pashtun nationality in Afghanistan to begin thinking in ethnic-national terms. This was largely a reaction to the fact that they had long been discriminated against on an ethnic basis, which served to highlight their ethnic awareness.²⁹

When the various Sunni *mujahideen* parties began to gradually ethnicize in the post-Soviet fight for power and resources, the oppressed Hazaras responded by creating Afghanistan's first overtly ethno-religious *mujahideen* party.³⁰ One of the *Hezb e Wahdat*'s first moves reflected this new direction—one that had nothing to do with their Iranian sponsors' agenda in Afghanistan. In 1990, the Hazaras launched a campaign to push Afghan-Pashtun settlers who had confiscated Hazara lands in the southern Hazarajat out of these areas. By 1991, there were few Pashtun communities left in the Hazarajat.

There were further examples of this secular-nationalism among the Hazaras. As Hazara communist militias defected to the *Hezb e Wahdat* following the collapse of the communist government in 1992, they increased the secular element in this Hazara umbrella organization. Far from being a purely fundamentalist religious party like the Lebanese Hizballah, the *Hezb e Wahdat* Party was increasingly becoming a vehicle for the empowerment of ethnic Hazaras to the exclusion of non-Hazara Shiis (such as the Wakhis of the Wakkhan Corridor, the Tajik-Farsiwan Shiis of Herat, or the Kizil Bashis in Kabul).

This ethnic component of the *Hezb e Wahdat* was to ensure that Afghanistan's most powerful Shii militia did not always walk in lockstep with its Iranian sponsors.³¹ In fact, the secular nature of the government that the *Hezb e Wahdat*

established in the Hazarajat disappointed Iran's *mullahs* who had called for Iranian-style theocracy.³²

That the Iranian sponsors ultimately chose to accept Hazara nationalist-secularist (and even Hazara ex-communist) elements in the *Hezb e Wahdat* party was a triumph of the Iranian pragmatists over the extremist hard-liners. By this time, the Iranian Foreign Ministry had given up on the idea of exporting the Islamic Revolution to Afghanistan. In the new climate, the Iranian realists were more concerned with simply making sure that the Hazaras were united enough to resist the Sunni *mujahideen* parties that were sponsored by their Saudi adversaries.³³

This rapprochement between the Iranians and nationalist-secularist-traditionalist elements among the Hazaras (many of whom strongly distrusted Tehran's motives) could not have come at a better time. As the Saudi-sponsored Sunni *mujahideen* moved on Kabul following the final collapse of the Afghan communist government in 1992, the Hazaras began to mobilize to defend their neighborhoods in western districts of the capital.³⁴

Their defensive posture was driven in part by the fact that such Pashtun *mujahideen* commanders as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar had openly proclaimed that the Hazara Shiis were *munfiqeen* (apostates). The Arab volunteers who fought alongside the Pashtun fundamentalists were even more extreme in their rejection of the Hazaras. These Saudi, Algerian, Yemeni, Sudanese, Egyptian, and Jordanian volunteers butchered Shiis whom they encountered when they marched into Kabul's suburbs.³⁵ Such blood letting portended an all-out war on the emboldened Shii Hazaras.

Much of this growing *ethnic* self-confidence came from the Hazaras' newly acquired weapons. By 1992, they had had over a decade to arm and train themselves for combat and were able to join the general battle for control of Kabul. Before the Pashtun fundamentalist *mujahideen* leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Arab allies could seize the capital, the Hazara communist militias that controlled the western suburbs gave this area to the *Hezb e Wahdat*. The Hazara fighters then joined the pro-communist forces of the Uzbek leader, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, and the Tajik *mujahideen* forces of Ahmad Shah Massoud, "The Lion of Panjsher," in repulsing Hekmatyar's Arab-Pashtun forces.³⁶

Thus began the Afghan Civil War that was to devastate Kabul from 1992 to 1996. This war started out as an alliance of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras against Hekmatyar's fundamentalist Pashtun faction. But events on the ground soon caused problems between the new allies. The alliance began to unravel when the Sunni *mujahideen* and Hazaras began to engage in tit-for-tat killings and kidnappings in western Kabul. This soon escalated into outright warfare. The anti-Hekmatyar partnership fractured when Massoud's Tajik fighters and the Pashtun forces of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf launched a campaign to conquer the Hazara-controlled districts of western Kabul.³⁷

In desperation, the Hazaras made a pact with the devil and decided to join forces with the Pashtun fundamentalist, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, to resist them. This new strategic alliance led to total war in western Kabul, an area inhabited predominantly by impoverished Hazaras. In the process, whole Hazara

neighborhoods that had survived the Soviet invasion intact were leveled in artillery bombardments.

The war on the Hazaras culminated in the slaughter of over 800 of their people by Massoud's and Sayyaf's forces in the Afshar District of western Kabul in February 1993. Scores of innocent Hazaras were hunted down and killed and Hazara women were systematically raped as *Hezb e Wahdat* forces were expelled from the Afshar District.

