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Master's Thesis

**THE ROLE OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN AFGHAN-
CENTRAL ASIAN RELATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN AFGHAN – CENTRAL ASIAN RELATIONS

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The relationships between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian countries which are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, are mostly based on security issues which can be regarded as normal when the situation in the region primarily in Afghanistan is given. Nevertheless, the historical, cultural, and especially ethnical ties that Afghanistan and these three countries have been sharing can not be ignored when conducting a study about these countries; therefore, the relationship between these countries should not be centered only on security but also should focus on these historical, social, and ethnical links.

This study aims to elaborate on kin policy perspectives of the relationships between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian states. This research tries to examine the role of kin minorities in Afghanistan- Central Asian relations by digging into common histories, the region's multi-ethnic demographic structure, bilateral relations, and people-to-people connections by collecting quantitative data and conducting qualitative research methods with a comparative analysis.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Central Asia, Relationships of Afghanistan and Central Asia, Kin-state, Kin-minority, Kin-state policies

ÖZ

AFGAN- ORTA ASYA İLİŞKİLERİNDE ETNİK KÖKENİN ROLÜ ZEYNEP SABİR

Afganistan ve onun üç komşu Orta Asya ülkesi olan, Türkmenistan, Özbekistan ve Tacikistan, ile ilişkileri, başta Afganistandaki olaylar olmak üzere bölgedeki durum göz önüne alındığında normal sayılabilecek güvenlik meselelerine dayanmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, Afganistan ve bu üç ülkenin ortak tarihi, kültürel ve özellikle etnik bağları, bu ülkeler hakkında bir çalışma yapılırken göz ardı edilemez; bu nedenle, bu ülkeler arasındaki ilişki sadece güvenlik odaklı olmamalı, aynı zamanda bu tarihsel, sosyal ve etnik bağlara da odaklanılmalıdır.

Bu çalışma, Afganistan'ın ve komşu Orta Asya devletlerinin ilişkilerinin akraba politika perspektifinde daha ayrıntılı bir şekilde açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, akraba azınlıkların Afganistan-Orta Asya ilişkilerinde herhangi bir rolünün olup olmadığını; ortak tarihi, bölgenin çok etnikli demografik yapısını, hükümetler arası ilişkileri, ve halklar arası bağlantıları ele alarak, nicel veriler toplayarak, nitel araştırma yöntemlerini karşılaştırmalı bir analiz yürüterek, incelemeyi amaçlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afganistan, Orta Asya, Afganistan ve Orta Asya İlişkileri, Akraba Devlet, Akraba Azınlıklar, Akraba Devlet politikası

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Zeynep Sabır

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

NATO : The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

UN : United Nations

ISAF : International Security Assistance Force

NDN : Northern Distribution Network

GLOC : Ground Line of Communication

IR : International Relations

IMU : Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

OEF : Operation Enduring Freedom

TAPI : Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India

CASAREM : Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market Turkmenistan-

TAT : Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway

EUDiF : European Union Global Fund for Diaspora

USSR : Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CST : Collective Security Treaty

GUAM : Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova

EURASEC : Eurasian Economic Community

C5+1 : Central Asia + Afghanistan

UNODC : United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

CSIS : Centre for Strategic and International Studies

SCO : Shanghai Cooperation Organization

OIC : Organization of Islamic Cooperation

CAN : Centre for Naval Analyses

EU : European Union

UTO : United Tajik Opposition

OSCE: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

CSTO : Collective Security Treaty Organization

AKDN: Aga Khan Development Network

DABS : Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat

CASA-1000 : The Central Asia–South Asia 1000

TUTAP : The Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan–Tajikistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan

HAWT : Humanitarian Association of the World Turkmens

UNFPA : The UN Population Fund

USAID : US Agency for International Development

CIA : Central Intelligence Agency

NSP : National Solidarity Programme

CDC : Community Development Councils

WCTPS : World Congress of Tajiks and Persian Speakers

UNHCR : United Nations High Commisnone for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

The area encompassing today's Central Asian states and Afghanistan has a rich history, marked by the presence of numerous clans, states, and kingdoms. Moreover, it has been inhabited by humans since the early stages of human history, with evidence of human habitation dating back to the late Pleistocene Epoch, approximately 25,000 to 35,000 years ago. (Sinor, D., Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2013). In the contemporary context, Afghanistan and the Central Asian states may have a shared border, but their historical connection goes beyond a simple geographic demarcation. Even in times predating the conceptualization of borders or the establishment of these states, the inhabitants of these territories faced common challenges and shared struggles. Furthermore, there was a notable freedom of movement, allowing people to traverse these lands without encountering the restrictions that are associated with borders in the present day.

Consequently, the demographic makeup of the region is closely intertwined, characterized by numerous ethnic communities residing across different countries. To better comprehend this intricate interconnection, one can examine the ethnic affinities of these countries, with Afghanistan serving as a notable example of these interwoven ethnicities. For instance, Afghanistan hosts all three ethnic affinities—Turkmens, Uzbeks, and Tajiks—within its borders, and these same ethnic groups are also found in other Central Asian countries.

The relationship between a state and its minorities who are ethnically related to the citizens of that state, and who live abroad is defined as a kin state and kin minority. (Salihi, Emin, 2020, p. 298). Turkish communities in the Balkans can be a good example of kin minorities of Türkiye. The focus of this study is to examine the influence of kin minorities residing in Afghanistan on the bilateral relationships between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian countries: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The central debate revolves around gaining insights into the priorities of these neighboring states in managing their relationships with Afghanistan.

While reviewing the literature, we have found that there is a lack of information about these kin minorities' role in today's foreign affairs of the region's countries. The literature that had written about bilateral relations of Afghanistan with its neighboring Central Asian states was focused more in the security aspect, rather than kinship affinities. Even if they had mentioned the ethnicity it was merely briefly, besides they did not analyze the case through the kin-state-kin-minority lens. Nevertheless, we have focused more on the roles and impacts of kin

minorities in the policy-making of these states, besides we also analyze people's interactions between these countries and the perspectives that they have against each other.

In this research study, we try to analyze the role of kin minorities in bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian states that are; Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The main question of this study is; "What is the place of kin minorities in building bilateral relationships between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian states?"

While conducting our literature review, we used qualitative research methods with a comparative analysis, further we have collected some quantitative data that involves the collection of numerical data. Quantitative data collection is practical when examining; the demographic makeup of the countries, the proportion of kin minorities in Afghanistan, and the percentage of their relatives in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Additionally, it is beneficial for analyzing; the percentage of trade volume each country has with Afghanistan, and the percentage of drug trafficking across borders of Afghanistan and these three Central Asian states; these numerical data will give opportunity for better perspective and understanding of the situations going on in the region.

The research's sub-questions are;

- 1) How the region's multi-ethnic demographic structure and kin communities has been historically constructed?
- 2) How are the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian countries?
- 3) Do neighboring Central Asian countries have any kind of kin-state policy towards their kin minorities in Afghanistan?
- 4) Is there any kind of connection between the people of neighboring Central Asian states and Afghanistan?

This thesis will be introduced in the introduction section. The literature review, as well as conceptual and methodological framework, will be the main topics of the first chapter. In the second and third chapters of the study, we try to find an answer to the first sub-question. The second chapter will handle the historical events that have been constructed both Afghanistan's and Central Asian states' ethnic structure, history and more. This chapter will contain three different parts. In the first part, we will analyze the common history of Afghanistan and

Central Asia before the borders were formed, and the events that affected the ethnic structure of this region. In the second part, we will examine the factors affecting the ethnic structure of Central Asia with the Russian invasion. In the last part, we will examine the events that affected the ethnic structure of Afghanistan with the establishment of the country borders.

In the third chapter, Afghanistan's ethnic groups will be examined by their demographical, social, and political organizations within the country. The third chapter will be based on the demographical structure of Afghanistan and will analyze the ethnic affinities of the country to be able to illustrate the ethnic map of Afghanistan.

Further, the fourth chapter will focus on the second sub-question. Firstly, we will try to describe Turkmenistan's, Uzbekistan's, and Tajikistan's foreign policy doctrine, and analyze how their foreign policy is constructed, then we are going to seek and analyze bilateral relations of each neighboring Central Asian countries with the government of Afghanistan.

Last but not least, the last chapter of the study will analyze the third and fourth sub-questions of the study. "Do neighboring Central Asian countries have any kind of kin-state policy towards their kin minorities in Afghanistan?" and "Is there any kind of connection between the people of neighboring Central Asian states and Afghanistan?" These are the questions we will try to seek answers to in the last chapter of the study.

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows: at the moment, Central Asian countries' foreign policies towards Afghanistan are mostly focused on trade and security rather than paying attention to kin minorities. Furthermore, although there is support for kin minorities, it is not impactful in cautious and interest-oriented Central Asian's decision-making. In order to avoid being seen as actively encouraging ethnic interference, the surrounding Central Asian countries would prefer to leave the subject of national peace and reconciliation to the Afghans. Additionally, because of its multi-ethnic demographic makeup and separatist impulses, they would incur negative consequences.

I. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I.A. Literature Review

Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian countries, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistan, have shared mutual histories, cultures, ethnicities, and even languages. Therefore, one can think their relationship is on the best level; nevertheless, the case is different. Indeed, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have valid reasons to be cautious and are more exposed to potential challenges brought on by Afghanistan's fragile status. (Olcott, Martha Brill, 2010, p. 51). Their geographic proximity makes them more open to the spill-over effects of conflict and uncertainty. One of their biggest concerns is that Afghanistan's currently fragile security situation could deteriorate, and violence, extremism, and other security issues might increase. Instability and conflict in Afghanistan might likely spread to its neighboring countries, resulting in more cross-border violence, and an increase in flow of displaced people looking for protection. A situation like this could impose on the neighbors' infrastructure, governance processes, and resources, escalating current issues and establishing new ones. (Norber, Johan, Holmquist, Erika, 2014, p. 19).

Furthermore, Afghanistan's neighboring countries have concerns about the possible extend of radicalized groups and the cross-border opium trade, which continues to be a significant part of Afghanistan's economy. Afghanistan's stability would mean a boost to an environment of trust and mutual benefit, making footsteps for unusual cooperation and development in the region. In this way, Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asian countries would have the opportunity to build stronger economic and political relations, while also contributing their resources and expertise to support its progress toward stability and peace. Such cooperative efforts will be beneficial not only for Afghanistan but also will lead to broader prosperity and security in the entire Central Asian region. (Hamidzada, Humayun, Ponzio, Richard, 2019, p. 3-4).

Ivan Safranchuk (2017) argues that the neighboring Central Asian countries of Afghanistan face five significant security challenges that come from Afghanistan's side of the border:

- 1) Militant smuggling: Cross-border trafficking of weapons and illegal items by militants puts the security of the border nations at risk.

2) Extremist leakage: Secret entry of extremist elements from Afghanistan into neighboring countries raises concerns about potential terrorist activities and the recruitment of sympathizers.

3) Taliban aggression: The security and stability of the area are jeopardized by the Taliban's direct attacks on neighboring countries.

4) Disruptive refugee flows: Conflicts in Afghanistan would mean an flow of refugees into neighboring states, straining resources and potentially causing social and economic disruptions.

5) Indirect entanglement in the conflict: The Afghan conflict may include regional states and non-state actors through intermediaries, complicating the regional security situation. (Safranchuk, Ivan, 2017, p.7-11).

Further, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which had formerly performed intrusions into Tajikistan in 1999 and Kyrgyzstan in 2000, also, frightened Central Asian republics about the potential spillover of Afghanistan's ongoing unrest. Besides, Turkmenistan, and to some extent Uzbekistan, pursued a policy of seeking accommodation with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Therefore at first, the Central Asian governments held complex and conflicting behaviours toward Afghanistan before the military campaign in Afghanistan led initially by the United States and later by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). In the context of Afghanistan's complicated position before the military intervention, the Central Asian republics fundamentally had to strike a difficult balance between security concerns and the desire for economic prospects and regional collaboration. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p. 3).

From the perspective of these states, the conflict in Afghanistan presents two main security challenges: the trafficking of narcotics and, to a lesser degree, the presence of Islamist extremist groups. Even though there was security challenges that Central Asian states worry, these countries also have objectives, broader economic goals that includes Afghanistan, besides such as taking rent from the US and other NATO members in exchange for access to their bases and transportation infrastructure. All of these factors significantly influence how each country views and interprets the ongoing war in Afghanistan. (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p.3). Generally speaking, Central Asian nations have been cautious about deploying soldiers to Afghanistan because of; the potential for upsetting Russia, the possibility of reaction from the

Taliban and al Qaeda, and out of fear of becoming entangled in the country's conflict. Therefore, instead of getting directly involved militarily, they centered on deriving significant economic gains from these operations. That is why, in order to reduce their reliance on the Pakistan Ground Line of Communication (GLOC), they have supported the establishment of the new supply route for ISAF/NATO, known as the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). (Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, 2012, p. 40).