It was this massacre, more than anything else, which signaled the end of the efforts to construct civil society in post-communist Afghanistan and the beginning of a civil war.³⁸ This war had the effect of continuing the ethnicization of the *Hezb e Wahdat* even as the Hazaras continued to ritualistically commemorate their sense of Shii victimization.³⁹ For the Hazaras, those who died in the conflict of the 1990s were increasingly seen as national as well as religious martyrs.

Not surprisingly, the rise of the nationalist element in the *Hezb e Wahdat* led to a growing rift with Tehran. Many Hazaras grew to distrust the Iranians whom they accused of supporting the Tajik-dominated *mujahideen* government forces of Massoud. Iran, it seemed, had begun to replace its focus on "Shii solidarity" with a policy of sponsoring Afghanistan's most powerful force, the Dari-speaking Tajiks. In a sign of the times, Hazaras even captured an Iranian agent who had been sent by Tehran to assist Massoud's Tajik government forces in their war with the Hazaras.⁴⁰

As Hazara distrust for Iran grew, the *Hezb e Wahdat* leader Abdul Mazari put himself squarely on the side of Hazara nationalism as his people began to stress their ethnicity over their religious identity.⁴¹ To understand this transformation one needs to understand Mazari. Abdul Mazari hailed from Mazar i Sharif, a town located in the flat northern plains of Afghan Turkestan recognized as the holiest Shii shrine in Afghanistan.⁴² Drawn to the mysticism of Mazar i Sharif's famed blue mosque (which is said to house the uncorrupted body of Hazrat Ali), Mazari eventually traveled to Qum, Iran, and trained to be a cleric. He was later imprisoned by the Shah's police and, after his release, returned to his homeland to share Khomeini's message with his people.

When the communist revolution of 1978 took place, Mazari led the Hazaras in resisting the Afghan communists and the Soviets. During *Hezb e Wahdat*'s second congress, he was elected Secretary General and subsequently led his people in fighting to defend the Hazara community of Kabul from the Pashtun and Tajik *mujahideen* parties.

When a new messianic Pashtun-fundamentalist force known as the Taliban appeared on the scene in 1995, Mazari felt that this unknown factor may serve as a counterweight against Massoud and the government. In the hopes of establishing relations with the fast-approaching Taliban, Mazari went to meet their leaders after they appeared to the south of Kabul. So optimistic were the Hazaras that the Taliban would be their ally that they even arranged to have them take over their lines in western Kabul.

But the Taliban proved to be even more extreme in their anti-Shiism than the Sunni *mujahideen* parties had been.⁴³ Lest this message be lost on the Hazaras,

the Taliban broke the rules of Afghan *melmastia* (hospitality) and photographed themselves torturing Mazari. They then threw the Hazara leader to his death out of a helicopter over the southern province of Ghazni.

Grieving Hazaras later found his body and carried it in a procession across the mountains for burial in the north at the shrine of Ali in Mazar i Sharif. As with Muhammad Sadr (the father of Iraqi Shii leader Moqtada al Sadr who was killed by Saddam Hussein's Sunni security forces), the Hazaras created a cult of martyrdom around Mazari. His tomb is now a *ziyaret* (pilgrimage) shrine for thousands of Hazaras who pray at it while visiting the *Rowza* (tomb of Ali). Among other sayings, Mazari was famous for stating, "Our only wish for our people is that being a Hazara should no longer be a crime" and "No society can survive without equality, tolerance, social justice, and brotherhood." This lack of religious or millenarian messages on the Mazari posters, billboards, and calendars is testimony to the strong secular-nationalist character of the Hazaras. In this respect, Mazari is more of an *ethno-national* icon than a Sadr-style religious martyr.

Regardless of the long-term impact his death had on his people, Mazari's torture and execution sent an immediate message to the Hazaras. The Taliban Sunni maximalists were not interested in being allies with Hazara "Shii dogs." The Hazaras were now involved in a war for survival with a new militant Sunni movement whose leader, Mullah Omar, called himself the *Amir ul Mumineen*, the Commander of the Faithful. Tellingly, the last time a ruler calling himself *Amir ul Mumineen* had entered their lands had been in the nineteenth century when the "Iron Amir," Abdur Rahman, had brought fire and sword to Hazarajat and subjugated its people.

The fall of the Hazaras

As the black-turbaned Taliban armies began to overrun Hazara villages in the southern Hindu Kush, the Hazaras decided to bury the ax with their former Tajik enemy, Massoud, and join ranks against their common enemy. Their decision to do so came about in part as a result of Taliban repression against Hazaras, which began with the Taliban's conquest of Kabul in 1996. Hazaras living in the capital were, for example, forbidden from publicly celebrating such major Shii festivals as *Ashura*, their shrines and mosques were closed, and Hazaras who did not grow beards or wear burqas were arrested.⁴⁴

In response, the Hazaras joined Massoud's umbrella opposition group known as the United Islamic Front, or more colloquially, the Northern Alliance. In the subsequent battles with the Taliban, the Hazaras played a key role in the defense of the Hazarajat and northern plain city of Mazar i Sharif. By this time, Iran, which strongly opposed the Saudi-backed Taliban regime, had overcome its previous differences with the *Hezb e Wahdat* and stepped up its support.

Karim Khalili, the *Hezb e Wahdat's* new leader following the death of Mazari, however, downplayed Iran's support and claimed, "I do not believe we have Iranian weapons. ... We don't buy weapons from Iran and they don't give them to us either."⁴⁵

But Iran's support, acknowledged or not, did not equal that given to the Taliban by the Pakistani ISI, al Qaeda, and Saudi Wahhabi charities. As a result, the Taliban began to gradually push deeper into the Hazarajat and into the plains around Mazar i Sharif in the north. To the horror of Mazar i Sharif's large Hazara population, in the spring of 1997 the Taliban were able to break through the lines of allied Uzbek troops in the west and conquer the city. As the Taliban triumphantly entered Mazar i Sharif, they singled out Hazaras, whom they declared to be "non-Muslims," for disarmament.

Having gained religious freedom, political clout, and security with their weapons, the Hazaras were not, however, inclined to hand them over to the very enemy that had killed their leader under the flag of truce.⁴⁶ When ordered to turn over their guns, the *Hezb e Wahdat* fighters began to fight back. As the fighting escalated, they quickly turned the urban maze of Mazar i Sharif into a death trap for the Taliban. By nightfall, the Taliban had been routed by the Hazaras and thousands of them had been killed.⁴⁷ It was the Taliban's single greatest defeat prior to 2001's Operation Enduring Freedom, and it was to increase the bad blood between the Taliban and the Hazaras.⁴⁸

The Taliban vowed revenge and lost no time in obtaining it. By summer, the Taliban had launched a blockade of the Hazarajat region, and that winter thousands of Hazaras began to die from starvation. But worse was yet to come. When the Taliban subsequently retook Mazar i Sharif the following year, the Hazaras knew that they could expect no mercy. In this, they were not mistaken. Vengeful Taliban fighters poured into the city and began to slaughter anyone who did not know the Sunni prayers. They killed those Hazara *kafirs* (infidels) who were unfortunate enough to have Mongol complexions offhand. Thousands of Hazaras were reported to have been killed in what was described by *Human Rights Watch* as a "killing frenzy."⁴⁹ Among other pronouncements, the Taliban declared that "Hazaras are not Muslims. You can kill them. It is not a sin."

At this time Tehran stepped up its logistic support to the Hazaras and the Farsi-speaking Tajik members of Massoud's opposition party. A virtual air bridge was developed between Iran and Tajikistan whereby weapons, ammunition, petrol, spare parts, and funds were sent to keep the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance opposition alive.

That support, however, came too late for the Hazara component of the alliance. Soon after the fall of Mazar i Sharif, the Taliban broke the Hazara resistance at the Shibar Pass and swept into Bamiyan and the rest of the Hazarajat. After 20 years of autonomy, the Shii Hazaras were back under the control of the Sunni Pashtuns. Retaliation for their overthrow of their Pashtun-Sunni masters was not long in coming. As they had done in Mazar i Sharif, the victorious Taliban randomly killed thousands of Hazaras as they swept across the land. A particularly frightful massacre of hundreds of civilians subsequently took place when the Taliban reconquered the mountain village of Yakaolang.⁵⁰

In addition to mass killings, the Taliban commander, Mullah Dadullah ordered the destruction of thousands of Hazara homes.⁵¹ The marauding Taliban were in many ways a late twentieth century manifestation of Amir Abdur

Rahman's nineteenth century rampaging Pashtun holy warriors. Like their nineteenth century predecessors, the Taliban sent waves of refugees fleeing into the high mountains seeking sanctuary. One Western diplomat commented "The clock has been turned back 100 years to a time when the Hazaras were officially denied the most basic of human rights."⁵²

In the barren mountain peaks the refugees were organized by *Hezb e Wahdat* fighters led by Karim Khalili and "Ustad" (Teacher) Muhammad Mohaqiq, a popular *Hezb e Wahdat mujahideen* commander. While the Hazara rebels were outgunned by the Taliban, they were nonetheless able to create resistance pockets throughout the region. From these enclaves, they launched guerrilla raids on Taliban forces in the valleys and overran lightly guarded districts with the support of the local population.

But for all their success in creating distractive "fires" that relieved the pressure on the main Northern Alliance enclave defended by Massoud, the Hazaras had few prospects for liberating their homeland. Their forces were isolated and heavily outnumbered by the Pakistani-supported Taliban, which had an endless source of fighters in the Pakistani and Afghan-Pashtun tribal regions.