With the beginning of the United States "global war on terrorism," Central Asian countries quickly agreed to take part in the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and then joined ISAF (stands for the International Security Assistance Force) operations led by NATO in Afghanistan. As it aligned with their multi-vector foreign policy doctrines, they considered the unexpected interest shown in the region by the USA and its allies as a chance that might be wonderful for them both economically, and geopolitically, as they would be paid for using the region's infrastructure and transit. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p. 6). Further, Central Asian countries actively engaged with the post-Taliban administration and non-state actors in Afghanistan. As a result, there was an upsurge in both the legal and illegal trade of goods between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Moreover, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project, the Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM) project, and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan (TAT) railway; all of these significant economic initiatives were revitalized or proposed during this time. The region's economic cooperation, increased connectivity, and strategic positioning of Afghanistan as a regional transit center were all targeted to be strengthened through these initiatives. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 5).

The nation's vital crossroads for interregional relations and global interests lies in its strategic location in the middle of South Asia and Central Asia. Indeed, Afghanistan holds a significant geopolitical position in the twenty-first century and continues to be the focus of interest for both neighboring and international nations. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.). Further, according to Orhan Gafarlı; It is essential to fully address Afghanistan as Central Asia's top security concern, especially in the context of "third-world security." Afghanistan's significance in South West and Central Asia arises from its relationships with neighboring countries and its internal instability issues. (Gafarlı, Orhan, 2016, p. 128).

Furthermore, the literature seems to be a little weak when it comes to the impact of kin minorities in relationships between Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asian countries.

There are some scholars such as Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh (2012), or Joshua Foust (2010) who 'briefly' mention ethnic ties between these countries, and the effects of these groups on the bilateral relationships of Afghanistan with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh argues that while there may be support for ethnic affiliations, it has little bearing on the practical and cautious stance taken by Central Asian nations. They are careful enough to not let such connections heavily affect their decision-making, even though they may have some ties to and sympathies with those communities. Officially, Central Asian nations favor letting Afghans decide on the issue of national reconciliation in their own country. They refrain from actively intervening in ethnic matters, as they understand that overtly supporting separatist tendencies that might have negative impacts on their own stability and security. They take a careful stance because they are aware that interfering with Afghan politics on the basis of ethnicity runs the risk of escalating regional tensions and instability, which is something they want to avoid. (Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, 2012, p. 42). Besides, Joshua Foust's saying "None of this means ethnicity does not matter in each country's view of Afghanistan, merely that such concerns probably do not drive decision-making" (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p. 14), supports Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh's claim.

When we examine the foreign policy objectives of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, we come to a conclusion; these nations predominately concentrated on their 'national interest' when developing their foreign policy doctrines. For instance, Matteo Fumagalli (2007) claims in his paper titled "Ethnicity, State Formation, and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and Uzbeks Abroad" that the ruling elites in Uzbekistan have placed more emphasis on state-building within its own borders than on forming and strengthening ties with other co-ethnic groups. Nation-building and consolidating power and authority within its territories have been the primary concentration for the ruling elites of Uzbekistan. (Fumagalli, Matteo, 2007, p. 105). Likewise, Luca Anceschi (2010) argues that in the political development of post-Soviet Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan governments, a significant signature is the imposition of nationalist narratives from the top down. Foreign policy has been given an important role in nation-building efforts and have become an essential component of the "institutionalized" identities that the leaders of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are promoting in these conditions. (Anceschi, Luca, 2010, p. 146).

Turkmenistan follows a policy doctrine called 'positive neutrality' while conducting foreign policies. The neutrality policy of the Turkmenistan government has its foundation on several fundamental principles, including promoting good neighborly relations, seeking mutual

understanding, embracing a naturally peaceful approach, refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, abstaining from participation in military alliances and blocs, and resolving international issues through diplomatic and political methods. These guiding principles help the Turkmen administration's actions in international relations and contribute to its on-alignment and neutrality. (Rahmanov, Amangeldi, 2022, p. 138).

According to Dina Rome Spechler and Martin C. Spechler (2010), Uzbekistan's foreign strategy aimed at ensuring stability in its territories, and making its authoritarian government potentially secure. The authors assert that an essential aspect of achieving this objective has been to prevent unwanted interventions or pressures from external actors. This approach has been acknowledged and pursued for a considerable period. (Spechler, Dina Rome, Spechler, Martin C., 2010, p. 159). During the Karimov period, multi-vectorism emerged as the cornerstone of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The nation sought to conserve its independence while maintaining harmonious ties with major global power centers like Russia, China, and the United States. Even under the presidency of Karimov's successor, Uzbekistan continues to employ the multi-vector foreign policy approach that was established during Karimov's reign. (Kelkitli, Fatma Asli, 20202, p. 26-27).

The Tajik administration's foreign policy doctrine depends on a multi-vector strategy, similar to the Uzbek government, concentrated on having balanced relations with several actors, including China, Russia, the United States, and various Muslim countries. Alexey Malashenko and Aziz Niyazi (2014), claim that by cooperating with several partners, Tajikistan seeks to improve its diplomatic and economic opportunities while avoiding over-reliance on any single country or bloc. Since the start of Rahmon's leadership, this approach has been beneficial and successfully implemented. Additionally, Tajikistan is able to successfully navigate the complexity of international relations and defend its national interests using this technique. (Malashenko, Alexey, Niyazi, Aziz, 2014, p.17). Tajikistan's multi-vector approach is observable in its relations with other countries. For instance, at first, Tajikistan appeared to be the most committed to Russia's regional objectives. Despite this, Tajikistan has engaged with the United States since 9/11, receiving over \$1 billion in aid from the USA. In addition, Rahmon permitted USA forces and the coalition to use Tajik airspace and airfields. Besides, Tajikistan's relations with Iran also are strengthening, and China has become the country's largest foreign investor. All of these are illustrations of the multi-vector approach of the country. (McClean, Wayne, 2015, p. 254).

Additionally, when it comes to kin minority and kin state policies of Central Asia, academic literature lacks sufficient comparative research on the kin state policies implemented by Central Asian nations. Amina Urpekova (2022) claims that the majority of these specialized investigations occur in the context of analysing emigration from Central Asian nations and in the building of profiles for the region, often under the supervision of various international organizations. (Urpekova, Amina, 2022, p. 44). Furthermore, although there is support for kin minorities, it is not impactful. The work authored by Olivier Ferrando (2009) stands out as one of the very few studies that examine the connections between Central Asian nations and their ethnic minority populations. Ferrando's work can be regarded as special in its investigation of diaspora strategies of cautious and interest-oriented Central Asian countries. Ferrando (2009) argues that his work's purpose is to examine the 'diasporisation' of Central Asian countries. In his study, he investigates whether diasporic strategies exist in Central Asian republics or not. (Ferrando, Olivier, 2009, p. 43).

Likewise, a report commissioned by the European Union Global Fund for Diaspora (EUDiF) in 2021, can be considered relevant to Central Asian kin-state policies; the study highlights several challenges that restricts the progress of diaspora policies in Central Asia. These challenges can be listed as follows: the different terminology used by authorities, the absence of laws that regulate interactions among diasporas, political structure insufficiency, an absence of understanding of the diasporas' dynamics, separation cases within diasporas, and the need to foster trust between immigrant populations and institutions of government. (Tittel-Mosser, F., 2021). The currently available literature on these topics is generally somewhat narrow in scope, and much of the research on kin minorities adopts a diaspora viewpoint.

On top of that, even though some studies concentrate on Central Asian states and the related minorities within them, most of this research centered on Uzbekistan and its minorities abroad. Matteo Fumagalli's study (2007) named "Ethnicity, state formation, and foreign policy: Uzbekistan and Uzbeks Abroad" or "Uzbek Communities in Central Asia as Human Connectivity Factor: Elements for a Kin-State Policy" by Fabrizio Vielmini (2021) can be a good illustration of this claim. Nevertheless, even in these works minorities living in Afghanistan were excluded.

To sum up, this literature review highlights the literature about the bilateral relationships between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian countries mainly concentrates on; the risk of spillover, drug smuggling, and direct conflict with the Taliban. Furthermore, this

literature review also tries to analyze studies that focus on the foreign policy doctrines of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan for a better understanding of their policies toward Afghanistan. Moreover, Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asian countries have been sharing historical, cultural, and ethnic ties. Despite this, the effects of kin minorities on their relationships have not been examined adequately in the studies. Even though some scholars point out the ethnicity card, they did not analyze them through kin-minority-kin-state relations. Besides, even though some studies underline diaspora policies of Central Asian countries, kin minorities in Afghanistan have been neglected. As a result, further research has to be required to assess the effects of kin minorities on intergovernmental relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian nations.

Establishing a conceptual framework for understanding kin minorities and kin states is crucial to underline the role of these ethnic affiliations in bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The next section of this study will try to give a conceptual framework for kin minorities and kin states by exploring the meanings of these terms.

I.B. Conceptual Framework: Kin minority – Kin State

The common understanding of a kin group is a group of individuals related by blood or marriage. Historically, this definition included families, extended families, bands, clans, and tribes. A more specific term employed by social scientists refers to individuals with similar backgrounds who have social, political, and economic links based on kinships derived from genetics, shared cultural heritages, and common interests. Although they are frequently minorities where they live, many communities maintain ties to their places of origin. (Sheffer, Gabriel, 2023).

At approximately the same time as minority rights were acknowledged, the idea of guaranteeing the protection of kin minorities developed. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there has already been a strong sense of religious community. The Peace Treaty of Karlowac stands out as the first international treaty to incorporate measures for preserving minorities. It was signed in 1699 by the Turkish sultan, the Polish king, and the Austrian emperor. This agreement permitted the Polish king and the Austrian emperor to act in a protective capacity on behalf of Roman Catholics living under Turkish rule. (Halász, Iván, 2006, p. 255).

According to Kristin Haugevik (2019), the concept of kinship remains surprisingly unexplored in International Relations (IR) scholarship despite the frequent mention of family and kin in academic, journalistic, and political discussions concerning inter-state relations. In the field of studying international relations, the role of kinship has not been examined analytically within the discipline of IR. She furthers her argument by claiming that because neo-realists and liberalists' major ideologies mostly centered on material causes in understanding inter-state cooperation and partnerships, references to kinship are frequently absent from discussions of inter-state relations within IR theory. Because of this, the significance of kinship, which encompasses more immaterial and cultural factors, is sometimes disregarded or underestimated in these theoretical arguments. For instance, Kenneth Waltz, who is known as the founder and leading figure of neorealism, also known as structural realism, in his book named; "Theory of International Politics", even though, mentioned briefly the terms of the family, and kinship groups as relevant elements in international political relations, he does not provide in-depth explanations about these concepts. (Haugevik, Kristin, 2019).

Emin Salihi (2020) argues that when examining the role of kinship ties in foreign policy-making, the concept of identity comes to the forefront. Constructivism and realism theories are used in the literature on international relations to analyze the connection between identity and foreign policy. While instrumentalization is an essential part of realism with its approach to the identity issue. According to this, states do not act based on emotional reflexes; rather, when it comes to their interests, they build partnerships with kin communities based on shared interests. Constructivism is the most common theoretical framework among academics studying international relations, with 24.4% of academics worldwide, plus, specifically in Türkiye, considering identity as a determining factor in foreign policy interests. (Salihi, Emin, 2020, p. 299). According to constructivists, who argue that there is an interaction between identity and interests, based on their social identities, states act in a way that is consistent with their predicted interests. Constructivists emphasize the significance of identities in explaining the behavior of states in international relations. (Karakaş, Kübra, 2022, p. 3).

However, within the constructivist theory, there seems to be a division. In some studies, state identity has been emphasized, while in others, national identity takes precedence. Wendt contends that when examining foreign policy, it is significant to keep in mind that a state's identity does not take into account its leaders' ideologies or cultural makeup. However, Kal Holsti critiques Wendt and incorporates national identity into the research. According to

Holsti, when states first enter into socialization in the international system, they do so with a certain identity. Therefore, internal factors and national identity are crucial in determining interests and foreign policy. (Salihi, Emin, 2020, p. 298).

In general understanding, the term “kin-state” means a country that represents the dominant nation of an ethnic group that lives across borders. Kin-states actively foster connections with members of this ethnic group, driven by shared cultural and national ties, and they also assume responsibility for safeguarding and maintaining the well-being of their external kin. The rise of distinct kin-state literature has been closely connected to the changes occurring in post-communist Europe and the former Soviet Union. It has emerged as a response to the need for appropriate analytical tools to understand these transformations effectively. (Waterbury, Myra A., 2020, p. 799-800).