Thus, the Hazaras were condemned to wage an increasingly desperate struggle against a Taliban regime that seemed to be committed to forcing the Hazarajat back into the nineteenth century. They would probably still be suffering under this regime today were it not for the Taliban's al Qaeda "guests" attack on the United States on 11 September 2001 (9/11). It was this so-called "Holy Tuesday" attack that invited the wrath of the United States down on the Taliban regime and led to the unexpected liberation of the Hazaras.

The Hazaras 2001–present

In the aftermath of 9/11, U.S. Special Operations Command deployed small Special Force A-teams to the high mountains of the Hindu Kush to fight alongside the Hazaras against the Taliban. While the Iranian government officially came out against the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the Hazaras were much more pragmatic and joined the U.S. forces.⁵³ It was a great deal for both sides. The Hazaras would have the assistance of the world's most powerful air armada and elite U.S. special forces in fighting their enemies. In exchange, the Hazaras offered U.S. Central Command "boots on the ground" proxy fighters. Their assistance would be crucial since the United States had almost no ground forces in this inaccessible mountain region.

In late October 2001, the Hazara commanders Mohaqiq and Khalili met with members of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s Special Activities Division and planned a horse-mounted campaign. Operating under the overall command of the Uzbek rebel leader General Dostum, their forces quickly moved down the Dar y Suf Valley in the northern Hindu Kush and broke out onto the plains of Afghan Turkestan. This thrust was supported by small U.S. Special Force A-Teams that called down precision air strikes, including two Daisy Cutters (the world's largest non-nuclear bomb), on Taliban positions.

The combination of twenty-first century killing technology and medieval cavalry charges proved to be irresistible. By early November, the Hazaras and allied Uzbeks and Tajiks had exceeded all expectations and broken through Taliban lines outside Mazar i Sharif. On 9 November, they charged into the holy city itself and were greeted as liberators. The grateful people of Mazar i Sharif sacrificed sheep in celebration and gave prayers at the shrine of Ali in thanks.⁵⁴ The fall of the holy city of Mazar i Sharif deprived the Taliban of the mandate to rule Afghanistan and their regime began to fall apart soon thereafter like a house of cards.

As this important Shii shrine town fell to the Northern Alliance, Mohaqiq and Khalili moved on Bamiyan and destroyed the Taliban forces there as well. Momentum had now switched to the Northern Alliance rebels' side. By late November, the Hazarajat was free and the Taliban had withdrawn, burning Hazara houses and fields behind them.⁵⁵

As the smoke dissipated, the Hazaras looked to the West to help them find a new role in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Clearly the United States and its allies had supplanted Tehran as the main external force to help the Hazaras in achieving their goals. In this, the Hazaras were not initially disappointed. The new Afghan interim government cobbled together by the U.S.-led coalition in Bonn, Germany, in December 2001 was per force headed by a Pashtun. But the new Afghan-Pashtun leader, Hamid Karzai, proved to be a moderate who was more interested in co-opting the country's various ethnic constituencies than bludgeoning them into submission.

As part of his inclusionary policy, Karzai appointed *Hezb e Wahdat* leader, Karim Khalili, as his Vice President, and the Mazar i Sharif-based Hazara commander, Mohammad Mohaqiq, as his Planning Minister. He also appointed four other Hazaras to his cabinet, and numerous Hazaras have run for political positions in the new parliament. Mohammad Mohaqiq also came in third place in the December 2004 presidential election.

In a step that speaks volumes to the level of secularism and liberalism in the Hazara heartlands, President Karzai also made the bold move of appointing a Hazara woman, Habiba Sarabi, as governor of Bamiyan Province (she became Afghanistan's first female governor). While women were being executed for organizing women's groups in the Pashtun south, Sarabi represented her people's more tolerant views towards the role of women in society. When she arrived to assume her new post, she was greeted by village elders who declared, "Women have a long history as leaders in Islam. We are proud to have you overseeing our community."⁵⁶ Women are also serving in Bamiyan's police force, something unheard of in the conservative Pashtun south where women remain confined beneath the burqa when not at home.

Most Hazaras seem to accept the fact that their highest leaders wore the turbans of clerics during the war years, but a new generation of secularists will help lead them into the future. During the author's time in the Hazara lands, one found girls attending schools where secular topics were taught (this when many girls' schools were being burnt in the Pashtun south). One also found hospitality

and stability that was often absent in the conservative Pashtun frontier regions, as well as a general appreciation of coalition activities in the country.

But for all their gratitude to their new coalition partners, the Hazaras' lands appear to have been overlooked in the rush to develop Afghanistan. While driving on smooth tarmac roads from Kabul through the Tajik-dominated Shomali plain and across the Uzbek-dominated plains of Afghan Turkestan, the author found only dirt roads into the Hazarajat. In the winter months, these roads are impassable, and many communities remain cut off from the outside world. Although there were numerous foreign construction projects under way in the south and north, the author saw no such investment in the Hazarajat—average Hazaras believe they have been left out of development taking place elsewhere.⁵⁷

In Kabul, the author noticed Hazara television programming⁵⁸ and met with several educated middle-class Hazaras, but still noticed a tendency for Hazaras to be working in the lowest jobs imaginable for minimal wages. While many of Kabul's suburbs resemble mud-walled shantytowns, the Hazara neighborhoods are the worst. Such lack of material progress, when combined with unrealistic expectations, may lead to dissatisfaction in the future—especially if the coalition continues to focus its efforts on “winning hearts and minds” of the Pashtuns while forgetting those of the Hazaras.

The Hazaras' sense of victimization has certainly diminished considerably since the toppling of the Taliban regime, but they still have their grievances. In July 2003, for example, 47 Hazaras were killed and 65 wounded by Sunni militants who opened fire on their mosque in Quetta, Pakistan. In 2006, dozens of Hazaras were also injured when their *Ashura* procession was attacked by Sunnis in Herat, western Afghanistan. On 29 January 2009, the prominent Pakistani Hazara diasporic leader Husayn Ali Yousaf was also gunned down by Sunni extremists in the city of Quetta. His death shocked the relatively well-integrated Pakistani Hazara community.

But perhaps the greatest tragedy the Hazaras confronted was the 2007 killing of one of their greatest politicians, the 45-year-old Sayyid Mustafa Kazimi. Kazimi, one of the founding members of the *Hezb e Wahdat*, was considered to be a rising star among the new generation of secular Hazara leaders. For this reason, he was chosen by the United National Front, a political grouping of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, to be their spokesman. But Kazimi was killed in a suicide bombing in Baghlan, Afghanistan's deadliest bombing to date. Many analysts feel the attack was carried out by the Hazaras' old ally and enemy, the Pashtun insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁵⁹

In light of this sort of grievance, there are many outsiders who are inclined to see the Hazaras as a potential Iranian insurgent-proxy force. Any and all links to Iran, no matter how innocuous, are seen as proof that the Hazaras' old ties to Tehran mean they will join the Taliban-led insurgency.⁶⁰ The parallels to Iraq, where the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has been training and equipping Shii insurgents with everything from explosively formed penetrators (a deadly form of improvised explosive device) to rocket-propelled grenades, are obvious.

With over a million Hazaras living in Kabul suburbs like Karte Sei, Dasht e Barchi, and Chindawul, Iranian-backed Hazara insurgents could wreak havoc not just in the Hazarajat, but in the Afghan capital. United Press International (UPI) journalist Arnaud de Borchgrave captured these fears when he wrote of the Hazara-controlled sections of the capital, “the Shiite suburbs of Kabul are now under the control of Iranian or pro-Iranian agents.”⁶¹

Those who know the Hazaras and their long history of fighting against the very Taliban foe that the coalition is engaged with in the south provide a less alarmist analysis. Peter Maxwell, the senior United Nations official in Bamiyan, for example, knows the Hazaras well and has written, “Extremist and anti-government elements are not at all welcome here (in the Hazarajat). This has a very beneficial effect on all sorts of activities. People are eager to rebuild their lives, they support the government and they have no time for the kinds of extremism found in other areas.”⁶²

Coalition Provincial Reconstruction Teams consider their tours of duty in the Hazarajat to be a respite from military duty in the south, according to International Security and Assistance troops the author met with in 2007 and 2009. While their counterparts in the Pashtun south are dying in the hundreds fighting an increasingly bold Taliban insurgency, the coalition troops in the Hazarajat are greeted as liberators.

The coalition has recently tapped into this sentiment and have begun to deploy Hazaras as policemen in the unstable south, knowing full well that they will not collaborate with the Sunni Pashtun Taliban.⁶³ This, in turn, puts them up against Taliban insurgents who coalition commanders increasingly believe are receiving weapons and other support from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Al Quds force.⁶⁴ It certainly would not be the first time that Iranian pragmatism trumped its feelings of religious solidarity with the Hazaras.⁶⁵

For all their frustration with the lack of development in their lands, the Hazaras are unlikely to join an insurgency led by their bitter Taliban enemies. Clearly, the Hazaras are among the strongest supporters of the continuing coalition presence in Afghanistan. While Iran still has its cultural appeal, young Hazaras are more interested in learning English and traveling to the West than emulating the revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁶⁶ Others are resentful of their treatment by the Iranians who used their people's war refugees as guest workers, then expelled them in waves when it suited their interests.⁶⁷ While Iran is a vibrant country with a rich culture, relatively strong economy, and historic links to the Hazaras, this is no longer translated into the sort of religious and political influence seen in the 1980s.

Perhaps no one is better suited to capture the new spirit of the Hazaras, who have experienced tremendous transformations since the communist revolution of 1978, than Sima Samar. Samar, an outspoken Hazara women's rights activist, was appointed as Deputy President in Karzai's Interim Afghan government and then as Minister for Women's Affairs. Currently, she runs an aid organization known as *Shuhada* (Martyrs) and has become something of an unofficial ambassador for both Afghan women and her long-suffering people.