Myra A. Waterbury (2020) argues that, when it comes to conceptualizing kin-state policies, the first conceptual frameworks that come to scholars’ minds are as follows: the concepts of irredentism and external state support for secessionist groups. (Waterbury, Myra A., 2020, p. 800). While secession refers to the act of challenging the authority of the parent state by seeking to exclude the parent state's jurisdiction from a claimed territory, without attempting to overthrow the government or alter the state's administration through revolutionary means. (Brown, Ed, 2020). Irredentism involves a country making political or territorial claims over a region in another country with shared ethnic or historical ties. This claim aims to regain or annex territories believed to have cultural or ethnic connections to the claiming state. What differentiates irredentism from secession is that unlike secession, irredentism is the process through which a section of an existing state splits off and joins another. (Ambrosio, Thomas, 2022).

Myron Weiner (1971) in his work named ‘The Macedonian Syndrome: An Historical Model of International Relations and Political Development’ demonstrates how states could get involved in conflict over a transborder ethnic group. The study placed particular emphasis on the interaction between kin-state irredentist ambitions and the marginalization of minorities. He draws 16 scenarios that he calls characteristics, in which cases transborder ethnic groups can lead states to engage in conflicts. He asserts that; “... we are dealing with a system of states in which the actions of one actor affect the actions of another, and that external actions affect and are affected by internal political development.” “....interconnection between the internal development of states and their interactions with their neighbors and with the great

powers and, perhaps even more importantly, to alert us to expect what so often appears to be (and often is) irrational and self-destructive behavior " (Weiner, Myron, 1971, p. 670-683).

Nevertheless, other concepts are not focused on destructive aspects to frame kin policies. For example, Özker Kocadal (2016), in his study named 'A Conceptual Typology of Kin State Mediation' argues that kin states can have significant involvement in international mediation efforts that concern their kin minorities. He continues by saying that although there is a possibility that kin states might favor their kin, they may actively take part in mediation attempts, and outside mediators may even encourage this kind of participation. (Kocadal, Özker, 2016, p. 172). This study demonstrates that not every kin state may pursue irredentism or comparable actions but may have a peace-making role.

Stephen M. Saideman and R. William Ayres (2008), authors of 'Kin or Country: Xenophobia, Nationalism, and War', give six different countries that are Hungary, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Armenia, and Croatia, as an example for kin- state acts. They argue that while the last three were more aggressive in their kin state policies, the first three were not much active. Their question was why some states follow irredentism and why some states do not. According to the authors, irredentism is more likely to occur if the kin state's content of the nation also includes those kin minorities who live in "lost territories" and who have a political connection with their kin states. However, if the kin state's "nation" content only includes those people who live in their territories and distinguishes kin minorities from domestic "us," or kin minorities who have no political connections with their kin states, it is less likely that irredentism will occur. (Saideman, Stephen M., Ayres, R. William, 2008, p. 23).

Further, diaspora politics and transnationalism were other concepts that scholars used to conceptualize kin-state policies; Szabolcs Pogonyi's article (2015) named 'Transborder Kin-minority as Symbolic Resource in Hungary' can be a good illustration of this claim. In his study, he argues that with modern day technological tools engaging kin minorities with their homeland becomes easier. Diasporas and kin minorities will be able to actively participate in the social lives of their homeland thanks to the internet, satellites, and a variety of other modern communication instruments that reduce geographic distance. Moreover, he claims that transnational engagement has far-reaching impacts, affecting individuals' sense of belonging and identification, as well as, their involvement in transnational politics and economics. Diasporas and expatriates, remaining closely connected to their homelands through modern communication, can leverage their dual status effectively, leading to the

initiation of lucrative business ventures. "Middleman diasporas" have played active roles in two directions. On one hand, they have been involved in importing goods and ideas from their homelands and have acted as magnets for chain migration. On the other hand, overseas diasporas have also been engaged in the reverse direction, contributing significantly to the economic development of their homelands through investments, remittances, and knowledge transfer. In certain instances, diasporas have demanded political rights, aiming to become stakeholders and exert influence on decision-making processes. Hence, the growing grassroots transnational engagement has motivated governments to intervene and establish regulations to further mobilize and involve diasporas in homeland affairs. (Pogonyi, Szabolcs, 2015, p. 74-75).

Nevertheless, there is a difference between diasporas and kin minorities; unlike migrant diasporas, which form gradually and voluntarily, external kin communities are a result of borders shifting across populations. Besides, in the context of relationships between kin states and "stranded minorities" across borders, the use of diaspora terminology is not common. Migrant diasporas are geographically dispersed, and their members often retain the citizenship of their country of origin, especially in the first generation. (Waterbury, Myra A., 2010, p. 132).

To sum up, conceptualizing kin-state policies can differ from perspective to perspective, and from case to case, we should be aware that kin policies can produce either irredentism or peace, it depends on many factors. Indeed, it is essential to evaluate and assess the actions of kin states based on the consequences they have on kin communities, inter-group relations, the nature of kin-state governments, and regional stability. Balancing these prerogatives requires further research to gain a clearer understanding of the security-related impact of kin-state politics and its potential to exacerbate or mediate conflicts within and between states. (Waterbury, Myra A., 2020, p. 805-806). The next section of the study will cover the methodological framework that will be conducted in this research.

I.C. Methodological Framework

This research aims to examine the role of kin minorities in the relationships between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian countries. Further, this study adopts qualitative research with a comparative analysis. Besides, we have collected some quantitative data that involves the collection of numerical data. Quantitative data collection is practical when examining the demographic makeup of the countries, the proportion of kin minorities in

Afghanistan, and the percentage of their relatives in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Additionally, it is beneficial for analyzing; the percentage of trade volume each country has with Afghanistan, and the percentage of drug trafficking across borders of Afghanistan and these three Central Asian states; these numerical data will give opportunity for better perspective and understanding of the situations going on in the region.

Qualitative research collects non-numerical data, such as; text, images, and audio. It emphasizes the exploration of subjective experiences, viewpoints, and attitudes, frequently achieved through methods like observation and interviews. Bilgen Kırıl (2020) argues that documents have been significant elements in qualitative research for many years. Types of documents include books, letters, magazines, journals, diaries, maps, charts, statistics, constitutions and regulations, legal texts, newspapers, photographs, memoirs, interviews, school records, health and public records, images, videos, messages, and more. Thus, document analysis is a qualitative data analysis method. This method aims to derive meaning by examining data obtained from written or visual documents. Such analysis helps develop a profound understanding by considering elements such as; content, themes, language usage, symbols, and visuals within the documents. (Kırıl, Bilgen, 2020, p. 171-173). This study has benefitted from documents, such as interviews, maps, and videos. This type of data collection helps to gain a more profound comprehension of the countries, regions, and people. Further, comparative analysis involves delineating and elucidating the resemblances and disparities in circumstances or outcomes across the broad spectrum of social entities, such as regions, countries, societies, and cultures. (Shahrokh, Zohreh Dehdashti, Miri, Seyed Mojtaba, 2019, p. 1).

Moreover, regarding the impact of kin minorities in bilateral relations of Afghanistan with neighboring Central Asian states, the available information is limited, thus, further research about the issue has to be done. Further, the structured interviews, which have been done with Afghan Turkmen, are one of the main aspects that make this study original. The interviews were structured due to individuals' concerns about their authoritarian governments. When approached for interviews, they were apprehensive about the study; however, sending the questions in advance helped alleviate their worries, leading to a more relaxed atmosphere. Besides, the interviewees were chosen using convenience sampling, due to time and cost limitations. Convenience sampling is a sampling technique that relies solely on using the first primary data source that is accessible for the investigation. In a convenience sample, respondents are chosen without regard to any predetermined inclusion criteria. Everyone is

allowed to take part. Simply said, this sampling method involves gathering people from anywhere they can be found, usually choosing handy locations. (Dorofeev, S., Grant, P., 2006, p. 41-42).

The utilization of online virtual interviews as a primary data collection tool has been embraced for various purposes. First and foremost, the interviews were conducted with Afghan Turkmen who live in Afghanistan, due to the restricted time frame allotted for this master's research necessitated the exploration of innovative and alternative approaches to data collection to improve the accessibility of primary data within the field. The interviews took place spanning a duration of four months, starting from February 2023 and concluding in June 2023. Second, this study was conducted amidst the exceptional global health circumstances that emerged during the onset of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Lastly, due to Taliban's rule in the country made it hard to travel to Afghanistan, particularly since I am a woman.

All in all, the research context significantly shapes the selection of data collection methods. Factors including global health conditions, the restricted research timeline, the resurgence of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and my identity as a female researcher were the primary motivations for adopting online interviews as a substitute for in-person interviews. This approach was chosen to facilitate access to Afghan Turkmen within Afghanistan and to effectively gather the necessary data. Moreover, even though I, as an Afghan Turkmen, am an insider, finding participants was hard since Afghan Turkmen lives in an authoritarian regime and they had their prejudices about such interviews. Besides, there are a good number of people who knows both Turkmenistan and Afghanistan very well that we have succeeded to reach; nevertheless, they were not ready to do interviews to not capture the attention of both state governments.

On top of that, online interviews also present difficulties when compared to in-person interviews the internet provides a narrower scope for establishing trust with participants. It also offers limited room for contextual and personalized interaction, resulting in a decrease in the quality of collected data. Further, the quality of the internet was also not good for voice calls; instead, we used applications such as Whatsapp, Instagram, and Facebook, we sent the questions of interviews and they sent their replies. Some of the interviewees did not know how to read and write in this case family members helped them to respond; this can be seen as a limitation of the fieldwork. Nevertheless, it was the only way to do interviews, since most of

the elderly Afghan Turkmens, especially women, did not have a basic education in reading or writing.

The next chapter of the study will examine the regions, that expand to today's Afghan and Central Asian territories, and demographical structure; and will try to answer the question; “How the region’s multi-ethnic demographic structure has been historically constructed?”



II. HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF KIN MINORITIES IN THE AFGHAN-CENTRAL ASIAN SPACE

The region that includes today's Afghanistan and Central Asia (Central Asia is a region that compensates five post-Soviet states including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and lastly Kazakhstan), has faced lots of historical events that have historically shaped Afghanistan's and Central Asian states' ethnic structure. Throughout history, various khanates, kingdoms, and states were established and were destroyed, and many different societies, and ethnicities, were lived in the region. Before colonization come to Central Asia, the region was a massive and unrestricted area that extended from Russia to British India, and from eastern China to Persia. The people's dispersion and the development of kin minorities were affected by various reasons. One of the reasons for formation of kin minorities was the Russian invasion of Central Asia in the 19th century. People that lives within the territories that Russian empire invade, and their ethnic brethrens left across the boundary were divided by the emergence of interstate borders with China, Afghanistan, and Iran. Numerous Tajiks and Uzbeks who stayed in or fled to Afghanistan, as well as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in China, were affected by it. (Ferrando, Olivier, 2009, p. 42).

Another reason was creation of five different nationality as a result of the Soviet ethnic policy. The Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Tajiks were among five indigenous peoples elevated to the status of "nationalities" and given national republics. (Ferrando, Olivier, 2009, p. 42). The region separated into five nation-states and with these the national identities that has never been existed before, had emerged. Since people of the region had named either 'Turks' or 'Persian', there were no identities such as 'Kazakh' or 'Kyrgyz', they were merely names of Turkic tribes that lived in the region. (Jonathan, Levin, 2017, p. 266). With the disintegration of USSR, these five nations became five independent states, and once again, the establishment of interstate borders between newly independent states' separated those who resided within the each new state borders from their ethnic cousins who had remained on the other side.

Further, in order to examine factors that led to emergence of the kin minorities in detail, this chapter will handle the historical events that have been constructed both Afghanistan's and Central Asian states' ethnic structure, history and more. (In this research study, we are going to use the term Central Asia to reflect three neighboring countries of Afghanistan which are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). This chapter will contain three different parts. In

the first part, we will analyze the common history of Afghanistan and Central Asia before the borders were formed, and the events that affected the ethnic structure of this region. In the second part, we will examine the factors affecting the ethnic structure of Central Asia with the Russian invasion. In the last part, we will examine the events that affected the ethnic structure of Afghanistan with the establishment of the country borders.