In a February 2005 interview with this recipient of the Kennedy Profile in Courage Award, Samar summed up her people's long journey from oppressed Afghan subrace to Iranian-supported ethnic militia, to a people that are helping their country build democracy. Her words likely capture the sentiments of the majority of her Hazara countrymen who are willing to defend their new found liberties not through Iranian-style militancy, but through the ballot box:

We have suffered for too long from the intrigues of outsiders. The U.S. and its allies set back Afghan women generations by sponsoring fundamentalist *mujahideen* in the 1980s. The Soviets tried to forcefully mold us in their image, but led us into the stone ages. Pakistan and Iran gave us weapons with strings attached to them and helped accelerate this process. Now it is time for us to build our own culture without outside interference. It is time for the fanatics and manipulators to let us live in peace. God willing we Hazaras and all people of Afghanistan will finally find peace in the new Afghanistan.⁶⁸

There is no more fitting testimony to the Hazaras' pro-coalition sentiment than the fact that the former U.S. First Lady, Laura Bush, chose the Hazara mountain city of Bamiyan as a destination for her first real foray outside Kabul in June 2008. There, she safely drove along the city's dirt roads past crowds of cheering Hazaras and met with women police officers, schoolgirls, and the governor, Mrs. Habiba Sarabi. During their meeting, Sarabi expressed her gratitude to the wife of former U.S. President George W. Bush for visiting her people and to her husband for assisting them in freeing themselves from the Taliban in 2001.

There are very few battle zones in Islamic Eurasia where the wife of former U.S. President Bush would have been given such a warm reception. The fact that Laura Bush was able to travel with such confidence among this Shii population is certainly unique. It speaks volumes to the failure of Tehran's project to turn the Hazaras into regional proxies in their struggles against their regional enemies, including the U.S. "Great Satan." While the Hazaras have been mobilized on an ethnic and religious basis by the tragic events of the last 30 years, they seem to be more interested in working with the U.S.-backed Karzai administration than in fighting it.

Like Governor Sarabi, the vast majority of Hazaras are clearly grateful to the United States and its allies for assisting them in ridding their lands of the Taliban. The Hazaras have no interests in such transnational issues as exporting the Islamic Revolution—they are concerned with rebuilding their own community. Such prominent Shii clerical groups as the Clergy Council of Bamiyan and top religious officials as Karim Khalili and Muhammad Mohaqiq have thrown their support by the U.S. efforts to rebuild their homeland. For the first time in centuries, the Hazaras seem to be on their way to full inclusion in their Afghan *baba watan* (fatherland). This has much to do with the coalition's efforts to build civil society, and they understand this. For all the failures of U.S. ambitions to export democracy in the Middle East, among the Hazaras of Afghanistan they

seem to have found willing partners who have put aside their notions of establishing a Shii theocracy in the mountains of the Hindu Kush and chosen to build the sort of civil society that the United States envisions.

Notes

- 1 Pamela Constable, "Hazaras May Play Key Role in Afghan Vote: Long-Oppressed Minority Is Wooed By Karzai, Others," *Washington Post*, 26 July 2009.
- 2 The Tajiks are Afghanistan's second largest ethnic group and represent approximately 25 percent of the country's population. The Pashtuns or Afghans are the country's largest ethnic group and make up roughly 40 percent of its population. The Uzbeks of Afghan Turkestan are the third largest ethnic community and make up roughly 10 percent of the population.
- 3 For photographs from this journey, see the author's website under "Field Research" (Afghanistan 2007) at: www.brianglynwilliams.com.
- 4 The name for the Afghan national airlines, Ariana, reflects the Afghans' Aryan origins and their national flag previously featured symbols from their legendary Aryan origins.
- 5 Most Hazaras are Imami or Twelver Shiis, although there are Ismaili communities found in the Shibar Pass and just north of the Hindu Kush and in the province of Baghlan.
- 6 While the Pashtun south has been devastated by suicide bombings which have killed thousands of civilians, the Hazaras have been spared the scourge of Taliban terrorism. This stands in stark contrast to Iraq, where Shiis are the main target for Sunni insurgent terrorism.
- 7 Most Hazaras do not identify with the struggles of Shiis beyond Iran. But the story of their rise from an impoverished "caste" to a major factor in Afghan politics has parallels to the rise of Lebanon's and Iraq's Shiis following the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon and the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq.
- 8 Ben Macintyre, *The Man Who Would Be King. The First American in Afghanistan* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004), 218. This source found that Hazara women went by the honorific of *agha* and played a major role in Hazara politics.
- 9 Hasan Kakar, *The Pacification of the Hazaras of Afghanistan* (New York: Afghanistan Council, 1973).
- 10 Far from being a destroyer of nations, the Soviets divided the Russian Empire up into ethnic-based administrative units and skillfully played these republics off against each other. The Afghan communists similarly sought to co-opt Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and other repressed ethnic groups in order to use them against the *mujahideen*.
- 11 Olivier Roy, *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1995), 95.
- 12 The communist garrison in Bamiyan held out until 1988.
- 13 The communists were content to let this mountainous zone remain autonomous while they focused their efforts on retaking the cities and major communication routes.
- 14 Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 220.
- 15 Prior to this, Hazara clerics had been sponsored by *khans*, who were the real power in the Hazarajat.
- 16 They were against the notion of rallying on the basis of Hazara ethnic identity, as some groups, most notably the *Tanzim-e Nasle Naw-e Hazara Moghul* (Organization of the New Generation of the Mongol Hazaras), tried to.
- 17 Humayun Sarabi, "Politics and Modern History of Hazara: Sectarian Politics in Afghanistan," Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy (MALD) Thesis, *The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University*, May 2005, 57.