II.A. Formation of Regional Ethnic Structure From Antiquity To 1700s

First and foremost, the region that compensates what we know as Central Asia and Afghanistan, is one of the ancient lands that human beings start to live from the very beginnings of human history that date back about 25,000-35,000 years ago. (Sinor, D., Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021). Besides, what makes the region is not only its antiquity but also its location, since Central Asia and its beyond bind the East to the West and has become a crossroads for the people of Eurasia. (Duarte, Paulo, 2014, p.). Moreover, the region that shapes nowadays modern Afghanistan and the Central Asian States was on the ancient trade roads such as (the most important ones) Great Silk Road. Afghanistan shares a long border with Central Asian countries which are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The border that Afghanistan shares with Tajikistan is 1,344 kilometers long, while the length of the borders of Afghanistan with Turkmenistan is 744 kilometers, lastly, the border length with Uzbekistan is 137 kilometers. (Forbes, Stratford, 2013).

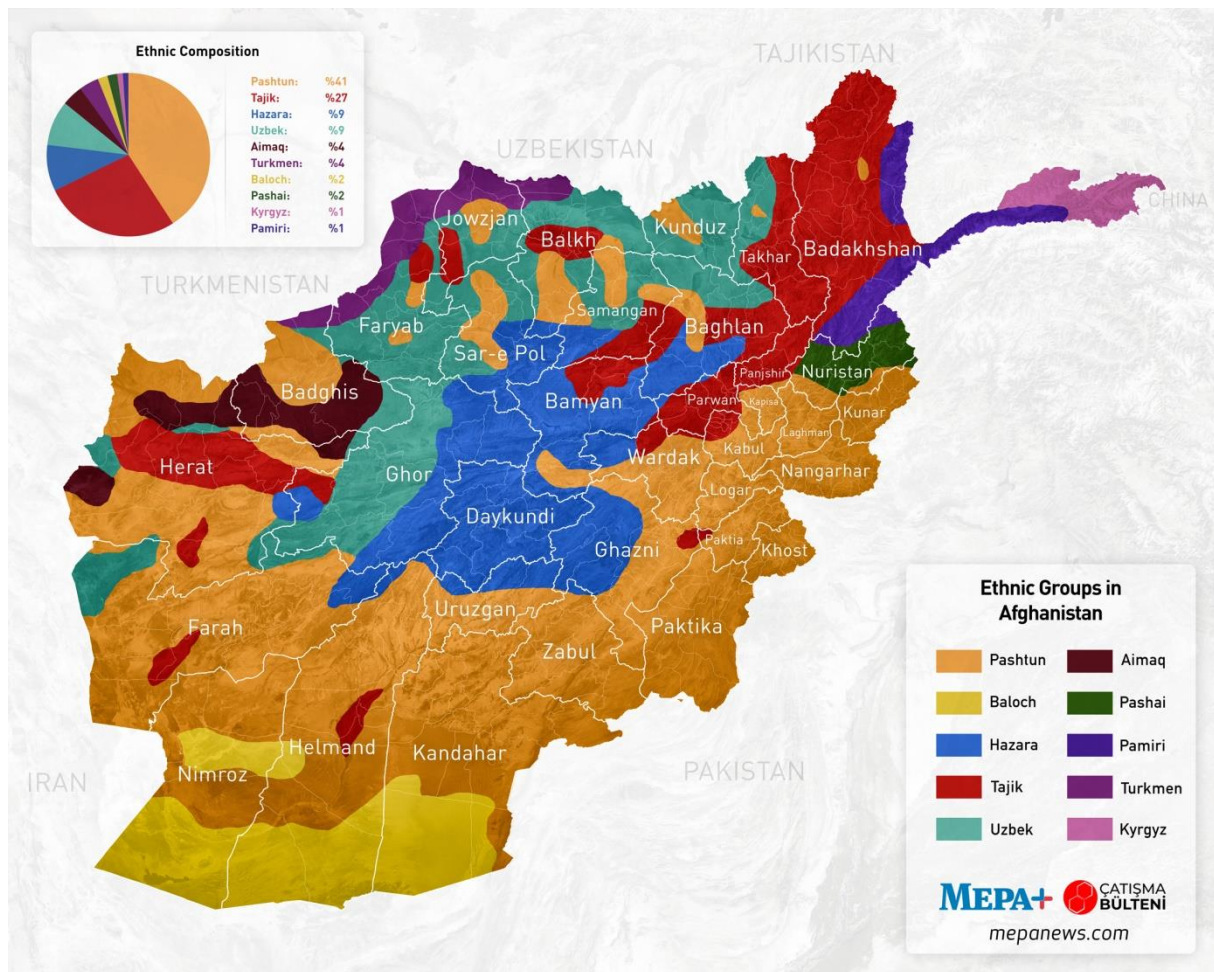
Nevertheless, these borders between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian states were not formed naturally and were not based on any ethnical or national ground, on the contrary, we could say it was the product of 19th centuries of imperial competition between Russia and Great Britain, since the borders that were drawn and made Russian- Afghan border of the time according to an agreement that was in 1895 between these two imperial powers, remains. (Abdullayev, Kamoludin, 2018, p. 65).

This chapter aims to illustrate how Afghanistan's and Central Asian people were/are related to each other not merely geographically, but also ethnically and linguistically, Central Asian countries, especially neighboring ones, are bound to Afghanistan by links of history, ethnicity, language, and culture.



Map 1. ; Ethnic Map of Central Asia

Source; Stratford



Map 2. ; Ethnic Map of Afghanistan

Source; Media Politic Analysis News (MEPA News) 2019.

As Map 1. and Map 2. illustrates the ethnic division across the region both in Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, it also proves the claim that was given above about the shared kinship between the nations of both Central Asia and Afghanistan. Indeed, the area which comprising today's modern states of Central Asia and Afghanistan was, at various times, part of a single state or empire. The common history of Afghanistan and Central Asia has seen states and empires that were built in the region that includes both of Afghanistan and Central Asia, like “ Bactria, the Old Persian Achaemenid Empire, the Empire of Alexander the Great, Greco-Bactrian kingdom, Kushan Empire, Persian Sassanian Empire, Hephthalite Empire, The Turkic Khaganate, Arab Caliphate, the Samanid state, Kara-Khanid Khanate, Ghaznavids and Khwarazmian dynasties, the empires of Genghis Khan and Emir Timur, Chagatai Khanate, Moghulistan, and Timurids” (Syzykova, Zhibek S., Kadyrbaev Aleksandr S., Mikhaylova, Natalia V., 2020, p. 1-2).

Individuals who have shared the same ethnolinguistic background now live within the territories of both Afghanistan and Central Asia. Afghanistan has lots of different ethnicities within itself and some of them such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen can be related to their co-ethnics across the border, for instance, Tajiks, who are ethnically related to Tajikistan's Tajik people, live in Afghanistan compensate about 30% of the population (Ahmad, Ayaz, 2018, p. 221). The Turkmen, Tajik, and Uzbek populations of Afghanistan are concentrated primarily in the northern part of the country that has borders with Central Asian countries.

According to the reading named "Nations of Afghanistan and Central Asia" (2020), the joint history of diverse ethnoses of Afghanistan and Central Asia can be traced back to the II millennium BC; the study had stipulate that their common history can be associated with the ancient Iranian tribes that have been named "Aryan and Indo-Aryan", the reading claims that "Aryans were belonged to the Indo-European linguistic and cultural community and became isolated at this time in the steppes of Central Asia, where they became known as representatives of the archaeological Andronovo culture" (Syzdykova, Zhibek S., Kadyrbaev Aleksandr S., Mikhaylova, Natalia V., 2020, p. 3). In addition, Shahista Wahab and Barry Youngerman contribute to this fact in their book named 'A Brief History of Afghanistan', they also assert that the origin people of the region were Indo-Aryan or Aryan people that emerged in the region around 2000 – 1500 BC. (Wahab, Shahista and Youngerman, Barry, 2007, p. 36-37).

According to the paper about the detailed history of the region released on 'historyfiles.co.uk'; from the very beginning of documented history about Central Asia, it is known that the region's population was Iranian or by another name Aryan people. (The History Files, n.d.). Three ancient groups were identified as inhabitants of Central Asia and the steppe, one of them was Saka. The Saka people were described as Schyrtians in the Old Iranian inscriptions that also gave the same information about several groups who lived in the region, which three. (Sinor, D, Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021). Therefore, these findings led us to assume that at the very beginning of history, the settlers in the region were Iranian.

However, the appearance of Turks in the region during the sixth century led to a drastic change in the demography of the region. The new settlers of Central Asia; the Turks were nomads and ruled the whole Eurasian steppe for three centuries. (Manz, Beatrice F., 1994, p. 5). The first group who had left written documents in the region was the Turks. The

inscriptions were named 'Orhon Inscriptions'. They are important for historians since it illustrates the times history and language. (Sinor, D, Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021). The expansion of the Turks in the region began in the 6th century, and following the Gokturk Empire, Turkic tribes instantly spread across all of Central Asia. The Uighurs, a Turkic speaker group, were one of many distinct cultural groups brought together by the trade of the Silk Route at Turfan in Chinese Central Asia. The Uighurs, primarily pastoral nomads, observed several religions including Manichaeism and they introduce it to the Chinese people. (Rossabi, Morris, 2023).

In the 8th century, Islam began to preponderate in the region and the early Arab Empire started to gain control over some parts of Central Asia. The Chinese influence was also expelled from western Central Asia with the Arab invasion. Both Afghanistan and Central Asian people were converted to Islam during certain historical eras as a result of the Arab conquest of the 7th and 8th centuries, even though the Islamization of Central Asia ended before Afghanistan's Islamization. (Syzykova, Zhibek S., Kadyrbaev Aleksandr S., Mikhaylova, Natalia V., 2020, p. 2). The region became very important for both the Islamic states of the Umayyad Empire (661-750) and the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258) both economically and militarily. Conversions into Islam made a way possible for the Arab-Islamic way of life in the region. The real reason for such large-scale conversions to Islam is still unknown, yet some cultural adaptations like allowing reciting Quran in Persian in Samarkand and Bukhara, made it possible for the people to understand the messages of Islamic thought. Plus, the Abbasid Dynasty's way of governance in the region which was semi-autonomy also helped engage of region's people in Islam. (Islam, Arshad, 2016, p. 315).

The region was almost independent under the Dynasty of Abbasid (750-1258) since they had followed a policy of autonomy in the provincial areas that was accelerated by Harun al-Rashid, making a way for the semi-independent Muslim dynasties which includes the Tahirids (821-873), the Saffarids (861-1003) and the Samanids (874-999). (Islam, Arshad, 2016, p. 315). The common history of Afghanistan and Central Asia has seen empires and states that were built regions that shaped the history and ethnical structure of both Afghanistan and Central Asia. Plus one of them was Ghaznavi Empire which was built by Sabuktigin. (Syzykova, Zhibek S., Kadyrbaev Aleksandr S., Mikhaylova, Natalia V., 2020, p. 6).

The Ghaznavids which were a Muslim and Persianated, Turkic origin dynasty, expanded their control from the region that covers today's Afghanistan, to larger parts of Iran, Uzbekistan,

Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, and northwest of India in the years of 977 – 1186. (Bosworth, C. Edmund, Encyclopedia Iranica, 2001). The Ghaznavids were the first important Muslim power in Central Asia, and they spread Islam in the region, especially in India. (New World Encyclopedia, 2017). Later, just before the Mongol invasion of Central Asia and its steppe, Muslims were disunited. In the 12th century with the disintegration of the Seljuq governance in the region, the Abbasid's power resurges from its ashes and another local power which was the Khwarezmi dynasty rise. The two power's hostility against each other started when Khwarezmi's ruler -Shah Ala-ad-Din Muhammad II, did not want to obey the Abbasid Khalifet (Islam, Arshad, 2016, p. 316).

The Mongols were the next group that gained control over the region in the 13th century. Mongols led by Genghis Khan were the next invaders of the Afghanistan and lands of Central Asia. Plus, the Mongol invasion of the region was very important for the region's history, since it led to a change in the course of Islamic history in the region. (Islam, Arshad, 2016, p. 317) Moreover, with the appearance of the Mongols in the region, the evolution of government, society, and legitimation systems of the region started and remained in force until the 19th century. (Manz, Beatrice F., 1994, p. 5). One of the important consequences of the Mongol invasion was the appearance of Hazaras in the region especially in Afghanistan (one of the ethnic entities of Afghanistan that is believed to compensate %10 of Afghanistan's population and have Shiite- Ismaili Mazhab of Islam. (Syzdykova, Zhibek S., Kadyrbaev Aleksandr S., Mikhaylova, Natalia V., 2020, p. 7).

Further, another significant development throughout history for the Afghans and Central Asian people plus eventually for the region was the appearance of the Timurid Empire (1405-1507), which made the region that consists nowadays Afghanistan the center of the culture throughout Central Asia. During the Timurid Empire time, Herat (now it is one of the important provinces of Afghanistan) became the center of trade of crafts, culture, and art. In the 16th century, Afghanistan was under the control of Turkic Tribes who came from Central Asia. (Syzdykova, Zhibek S., Kadyrbaev Aleksandr S. , Mikhaylova, Natalia V., 2020, p. 7).

The Uzbek conquest of Transoxiana (the term Transoxiana is used to refer to a region that is located between the Amu River also known as 'Oxus River') can be regarded as another crucial and turning point in the history of the region. The origin homelands of Uzbeks as a tribal unity is traced back to the north of the Aral Sea, eastern regions of the Golden Horde (also called Kipchak Khanate). The Uzbeks began to unify under a descendant of Chingiz

Khan, whose name was Abu'l-Khayr Khan. They had started to threaten and interfere in the affairs of the Timurid dynasty in Transoxiana. (The History Files, n.d.).

Muhammad Shaybani, who was the grandson of Abu'l-Khayr Khan, took control of Khwarazm's (another name Khorezm, or Chorasmia, is the historic region along the Amu Darya (which also called Oxus River in Greek), in the territories of present-day Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.) territory that includes Samarkand and basins of Amu Darya and Syr Darya. (Sinor, D, Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021). Besides he took control of the Herat in 1507. The rising Uzbek population alongside both Syr and Amu Darya can be regarded as a demonstration of the significance of Uzbek's rule over the region since his rule had altered the course of the history and demography of Central Asia. (The History Files, n.d.).

While, Uzbek tribes took control of the region that compensates today's Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and North of Afghanistan. Babur Shah, a descendant of both Timur and Chingiz Khan, made his way toward Kabul and took control of the region in 1504 by establishing Mughal Empire that lasted until the mid-19th century in eastern Afghanistan and southern Hindukush. From that time the next 200 years there was a contention between the Mughal Empire and Safavids over the Afghanistan's lands and the region was parceled between the two power. (Sinor, D, Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021). However with the death of Nadir Shah, the Shah of Safavids, Ahmed Shah Durrani took control over the region that made possible the emergence of an Afghan Empire in the region in the 1700s, plus from that time the name 'Afghanistan' has been started to be used. (The History Files, n.d.).

With these developments, Afghanistan's fate was divided into Central Asia which was invaded by Russians. In the next section the division of Central Asia, and the formation of the demographical structure of the region will be discussed.

II.B. The Division Of Central Asia Under Russian Rule: The Birth of The Contemporary Kin Minorities

Being a region that was the crossroads of important trade routes and that links East to the West, Central Asia throughout its history was always been under the control of different powers and was a battlefield for all of them. Undoubtedly, Russian rule first under Tzarist Russia and later under Soviet Russia can be regarded as one of the most remarkable and

extent one both in terms of time and effect. The change that Russian rule brought to the region can be seen in the forms of political structure; the region once had a political structure that consisted of tribal and clan organizations that changed into a political structure that has nation-states. The region separated into five nation-states and with these the national identities that has never been existed before, had emerged. Since people of the region had named either 'Turks' or 'Persian', there were no identities such as 'Kazakh' or 'Kyrgyz', they were merely names of Turkic tribes that lived in the region. (Jonathan, Levin, 2017, p. 266).

Furthermore, with the government supported/forced migrations of Slavic people into the region, the demography of the region changed. The Tzarist Russia made lots of reforms and support migrations of Russian people into the region, plus during the Soviet rule, thousands of Turkic workers were taken from their region and sent to other parts of the USSR, in the same way, thousands of Russian and other non-Russian nations were sent to the Central Asia as 'expert workers' for economic and industrial excuses. Nevertheless, the main purpose of this migration movement, which has been continued for years, was political rather than economic, and this policy aimed to bring non-Russian nations together in one spot and destroy their feelings of nationality because the common communication and education language which people who come across with different languages and cultures could use in these artificial cosmopolitan regions was Russian. These people, who lost their language, in this way, would lose their nationality and would have merely a Soviet identity. (Güneş, Yasemin, 2011, p. 40).

The first contacts of the Russians to the region were made in the territories of Kazakhs, plus the recorded diplomatic contact between Kazakh and Russian people was as early as the 1570s-1590s, following the Russian invasion of Siberia and annexation of Kazan and Astrakhan. Nevertheless, these contacts did not resume again until the 1700s, since the Russian ruler wanted to make claims over the Kazakh region. (Khodarkovsky, Michael, 2004, p. 147).

The Russian control over the region had begun in 1730 with the Russian overlordship to the Kazakh tribes that had been ruled by Abu'l Khayr Khan. (Islamov, Bakhtiar, n.d.) The Kazakh leader's aim was not any kind of annexation or overlordship, rather what he sought was assistance from Russia, while Russia saw it as an opportunity to extend its power. (Sabol, Steven, 2013, p. 29) Moreover, the Russian Empire's slow, yet progressive spread into the regions of Kazakh steppes had demonstrated itself in different kinds, from direct annexation of lands to the settlement of Russian people to the region by claiming 'cultivation of non-

possessed lands'. Besides, at the beginning of the 19th century, Russian Empire had started its claims on the lands of Kazakh tribes and behaved as if the lands were their colonies. (Zhussipbek, Galym, 2017, p. 12).

Russian Empire's intervention in the lands of middle and southern Central Asia took place in the years of 1860s and 1880s. At that time there were three tribal states in the region; Bukhara Emirate, Khanates of Khiva, and Khanates of Kokand, and were fighting with each other as well as with Iran and Kazakhs. Hence, no power could play a dominant role in the region which made it possible for the Russian Empire to conquest and annex the region. Furthermore, the slave trade that was led by the three states, specifically led by Khanates of Khiva, made the justification for Russian conquest, since the first Russian Empire attempted to intervene in the region with the excuse of saving Russian origins people from the slave trade. The Russian Empire just saw a resistance from Turkmen tribes, that made the conquest of the region of Turkmen tribes, today's Turkmenistan, a bit harder than others which ended in 1885. (Zhussipbek, Galym, 2017, p. 13-14).

Obviously, with the Russian rule in the region, the 'free-ride' and 'stateless' times of Central Asia had ended. The new ruler of the region had initiated government structure in the region and made political, structural, and cultural changes in the region (Sabol, Steven, 2013, p. 32). In addition, the emergence of Russian rule in the region caused the unification of various clans, and tribes into much bigger groups that would make the foundations of modern nation-states of Central Asia that played a significant part in the nation-building in the region. (Abdulaev, Kamoludin, 2018, p. 71)

In 1916, an uprising occurred against the Russian regime in the region. Even though the trigger of the rebellion was the enrollment of men for the Tzarist army to serve in the First World War, the uprising had its roots much deeper. The colonial policies of the regime, especially in the organization of fertile lands, in the region can be seen as the main reason for the uprising. (Morrison, Alexander, 2016).

Starting from the 1917 Revolution until 1920, different groups that had tried to gain autonomy, emerged in the region. The emergence of the Kazakh 'Alas Orda' government and the multi-ethnic Kokand government was the product of that time, while already existing khanates of Khiva and Bukhara had been trying to protect their semi-independent status. (Sinor, D, Allworth, Edward, Smith, David Roger, and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021).

Conversely, all attempts to gain autonomy during the civil war between Tzarists and Bolsheviks had been crushed. The short-lived Kokand government had lost to Soviet Russia, while the Kazakh's Alas Orda organization did hang up until 1927-1928. (Yardımoğlu, Sacit, 2013, p. 27). When the USSR's direct intervention started to intensify, all the leaders of the organization were etiquette as 'bourgeoise nationalists', and all groups that were regarded as bourgeois and nationalists were attacked and dispersed. (Sarmış, Nurcan, 2016, p. 65).

In the region of Transoxiana, the situation was not far from the Kazakh steppes, The Red Army of the USSR had annexed Bukhara, and put an end to the sovereignty of the Bukharan Emirate, in 1920. Even though the resistance against Soviet Russian rule over the region remained until 1928, eventually, the Soviet regime could exert control over the whole region. (Yardımoğlu, Sacit, 2013, p. 27). Soviet Russia was the successor of the Russian Empire; nevertheless, there were differences in their way of governance in the region. According to, Galym Zhussipbek the Soviet times in Central Asia's history can be regarded as the time of enormous 'social engineering' reforms.

The projects initiated by the Soviet-Russian regime aimed to create 'modern people and modern society' in Central Asia. The project of modernizing drove the region into a transition that includes; "Soviet nationality policy and the administrative division of the region; Soviet cultural policy, including state atheism; sedentarization and collectivization; industrialization and urbanization." (Zhussipbek, Galym, 2017, p. 25). Moreover, to bring such changes and to create 'Soviet man' in the region, intense efforts have been made to install the Russian language and culture, and the use of local languages in public places had been restricted by bringing the principle of using the Russian language almost everywhere.(Sarmis, Nurcan, 2016, p. 72).

Even more, since Islam has been one of the main driving and unifying force for the resistance (such as the Basmachi Movement and the Jadid movement) against Russian rule in the region, the USSR had attacked Islam with its strict policies of state atheism. Besides, as has already been mentioned above, the migrations that were forced by the state policies in the region made a huge altering in the course of Central Asia's both history and demography.

In summary, during both Tzarist and Soviet Russian rule, confusion about identity has been created in the minds of Central Asian people whose lifestyle was changed all in terms of economically, socially, and politically. Central Asia was under the Russian role for over a

hundred years, from 1860 until the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. The five nation-states of the region gained their independence after that. (Duarte, Paulo, 2014, p.).

II.C. Historical Formation Of Ethnic Structure in Afghanistan (1700S- 1999)

Afghanistan, similar to Central Asian countries, with its significant location on the map of the world, was home to many states and empires and was a crossroad for trade roads. Furthermore, Afghanistan is a landlocked country without any coast. Its neighbors are Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and lastly China with a shorter border at the narrow Wakhan corridor. (Dupree, N. , Hatch, Weinbaum, Marvin G., Ali, Mohammad , Allchin, Frank Raymond , Dupree, Louis and Petrov, Victor P, 2023).

From Alexander the Great to Ghaznavi's Mahmud, and from Mongol power to Mungul's Babur Shah and Persian ruler Nadir Shah, the lands of the modern state of Afghanistan had witnessed lots of rulers until the emergence of Ahmad Shah Abdali (a commander of Nadir Shah) who united Pashtun tribes and built Durrani Dynasty and took control of the region that includes today's Afghanistan. Ahmed Shah Abdali (Durrani) was regarded as the founder of Afghanistan since with his rule the nation's shape started to appear. (The History Files, n.d.; Nationsonline, 2017).

Afghanistan because of its location and its ancient history, which starts with old human settling, was home to many tribes, clans, and kingdoms throughout history. That is why; it has lot kinds of ethnicities in itself and is a multi-ethnic country. In this chapter of the study, Afghanistan's ethnic and demographic structure will be the main topic and we are going to analyze it. Afghanistan's demographic map is a patchwork of its located region, she shares ethnic and linguistic similarities with her neighbors, therefore, we can say that when it comes to ethnicity, Afghanistan is a minor reflection of Central Asia and its beyond where Iran, Pakistan, and as well as Afghanistan herself is located.

Obviously, in 1747, Afghanistan was founded on the ruins of empires like Moghul, Uzbeks, and Persian; hence we can say that even from its foundation Afghanistan had a multi-ethnic composition. Besides its boundaries, certainly, the one that she shares with the Central Asian countries right now, was imposed on the region's people by the colonial powers of that time Russia and Great Britain and it was a result of geopolitical struggles between them. Moreover, the consequence of this power struggle led to the construction of artificial boundaries between those people who had shared the same ethnic and linguistic traits, and it was clear to say that

this boundary had not any ethnic foundation and has been built as an ‘engineering project’ of the two colonial powers. (Hyman, Anthony, 2002).

In Afghanistan’s case, the historical process and its location had a huge impact on the construction of the country. Afghan history is portrayed by the historians of the country as very old that can reach to ancient times, whereas, Afghanistan as a modern state manner is regarded as the product of modern history since the border that covers and lines contemporary Afghanistan had been made artificially as late as 19th century by colonial powers. (Schetter, Conrad, 2005, p. 4). In addition, with the leadership of Ahmad Shah, Afghan rule with the support of tribal leaders in the region had managed to control enormous parts of the region that compensate lands from Meshed to Kashmir, from the Amu Darya to the Arabian Sea. Besides, the rule over such a tremendous land made Durrani Dynasty one of the big ones in size, precisely the second one after the Ottoman Empire, Muslim Empire in the 18th century. (Dupree, N. , Hatch, Weinbaum, Marvin G., Ali, Mohammad , Allchin, Frank Raymond , Dupree, Louis and Petrov, Victor P, 2023).