- 18 Hafizullah. "Exporting Iran's Revolution."
- 19 Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 140.
- 20 Kristian Berg Harpviken, *Political Mobilization among the Hazara of Afghanistan (1978–1992)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Political Science, Department of Sociology, University of Oslo, May 1995.
- 21 While U.S. analysts were inclined to see the Afghan conflict in black and white terms, there were clearly deeper ethnic issues at play in Afghanistan that made this war gray. Pro-government "tribal militia" forces like Naderi's Ismailis were far more concerned with gaining weapons and autonomy vis-à-vis their Pashtun enemies than fighting the Soviet invaders.
- 22 Only the Tajik-dominated *Jamiat i Islam* party agreed that Jaffarite law should be applied to Hazaras and other Shiis as opposed to Sunni law. As will be shown, this was to lead to the exclusion of the Hazara party in the sharing process when the Pakistani-sponsored Sunni *mujahideen* parties seized the capital and overthrew the communist regime in 1992.
- 23 This reflected the tendency of Sunni Pashtuns in Northwest Pakistan, who had a history of attacking local Shiis.
- 24 The Iranian city of Qum served as the equivalent of Peshawar, Pakistan, for the Hazara *mujahideen* parties who trained, regrouped, and were indoctrinated in the city by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Some Shii groups were also trained and equipped in the Pakistani city of Quetta.
- 25 Roy, *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War*, 100. To cover their tracks, the Iranians did not ship weapons and supplies directly across the border to Afghanistan. Instead, they shipped them via Pakistan.
- 26 As in other regions, the Iranians were concerned with checking the influence of the Saudi Wahhabis in Afghanistan.
- 27 "Hizb i Wahdat. The Unity Party." *FAS Intelligence Resource Program*. www.fas.org/irp/world/para/hizbi_wahdat.htm.
- 28 Prior to this, there had been no real sense of Hazara nationalism among this people, who were divided by tribal and regional allegiances. When the Pashtuns conquered the Hazaras, they did not fight back as one, but instead were conquered piecemeal.
- 29 It should be stated that Afghanistan's ethnic, regional, and tribal groups did not develop full-blown nationalism of the sort that has haunted the Balkans. While the various groups did undergo ethnic mobilization in the 1980s and 1990s, local clan, village, or tribal affiliations are still much stronger than ties to rather vague, overarching notions of ethnicity or nationalism.
- 30 Grant M. Farr. "The Rise and Fall of an Indigenous Resistance Group: The Shura of the Hazarajat," *Afghanistan Studies Journal* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1988), 54.
- 31 The Mongol Hazaras complained that for all their revolutionary zeal, the Iranians identified with Afghanistan's Sunni Tajiks (who were considered East Iranians) on the basis of their shared "Aryan-Iranian" ethnic origins more than with the Hazaras. Hazaras proved to be particularly distrustful of Iran's support for their archenemy Ahmad Shah Massoud (a Dari-speaking Tajik leader).
- 32 In this, it also differed from Lebanese Hizballah, which places a much greater emphasis on religious mobilization and support for Iran.
- 33 From its formation the Saudi-Wahhabi state was strongly anti-Shii. In the nineteenth century, the Saudi *ikhwan* (Brotherhood) attacked Shii communities in Iraq. In return, Iran has bolstered Shii elements in Saudi Arabia.
- 34 While the *mujahideen* tried taking Kabul in 1989 following the Soviet withdrawal, they were repulsed with heavy losses. It was not until 1992 that the Afghan communist government collapsed, following the ending of its financial support from the Soviet Union.
- 35 Dore Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2003), 133.
- 36 The story of the formation of the Uzbek-dominated militia known as the Jumbesh under General Dostum has certain parallels with the case of the Hazaras. See Brian Glyn Williams, "Writing the Dostumname: Field Research With an Uzbek Warlord in Afghan Turkistan," *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1–2 (Fall 2007).
- 37 It has been theorized that Massoud may have attacked the Hazaras to refute rumors that he was on Iran's payroll.
- 38 At this stage Iran supported the Hazaras in their wars with the Tajik forces of Massoud and Rabbani.
- 39 It should be stated that the *Hezb e Wahdat* was involved in its own atrocities against Pashtuns and Tajiks in Kabul. Wahdat forces were accused of burning the bodies of prisoners in brickmaking furnaces and publicly executing others. "Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's Legacy of Impunity; Part III: The Battle for Kabul," *Human Rights Watch*, 2005. Available at http://hrw.org/reports/2005/afghanistan0605/4.htm#_Toc105552345.
- 40 Hafizullah Emadi, "The Hazaras and their Role in the Process of Political Transformation in Afghanistan," *Hazara House*. (Hazara online forum). Available at: http://boozers.fortunecity.com/jerusalem/47/Political_Role/political_role.html.
- 41 Today, Mazari is seen as the father of Hazara nationalism and is a member of their nationalist pantheon, which now extends back to Genghis Khan. For a typical website dedicated to Shaheed Baba Mazari (the Martyr Father Mazari) see: www.imhazara.20m.com/photo.html.
- 42 Afghan Shiis and Sunnis believe that the uncorrupted body of Husayn was carried to Mazar i Sharif on a white camel from Karbala, Iraq, to keep it from being defiled by his enemies. Today, the blue-domed tomb of Mazar i Sharif is a pilgrimage center for Hazaras who travel there every year to celebrate Nowruz (Persian New Year) and other festivals.
- 43 As mentioned previously, Hazara women were relatively empowered compared with Pashtun women. This process was accelerated by the fact that many Hazara women lived in Iran as refugees (where women were more liberated than in Afghan villages) or joined the communist party.
- 44 As ethnic Mongols, many Hazaras had difficulties in growing the mandatory fist-length beard required by the Taliban. Don Hill, "Ashura Preparations Call for Piety, Heightened Security in Iraq," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 18 February 2005.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 While the Taliban were a Sunni fundamentalist movement first and foremost, there was a Pashtun nationalist subtext to their actions that has been overlooked by outsiders.
- 47 The Uzbek leader Malik, who had originally betrayed the city to the Taliban, subsequently massacred hundreds of Taliban fighters.
- 48 At this time, the Hazaras also pushed the Taliban out of the mountains to the east of Bamiyan and launched a counteroffensive that brought them down the Shibar Pass.
- 49 "The Massacre in Mazar i Sharif," *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 10, No. 7 (November 1997). www.hrw.org/reports98/afghan/Afrepor0.htm. See also Michael Sheridan, *Sunday Times*, 1 November 1998.
- 50 "Massacre in Yakaolang," *Human Rights Watch*, January 2001. Available at www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/afghanistan/afghan101-03.htm#P126_15001.
- 51 "Ethnically-Motivated Abuses Against Civilians," *Human Rights Watch*, October 2001. Available at www.hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/afghan-bck1006.htm.
- 52 Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 193.
- 53 That said, Tehran did assist the United States by arresting several key al Qaeda operatives on its territory.
- 54 While the Hazaras have a strong presence in Mazar i Sharif, it has traditionally been ruled by Dostum's Uzbeks. Since 2001, however, the Tajik commander Ustad Atta has been the dominant leader in the city.