While Russians were slowly but progressively invading the steppes of Central Asia, the lands of Afghanistan had become a ‘buffer zone’ between Russians and the British. The power struggle between these two imperial powers in the region led to an agreement between themselves about the creation of a borderline between Afghan lands and Central Asia. According to this agreement, there would be an “Afghan buffer” between the sphere of influence of the two imperial powers. (Abdulaev, Kamoludin, 2018, p. 65). This agreement shaped today’s borders between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian states, a border that is not focused on kin ties but only focuses on imperial powers' goals. Furthermore, the northern borders of Afghanistan was not the only one built artificially by the colonial powers. The Durand Line that divide Afghanistan and British India of the time also was a project and was not grounded in any kind of ethnic or linguistic founds. (Barthorp, Michael, 1982, p. 176).

In addition to these influences over the nation-building of Afghanistan, migration flows, which made another tremendous impact on the demography of the country and its beyond, across both Afghanistan and the whole region also took place due to clashes between local powers of the region as well as between great powers. Moreover, with the support of the British the newly built state of Afghanistan, started to conquer the neighboring khanates of Balkh, Herat, and Shibirgan, and the consequence of this expansion was the migration of

people. For instance, the Tashkurgan region had twelve thousand inhabitants before Afghans came; nevertheless, Afghan settlement in the region made people flee and diminished the population of the region to seven thousand. (Abdullaev, Kamoluddin, 2018, p. 66).

On top of that, internal policies that Afghan rulers put into effect also shaped the demographical structure of the country. Between 1880 and 1901, there were fewer Pashtuns in the northern regions. After assuming power in 1880, Abdur Rahman initiated a process that has been described in various terms such as ‘internal imperialism,’ ‘interior colonization,’ ‘Afghanization’ ‘Pashtun colonization,’ and ‘Pashtunization’ (Bleuer, Christian, 2012, p. 70) From Abdur Rahman's ascent to power until 1979, nearly every Afghan ruler pursued a policy of seeking to create a more uniform population in Afghanistan. This effort often referred to as “Pashtunization,” involved the utilization of Pashtun nationalist ideology, land appropriation, discriminatory taxation practices, and compelled resettlement that favored the Pashtuns. (Shahrani, M. Nazari, 2000, n.p.). As part of the ‘Pashtunization or Pashtun colonization process in the region, the Afghan state used land confiscation, forced resettlement of people, discriminatory taxation policies in favor of the Pashtuns, and lastly, Pashtun nationalist ideology. (Aslanov, Gafferberg, Kisliakov, Zadykhina, and Vasilyeva, 1969, p. 74).

Indeed, all this migration flows across the region shaped Afghanistan’s demography as a multi-ethnic state, however, it was not the only effect on the country’s demography, since there was a translocality between the people of Central Asia and its beyond that includes Afghanistan, people could have moved freely within their ethnocultural and tribal areas before the Russian invasion of Central Asia and before Great Britain’s interruptions, hence, these movements also helped to shape the ethnic map of Central Asia and eventually the ethnic map of Afghanistan. (Abdullaev, Kamoluddin, 2018, p.70).

To sum up, all the information we had given above, from the very beginning of history people that live in the region of present-day Afghanistan and its located region were free from any kind of boundaries, hence it made the region a multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic demography, however, with the limitations that came with Anglo-Russian power struggle this freedom had been restricted. Besides, again with the Russian- British interventions and in-capabilities of the local powers, such as the Khanate of Khiva of Bukhara Emirate, people with common ethnic and linguistic tribes were divided by the borders established by those powers for their goals without considering ethnicity.

All in all, with the information given above the picture of the region's history, illustrates the events that shaped the demographic structure of Afghanistan which makes the country unique and important to study and explore. The ethno-culture and historical wealth of Afghanistan's people can be regarded as the backbone of the country's history. Since we had mentioned how come Afghanistan has a multi-ethnic structure, now it is time to introduce, explain and analyze the ethnicities that Afghanistan has in itself and their places in the country.



III. ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND KIN STRUCTURES IN AFGHANISTAN

As already explained and analyzed in the former chapter, Afghanistan has a multi-ethnic structure within itself; in the national anthem of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan that was approved in May of 2006, 14 ethnic groups were recognized. These are listed like this; Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Arabs, Balochis, Nooristanis, Pamiris, Gujars, Brahuis, Qizilbash, Aimaq, and Pashai. Nevertheless, the percentage of these groups is not the same and some groups are dominant both in the population percentage plus in the politics. (Qazi, Abdullah, 2018). In this chapter of the study, Afghanistan's ethnic groups and their demographical, social, and political organizations will be analyzed. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Turkmens, will be the main groups that are going to be examined, other groups will be gathered under the 'Others' title.

III.A. Pashtuns: Demography, Social And Political Organisation

The most populous group of ethnicities that Afghanistan has are the Pashtuns of in other names Pushtan, Paktun, or Pathan. The origins of the Pashtuns or where they came from is precisely not clear. Most scholars believe that their origin can be traced back to the ancient Aryans, whereas Pashtun tradition claims that their origins were related to Afghana, the grandson of King Saul of Israel. (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023).

Further, they have been the most powerful ones in political manners. They ruled the country almost throughout its all history with a few brief interferences during Tajik Habibullah Khan's brief rule in 1929, Mujaddidi's rule in 1992, and Rabbani's in 1996. The majority of the Pashtuns are located more in the eastern and southern parts of the country, while they can be seen in all other parts of the country because of the 'Pashtunization' policies that started during Amir Abdur Rahman's time. Their language is Pashtu, but almost all of them can speak Dari (Afghan Persian). The majority of the Pashtun group is Muslim and are following the 'Sunni sect of Islam. In the contemporary population of Afghanistan, it is estimated that 42% of the population has Pashtun ethnic background. They also named 'Afghans' and Afghanistan as the 'lands of Afghans' which means 'lands of Pashtuns' Nevertheless, now with the guarantee of Afghanistan's constitution the term 'Afghan' cover all ethnic groups of the country. As already mentioned above that some groups share the same ethnicity with their neighboring countries, Pashtuns are one of these groups, after the formation of the Durand Line between Afghanistan and British India in 1893, a significant number of the Pashtuns

stayed on the other side of the borders and became a part of British India where now Pakistan is located. (Ahmad, Ayaz, 2018, p. 220).

It was estimated that the Pashtun population in Pakistan is approximately 25 million. (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023). Moreover, since the region's political and social foundation was more tribal in ancient times, the Pashtun ethnic group has also strong prominent features of tribal elements. The Pashtuns have been covering lots of tribes in itself such as Durrani and Ghilzali is more prominent and a few smaller ones like Safi, Jaji, Wardak, Tani, Jordan, Mangal, Khungiani, Mohmand, Tani, and Shinwari. (Sawe, Benjamin Elisha, 2019).

The Pashtunwali (or Pukhtunwali) code is an important social structure for Pashtuns, this code is a combination of local interpretations of Islamic Law and their tribal code of honor that includes being able to speak Pashtu and following established customs. (Minority Rights, 2015a). The Durrani Pashtuns were the ruler of Afghanistan from the start of Afghanistan's history, their reign started with Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1747 and lasted until the coup of 1978 that overthrew President Mohammad Daoud. (Durkin, J. Keller, 2008-2009, p. 12). Further, the Pashtuns have always regarded themselves as the rightful ruler of Afghanistan.

The Taliban that governed the country until 2001 also consisted mainly of Pashtuns, indeed Hamid Karzai former president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan also belonged to the Durrani tribe of Pashtun, and his successor Ashraf Ghani is also Pashtun. Therefore, even though now the government is overwhelmed by the Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Northern alliance, Pashtuns are still one of the most powerful ethnic groups in the country. (Minority Rights, 2015a).

III.B. Tajiks: Demography, Social And Political Organisation

Tajiks, the original Persian-speaking people of Afghanistan, are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, and it is estimated that the Tajik population in the country is around 30 percent of the population. The name Tajiks attributes to the sedentary people that speak a form of Persian language in Afghanistan. The Tajiks speak Dari (Afghan version of Persian) and unlike the Pashtuns, they are not tribal and do not have any code. North and northeast of the country such as Samangan, Baghlan, Panjshir, Takhar, Badakshan, and Parwan districts have more Tajik inhabitants in themselves and also they form an enormous part of Kabul's (capital city of Afghanistan) population. Tajiks in terms of ethnic origins are an exception and

their origins cannot be related to any ethnic group, beside Afghan people use the ‘Tajik’ term to define people who don’t have any ancestry and cannot be placed in any ethnic category, that is why Tajiks are more difficult to identify and explain, further, the term ‘Tajik’ itself is unclear and not used within the Tajik community. The Tajiks, as others named them, do not define themselves with this term, but rather identify themselves within their living places, for example, people from the Panjshir Valley of Afghanistan are identifying themselves as Panjshiris, whereas people from Kabul would describe themselves as Kabulis. The term ‘Tajik’ was used by the Soviets to refer to those people who all settled, Persian-speaking, nontribal populations. (Rubin, Barnett R., 2002, p. 30)

Tajiks also mostly follow the ‘Sunni’ sect of Islam, nevertheless, there is a tiny percentage of Tajiks who lives along the border of Iran and follow the Shi’a sect of Islam. In addition, Tajiks also have ethnic links with the neighboring Central Asian countries of Afghanistan, of course, the first one is Tajikistan with approximately 64 percent of its population, and Uzbekistan has Tajik groups, that cover 4 percent of Uzbekistan’s population, itself, too. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107) Tajiks are mostly living in big cities, especially in Herat and Kabul, therefore, they are keen to have a role and influence both the economy and policy progress over the country. (Ayaz, Ahmad, 2018, p. 221)

Nevertheless, even though they are influential in policymaking and play progressive roles in the politics of the country, they had few chances to govern and be the ruler of the state. The first one was during Habibullah Kalakani’s rule in 1929 and the second one was in 1992 when Burhanuddin Rabbani became the president of Afghanistan with the Peshawar Accord but was overthrown by the Taliban in 1996. (Minority Rights, 2015b)

Burhanuddin Rabbani and other Tajiks came together and started to mobilize themselves, and found the ‘Jamiat-e Islami Party’ of Afghanistan in 1967. Moreover, after Burhanuddin Rabbani was ousted by the Taliban Tajiks became more eager and built the Northern Alliance, an alliance of opposition against the Taliban with other non-Pashtun groups that came together to fight against the Taliban. Further, one of the founders of the alliance was Ahmed Shah Masoud, a Panjshiri Tajik who fights against the USSR during its invasion of Afghanistan. (Bezhan, Frud, 2016).

When the US-led coalition overthrew the Taliban which was Pashtun-dominated, Tajiks along the Northern Alliance collaborated with the coalition, and that led to a change in Tajik’s political stand in the country after 2001, the changed situation showed itself with the

dominance of Tajik groups in the interim government that was founded in 2002, even though the head of the government Hamid Karzai, was a Pashtun. Tajiks along with the other non-Pashtun ethnic groups were aware of the pro-Pashtun policies during the Taliban time and they were discriminated against because of their activeness in politics and economy in Afghanistan, therefore they supported the US-led coalition now are concerned about the consequences of peace talks between Taliban and the government, plus assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani by the Taliban made Tajiks suspicious about Taliban even more. (Minority Rights, 2015b)

III.C. Uzbeks: Demography, Social And Political Organisation

The Turkic origin, Uzbeks are believed to be appeared in the region in the third century BC. The Uzbeks generated 9 to 10 percent of Afghanistan's population and are the fourth largest ethnic group in the country. They are speaking 'Uzbeki', a Turkic-Mongolian language. Uzbeks are following the Hanafi School of the Sunni Sect. (Minority Rights, 2015c). Uzbeks' social community structure is based on tribes and still define their social identity with their tribal structure, nevertheless, this tribal structure is not as strong as the one Pashtuns have. The majority of the Uzbeks are located in the north and northeast of Afghanistan alongside the Uzbekistan border. (Durkin, J. Keller, 2008-2009, p.13). Uzbeks, like Tajiks, also have their co-ethnic brother across the border in the Central Asian countries and are estimated to be the most populous Turkic group of the region; as it is understandable, Uzbeks are the most populous in Uzbekistan, they cover 72 percent of Uzbekistan's population, in Tajikistan this percentage is 24, 14% of Kyrgyzstan's population, 9% in Turkmenistan's population, and lastly 9% of Afghanistan's population are Uzbek. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107).

The Uzbeks' origin is estimated to refer to Oz Beg, a Mongol Khan who made the Golden Horde (Kipchak Khanate; the western part of the Mongol Empire) reach its greatest power under his rule. They emerged out of a mixture of ancient Iranian people with Mongol or Turkic Tribes. (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023).

In addition to this estimation, there is another claim that the 'Uzbek' term may be deviated from 'Oghuz bek' which means leader of Oghuz, plus this is linked to Oghuz Khan, or "Uzbek" term may have been an adjective to refer specific tribes of Turks, to mean "Self-lord" that may in time turned into an ethnic name. (Nurkulov, Nurshood, 2020, p. 21). The Uzbeks settled in the northeast and southern part of Afghanistan with ancient migrations as well as with the recent ones in the 1920s and 1940s from Russia when the Russian

government's atheistic policies conflicted with their Islamic way of life. (Naby, Eden, 1984, p. 9-10). Uzbeks along with other non-Pashtun minority groups in Afghanistan were oppressed by the Pashtun rulers, especially during the Amir Abdur Rahman, they were forced to migrate and their land was given to the Pashtuns because of Pashtunization policies of Amir Abdur Rahman (Shahrani, M. N., 2002, p. 718).

Uzbeks' way of life was described as 'dirty' and 'wild by the British to make Afghan rulers invade the northern part of Afghanistan where Uzbeks were settled, in the name of Pashtunization policy, since British rulers wanted to include those parts under control. (Bleuer, Christian, 2012, p. 72). When, Amir Abdur Rahman gave the land of Uzbeks to the Pashtuns and made them superior to Uzbeks, the resentment and hatred against Pashtuns increased among Uzbeks, plus this development made Uzbeks more mobilize, and they started to become more unified and politically aware. To illustrate, the Uzbek armed groups united in the 1990s when the Pashtun-dominated Taliban emerged in Afghanistan. (Ahmad, Ayaz, 2018, p.222).

Moreover, during the communist regime and after the USSR withdrawal from Afghanistan, Uzbeks had their first spokesperson General Rashid Dostum an ethnic Uzbek who supported USSR backed government of President Najibullah militarily against anti-Soviet and US-backed Mujahideen. (Sjoholm, John, Kassabian, Joe, 2017) For instance, General Abdul Rashid Dostum stated: "Uzbeks and Turkmens in the north of Afghanistan will not allow the Pashtuns to command the old way" in Moscow in June of 1990. The Uzbeks owe their power in current politics to Rashid Dostum. Further, the Uzbeks seek and found opportunities during the communist regime, since there were not any 'favored' ethnic groups all of them were 'equal'. Uzbeks had a chance to do radio broadcasts, publish daily newspapers and poems in their own language. (Nurkulov, Nurshood, 2020, p. 22). Moreover, Uzbeks like Tajiks had a role in the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, plus with the fall of the Taliban regime, they become more dominant in the policy and military of Afghanistan. (Minority Rights, 2015c).

III.D. Turkmens: Demography, Social And Political Organisation

Even though the exact numbers of the Turkmen ethnics in Afghanistan are not clear, it is estimated that 3 percent of Afghanistan's population is covered by them, which makes them the second largest Turkic-origin group in the country. Just like Uzbeks, Turkmens or 'Turcoman, Turkman, Turkoman' in other names are located in the northern parts of the country in cities like Badghis, Balkh, Faryab, Herat, Jowzjan, and Konduz, and they have a

Turkic origin, they came from the Turkic tribes of Oghuz Khan back in the 7th and 8th centuries. They are following the Hanafi Tradition of the Sunni sect as Uzbeks do. (Minority Rights, 2015c).

Turkmen in Afghanistan are speaking Turkmen an Altaic language and the official language of Turkmenistan. (Ahmad, Ayaz, 2018, p.231). However, since they did not take any education in their language they use their language only in spoken language and do not know the grammatical rules of their language. Although they have the Turkish equivalent of a word they had received many words, especially from Persian and Arabic languages, hence this situation led to the dominance of Arabic and Persian over Turkmen Turkish in Afghanistan. (Şahin, Savaş, 2016, p. 1145). Turkmen are not populous in Afghanistan, besides the other ethnic groups, they have co-ethnic brothers across the border; the majority of them live of course in Turkmenistan with 77 percent of the country's population, besides 2 percent of Turkmen living in Iran, as well. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107).

Nevertheless, according to Thomas Barfield, even though Turkmen are a minority in Afghanistan, their place in the country is important because of Turkmen carpets that were made from the wool of world-prized Karakul sheep. The carpets made by the Turkmen are making a huge contribution to Afghanistan's economy. (Pittglobal Studies, Barfield Thomas, 2013). In addition, the social structure of the Turkmen community is based on tribes and this structure shows itself in their both social and political life, and they had influenced Afghanistan culturally. (Minority Rights, 2015c).

According to Savaş Şahin (2016) the Turkmen tribes that are living in the country; 'Ersari, Salur, Sarik, Teke, Alili, Covdur, and Yomut', besides the first three the most known ones. Further, all Turkmen of Afghanistan are aware of their tribes, since they have a popular belief in knowing their ancestors. (Şahin, Savaş, 2016, p. 1146). Dependency on the central government was not an issue for the Turkmen since they had considerable income that comes from selling mostly carpets, producing crafts, animal by-products, and farming. They had their economic stand and they did not interfere in the politics of the country as much.

Since in the Turkmen community the tribes were the ones that decide their political stand of them, the seven major tribes decided to have a neutral stance during the Soviet and Taliban domination and avoided being in any part of the uprising, they did not take any role in Northern Alliance or did not build a resistance of themselves. (Joshua Project, 2023). Due to this neutrality, Turkmen do not have any powerful leaders who can be their spokesmen and

represent them in the politics of the country both during and after the civil war and in the state's rebuilding processes. Therefore, Turkmen were excluded from the social and political mainstream of the country. They have remained apart from the processes of decision-making, plus, the ruling class of the country always neglects them, since, they do have not any kinds of leader or spokesperson who could be a voice and speak for their rights. (Minority Rights, 2015c).

Additionally, in the current situation in Afghanistan, Turkmen had started to build their own form of militias to fight against the Taliban groups that started to resurge in their regions, Turkmen do not feel safe and they believe there is a lack of protection from the government of Afghanistan against the Taliban. Furthermore, there are some members of the Turkmen community that participate in the Taliban groups. (Radio Free Europe, 2017).

III.E. Hazaras: Demography, Social And Political Organisation

The Hazaras make up about 10 percent of Afghanistan's population, approximately as much as Uzbeks do. It is believed that their origins can be traced back to Genghis Khan's forces. Unlike other ethnic groups in the country, the majority of the Hazaras are following the Shi'a sect of Islam. (Durkin, J. Keller, 2008-2009, p. 13). Hazaras are located in the mountains in the center of Afghanistan which is referred to as 'Hazarajat' that cover the provinces of Oruzgan, Ghaur, Herat, Farah, Qandahar, Parwan, Baghlan, Balkh, and Badghis. Hazaragi, which is a dialect of Dari, is spoken by Hazaras. (Ahmad Ayaz, 2018, p. 221).

Their social structure is a bit complex and consists of big families that establish joint families that are called 'khanawarr' or 'dudrau', the khanawars come together and make up a unity named 'tol, tolwara or tolwar', and several tols make up 'tayefa' and lastly with the unity of tayefas 'Qaum' emerge. Unlike the Pashtuns, Hazara Qaums did not unify, though they enjoyed autonomy and free ride in their regions. Nevertheless, this free ride ended with the Hazaras- Afghan (Pashtun) wars in the years 1890 and 1893. (Mousavi, Sayeed Askar, 1998, p. 46-47).

The Hazaras were the most excluded and discriminated against ethnic groups in the country, specifically by the Pashtuns. Especially during the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman

the Hazaras faced severe political oppression and they had suffered economically and socially, due to the clearance of a 'Jihad' on Shi'as of the country by the leaders of the Sunni sect. Further, as Amir Abdur Rahman extended his control from Kabul to other parts of the

country by using force, the first ethnic group that stand against this expansion was the Hazaras, to suppress this revolt lots of Pashtun men were sent and Hazaras were killed, their lands were occupied and they were enslaved. Additionally, even Uzbeks and Tajiks became enemies of Hazaras and help Pashtuns to compress Hazaras since Amir Abdur Rahman was clever enough to use Sunni cards and play on their religious sensibilities against Shi'a Hazara. In 1893, Pashtun Rahman occupied Hazarajat, plus it is believed that he wiped out 60 percent of the Hazara population from their lands. (Minority Rights, 2015d). All of these oppressions against Hazaras shaped their sense of nationality which led them to establish the Hizb-e Wahdat Party that was established in 1988 and unify the Hazara people, who were divided, under the same roof. (Mousavi, Sayeed Askar, 1998, p. 6-7).

In addition, after Mujahidiin took power a civil war broke out in the country and during the civil war of Afghanistan, hundreds of Hazaras were massacred by the government forces of Burhanuddin Rabbani and Massoud, besides there was fighting between Hizb-e Wahdat Party of Hazaras and Mujahidin leader Abdul Rasul Sayyaf's Ittehad-i-Islami Party. Abdul Ali Mazari became the spokesperson of the Hazaras between 1992 and 1995. He managed to sign an agreement with the Taliban on behalf of Hazaras in 1993, nevertheless was also killed by the Taliban in 1995. Hazaras joined hands with General Abdul Rashid Dostum and joined the new anti-Taliban 'Shura-ye Ali-ye Difa' with Dostum's leadership. Besides, Hazaras also joined the Northern Alliance against the Taliban. (Minority Rights, 2015d). When the Taliban came into power the Shi'a Hazaras were targeted once again for their beliefs, they started their anti-Shia agenda by haunting Hazaras house-to-house. More than 8000 were killed, while thousands more Hazara was raped or injured. (Brahimi, Alia, 2010, p. 10).

III.F. Others: Demography, Social and Political Organisation

Other than those mentioned ethnic groups the above, Arabs, Balochis, Nooristanis, Pamiris, Gujars, Brahuis, Qizilbash, Aimaq, and Pashai are the other ethnic groups that were officially recognized. The Aimaqs are estimated to have Turco – Mongolian origin because of their appearance and their daily life. The group is mostly habituated in the western part of the central mountain region. Besides, it is estimated that they are covering approximately 4 percent of the population. According to Map 2. an ethnic map of Afghanistan by MEPA News (2019), Balochis are estimated to cover 2 percent of the population, Pashai covers 2 % of the population and Pamiris cover 1% of the other groups it is still unclear how many percentages they are covering. (MEPA News, 2019). They are living in the Kandahar region of the

country. (Weinbaum, Marvin G., Ali, Mohammad, Dupree, Nancy Hatch, Petrov, Victor P., Dupree, Louis, Allchin, Frank Raymond, 2022).

To conclude, Afghanistan has a multi-ethnic demographic structure, and most of these groups have kinship ties with neighboring countries, for instance, Pashtuns with Pakistan, Turkmens with Turkmenistan, Uzbeks with Uzbekistan, and Tajiks with Tajikistan. In the next section, we are going to analyze the bilateral relations of Afghanistan with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan which have kin minorities within Afghanistan. The reason for studying these specific countries, as already mentioned in the literature reviews part of the study, the relationship of these three neighboring Central Asian countries with Afghanistan was studied mostly through security lenses, while other aspects can be impactful, and one of these is kinship ties. Moreover, Central Asian policies with their kin minorities who live in Afghanistan also have been neglected in the literature, therefore further studies have to be done. To be able to do this first we have to analyze bilateral relations of Afghanistan with these countries and create a framework. The next chapter of the study will analyze these bilateral relations.

IV. BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS CENTRAL ASIAN NEIGHBOURS

To be able to analyze the kin state policies of three neighboring Central Asian countries towards their kin minorities living in Afghanistan, firstly we are going to examine bilateral relations between Afghan governments and its three neighboring countries in this chapter of the study. Besides, as already we had mentioned above, Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors have some particular commonwealth and similar cultural and ethnical ties due to their shared histories. This chapter will be focused on one of the sub-questions of the study; “How are the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian countries?” and will try to build a framework for these bilateral relations.

IV.A. Relations of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is the second largest state in Central Asia after Kazakhstan; it declared its independence on 27 October 1991. The location of Turkmenistan made it to be bordered by Uzbekistan to the north and east, Kazakhstan to the northwest, Iran to the south, and Afghanistan to the southeast, plus it has a coast to the Caspian Sea. The ethnicity of the country mostly consisted of Turkmen which covers 85% of the population; followed by Uzbeks with 5% and Russians with 4%. (Smith, D., Roger, Hambly, Gavin R.G., Allworth, Edward, Zhmuida, Viktor Borisovich, Sinor, Denis, 2023). Turkmenistan, soon after gaining its independence, in 1995, reinforced a doctrine called ‘positive neutrality’. According to this doctrine; there should be ‘mutual non-interference’ in domestic affairs. Furthermore, due to this neutrality position that Turkmenistan reinforced as a policy in its foreign relations, it was alienating itself from international affairs. Besides, following its neutral status in international affairs, Turkmenistan was not enthusiastic to join or to make a voice in any kind of regional cooperation and initiatives. In addition, Turkmenistan also steers clear of the regional conflict which is why it has good term bilateral relations with its neighbors. (Dzardanova, Svetlana, 2016, p. 35).