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For an account by a *New York Times* journalist who visited the area shortly after the Taliban's withdrawal, see Barry Bearak, "Where Buddhas Fell, Lives Too Lie in Ruin," *New York Times*, 9 December 2001.

Declan Walsh, "A First for Afghan Women: The Governor," *Guardian*, 26 April 2005.

A *National Geographic* reporter witnessed the same. See Philip Zabriskie, "The Outsiders," *National Geographic*, February 2008.

The popular musical talent show based on the U.S. version, *Afghan Idol*, now appears in Hazaragi as well as Dari and Pashtun.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was exiled by the Taliban but returned in the winter of 2001–02 to partake in the insurgency against the coalition.

The author found the same with Ismail Khan, Dostum, and Massoud's heir, Fahim Khan. All of these commanders have been accused of being "Iranian agents." Such sweeping accusations overlook the commentary by a Pakistani ISI agent who declared in frustration "You can rent an Afghan, but you can never own him."

"Afghanistan's Opium Tango," *UPI*, 15 March 2007.

Pamela Constable, "Out of Ruins, Afghan Group Builds Anew After Decades of Persecution," *Washington Post*, 24 August 2004.

Collin Freeze, "For Afghan Police, Staying Alive is the First Priority," *Globe and Mail*, 14 January 2008.

Brian Todd, "Coalition. Taliban Have Iran Arms," *CNN*, 31 May 2007; and Ron Synovitz, "Is Iran Sending Weapons to Afghanistan's Taliban?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 27 June 2007.

U.S. commanders believe that the Iranians are sending land mines, explosives, and weapons to the Taliban to help them destabilize the country and weaken U.S. influence. With U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran feels sandwiched between coalition forces it sees as competitors for influence in the region. For this reason, it may be trying to undermine the United States in Afghanistan as it has done in Iraq.

Conservative Hazara clerics have also thwarted efforts by Governor Sarabi to end the marriages of young girls and other "un-Islamic" innovations.

Alessandro Monsutti, *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 137.

Interview carried out at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, February 2005.