When we look at the relations of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan there is not much to say about before 2001, since their relations do not go too deep with Turkmenistan being a newly independent state and with Afghanistan being politically unstable. Turkmenistan, like it has been doing the same with all its neighboring countries, has taken a neutral position in its relations with Afghanistan and protects this status for Afghanistan’s domestic affairs. Turkmenistan’s border shared with Afghanistan is about 763 km; nevertheless, before the

independence of Turkmenistan, at the time of the USSR, the relations, which were dependent on maneuvers of Moscow, between the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and Afghanistan were very limited. Afghanistan recognizes the independence of Turkmenistan during the Dr. Nejibullah government and the relations between the two states had started. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

In 1996, President Burhanuddin Rabbani visited Ashgabat and met with Turkmen president Niyazov mostly for discussing trans-border trade; it was the first bilateral contact between the two countries and remained the last meaningful one since the Taliban came into power. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 112). Moreover, the Turkmenistan government has preferred to stay in contact no matter who came into power in Afghanistan. For instance, when the Taliban started to rule the country, Even though Turkmenistan did not recognize the Taliban government officially, at times and in particular matters, did advocate the Taliban's case in international forums, plus, Ashgabat, unlike other Central Asian countries, keep its relations with the government based more on the economic issues. According to Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazemi (2014), Turkmenistan has often quietly constructed hidden relationships with various entities in Afghanistan over the previous two decades, despite its seeming that Turkmenistan isolates itself from Afghanistan. Besides, they mention about Ahmad Mutawakkil's note, the last foreign minister of the Taliban era in the country; according to him the Turkmen government and Taliban had enjoyed good relations with each other particularly based on business and economic grounds, plus Turkmenistan allowed an unofficial Taliban representation in Ashgabat, while keeping an active consulate in Afghanistan. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 50).

Further, while Turkmenistan has never been threatened by the Taliban, Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's commander, threatened the other four Central Asian governments, particularly Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, for interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. (Radio Free Europe, 2014b). In addition, Turkmenistan permitted two sides of the Afghan civil war, particularly between the Mujahedin government and the Taliban, to form political entities following the civil war, which can be regarded as a demonstration of impartiality of Turkmenistan. Besides, Turkmenistan's relations with Afghanistan have never been strained, and diplomatic warming contacts have been established, despite the country's political instability, but the relations between the two countries are mostly driven by economic factors rather than political or ethnical ones. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

The Turkmen government was the only Central Asian state that did not officially recognize any threat caused by Afghanistan, instead, it attempted to boost business-related ties with the Taliban, primarily by focusing on a pipeline that will carry the Turkmen gas following a route that includes territories of Turkmenistan- Afghanistan-Pakistan-India, which also named as “TAPI” pipeline. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, Ashgabat needed favorable ties with the Taliban and their followers, who controlled 90 percent of Afghanistan by 1999 (BBC, 2022), to export energy to South Asian markets via Afghanistan. Taliban’s Foreign Minister of the time Mawlawi Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil and his Turkmenistan counterpart, Boris Shikhmuradov, decided to establish TAPI in 1997 to achieve this goal. Besides, even now, the Taliban had favored the project and declared that they want to be a part of this project, and the Afghan government should not keep the Taliban out of this project (Khan, Tahir, 2015) In addition to these, Svetlana Dzardanova (2014) stipulates that the Turkmen government has been playing neutrality card so well that made Turkmenistan advantageous in the international area for acknowledgment and cooperation. The neutrality statute of the country helped the government to not be tricked by the global powers easily, as well as an opportunity for Turkmenistan, which can be considered a small state, to keep its regime survival and stability in its turbulent neighborhood. (Dzardnova, Svetlana, 2014, p. 45)

Turkmenistan promised to mediate between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance while keeping its impartial position. The foreign minister of Turkmenistan at the time; Boris Shikhmuradov visited Kandahar on March 2, 1999, and met with Mullah Muhammad Omar, who was the leader of the Taliban, and tried to persuade the organization to meet with the Northern Alliance in Ashgabat. (Pannier, Bruce, 1999) Therefore, the Taliban met with Northern Alliance members in December of 2000 in Turkmenistan’s capital Ashgabat, with the presence of the United Nations representatives; nevertheless, the meeting did not open a breakthrough but there was some progress for peacemaking in the country; the Northern Alliance agreed to that in any post-conflict Afghan government, the Taliban would obtain a disproportionate amount of power. Once the hostilities ended, the Taliban side agreed to regard the Northern Alliance as a legitimate political force that was unarmed and constructive. As a framework for a prospective ceasefire, the parties agreed to hold follow-up negotiations and focus on confidence-building measures. (The Jamestown Foundation, 2000)

In the aftermath of the Taliban’s fall from the control of Afghanistan, at first, Turkmenistan, once again, played the neutrality card and made it clear that it would not support the USA’s military operations in the country, in any kind way unlike its neighbor Uzbekistan.

Nevertheless, with the death of Saparmurad Niyazov in 2006, the new Turkmen president; Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov, had initiated an attempt to play a more active role in the region as the mediator. Indeed, even though Turkmenistan has seemed to refuse to let foreign military bases or airbases in its territories, for the duration of the military anti-terrorist campaigns in Afghanistan, and it has seemed to let only its airspace for humanitarian transports to Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, in 2002, without public knowledge, secretly, had facilitated CIA flights through its territory which can be enumerated as 1600 flights per year. These flights were also kept quiet by the US to not bring any harm to the position of neutrality that Turkmenistan seeks and claims. (Cooley, Alexander, 2012, p. 45).

Moreover, the relationship of Turkmenistan with the new Afghan government led by former president Hamid Karzai reached another level; Afghanistan opened Afghan Embassy in Ashgabat in 2005, plus, the new trade agreements between these two countries made political relations warmer. Former president Karzai visited Turkmenistan, and this visit led to the signing of six bilateral documents which were; an agreement on cooperation between their chambers of commerce, a memorandum of understanding to increase Afghanistan's electrical supply, a cooperation agreement in the fields of culture, media, tourism, and the arts, an agreement between governments for friendship and cooperation and joint statement. Besides, Turkmenistan had promised to build a railway to connect its Atamyrat Province and Aqina of Afghanistan. (News Central Asia, 2011). Moreover, even with the change in power in Afghanistan with the Taliban, Turkmenistan continue to proceed with this railway project that only 800 meters of it left. (News Central Asia, 2022).

The railway had opened officially in 2016 by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, this new line is the first phase of a projected Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway, also known as the 'TAT Railway', which is 2013, three countries agreed to build, was completed. (Grantham, Andrew, 2016) However, even though while publicly participated in multinational peace initiatives for Afghanistan, and joint declaration with Afghanistan for providing and keeping peace and stability in the regions in 2007, later in the same year, the Turkmen authorities may have also delivered some supplies to Taliban in exchange to the withdrawal of the Taliban fighters further away from Turkmenistan's border. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 51)

While as well as Taliban want to be a part of the TAPI pipeline project we already mentioned above, Turkmenistan also is ready to partner with and back any type of government in the

region to avoid any kinds of instability that will occur in the region that will hold back the construction of the TAPI pipeline project. On top of it, the Taliban's need for energy also was supplied by Turkmen gas, for instance in 2004, there were seventy official contacts between Turkmenistan and twenty-four different Afghan enterprises, these contacts, eventually, led to petrochemical supply, worth over ten million dollars, to the areas of the Afghanistan that has been controlling by the Taliban. (Institute for War & Peace Reporting, 2005)

Energy seems to be one of the most significant issues of foreign policy's Ashgabat towards Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has been looking for alternative export channels for its natural gas as its energy ties with Russia degraded, as well as tensions with Azerbaijan over the Caspian Sea's split. Turkmenistan is interested in establishing a new export route via Afghanistan because it is unable to join the Southern Gas Corridor due to Russian pressure and its conflicts with Azerbaijan. (Gafarli, Orhan, 2016, p. 136). In his report named "Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interest in Afghanistan," Joshua Faust (2010) asserts that the perspective and policy of Turkmenistan through its neighbor, Afghanistan, is filtered with its energy exports and shaped by those interests. (Faust, Joshua, 2010, p. 8)

On top of all the energy concerns of Turkmenistan, there is another reason why Ashgabat has ties with all political forces, even Taliban or other local powers; Turkmenistan's best hope for avoiding more complications and threats that would come from its neighbor Afghanistan is to maintain good relations with the important players in the country. (Startseva, Nina, 2014, p. 21-22) Therefore, besides energy concerns, security concerns are another point that shapes Turkmenistan's attitude towards Afghanistan both bilaterally and internationally.

In recent years Turkmenistan's perception of vulnerability to spillovers of Afghanistan's insecurity has grown, which led to a shift in Turkmenistan's foreign policy away from its isolationism, and it has joined many regional cooperation frameworks, notably the Almaty Process and the Istanbul Process. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p.5). Turkmenistan's leadership had started to coordinate measures with its surrounding neighbors, maybe because it believes its efforts will not be sufficient if Afghanistan poses a significant threat. The meeting of presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in Ashgabat on October 2, 2012, to discuss border security regarding the departure of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan, can be a good sign that illustrates increasing concerns of Central Asian states. (Startseva, Nina, 2014, p. 24).

At the very beginning of Turkmenistan's independence in 1991, unlike Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the other two Central Asian countries that share a border with Afghanistan, the security of the borders shared with Afghanistan has received comparably little attention from Turkmenistan's government, plus Turkmen-Afghan border used to be calmer than other two Central Asian countries. Finally, in 2005, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan began negotiating the demarcation and fortification of their common border; nevertheless, despite the international support for the borders to Turkmenistan, the progress was not sufficient. In addition, the situation on the Turkmen-Afghanistan border has increasingly deteriorated since 2013, and events there have turned into what could be the most significant challenge to the ruling Ashgabat administration since its independence. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 124) In addition to these actions, Turkmenistan's authorities had also reached out to Afghan Turkmen leaders in northern regions of Afghanistan, Faryab, and Jowzjan, neighboring Turkmenistan, and among those leaders, some had ties with the Taliban in the past. (Radio Free Europe, 2014a)

The ethnic Turkmen minority in Afghanistan makes up around 3% of the country's population and they are living primarily near the Afghan-Turkmen border in the northwestern provinces of the country like Jowzjan, Badghis, Faryab, and Herat. These regions are barely under state control and there was the scene of ongoing conflicts between the various armed groups such as Daesh, Taliban, and government forces, resulting in huge harm or death among the local population. (Dzardanova, Svetlana, 2016, p. 40)

According to the correspondents of Radio Free Europe (2014b) in Afghanistan, Afghan Turkmens had started to arm themselves and built joint militia against the Taliban, even there are some joined to Taliban, in the April of 2013, according to Afghan media there was an enormous clash in Faryab, neighboring Turkmenistan, between Taliban and Afghan security forces that lasted nine days. (Radio Free Europe, 2014b)

A significantly larger incident illustrates the deteriorating situation on Afghan-Turkmen border that occurred on February 27, 2014, when an armed gang slipped into Turkmenistan from Afghanistan's Badghis district and fought with Turkmen border guards, killing three men before withdrawing. Besides, militants targeting the Turkmen border from Badghis and Faryab regions continued to occur in the following years. (Safranchuk, Ivan, 2017, p. 3)

In a video released by Radio Free Europe, Afghan Turkmens who has been living near the borders of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan state that the Taliban had tried to make a move in

their regions, therefore they had to take arms and fight against the Taliban by themselves, besides they had called for help and support from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. (Radio Free Europe, 2017). Additionally, another security challenge that threatens Turkmenistan's border and its relations with Afghanistan, aside from the spillovers of the clashes, is drug trafficking. One of the biggest sources of concern for Turkmenistan near the Afghan border is narcotics trafficking, plus it is estimated that more than 15% of drugs produced in Afghanistan, including 20% of heroin, are transported into Europe via Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan, and Russia. (UNODC, 2012).

At the very same time, narcotrafficking was on the rise in Turkmenistan, with reports that state authorities were working together to safeguard and benefit from smuggling, even if it is not clear. Along with that, Turkmenistan has grown as a vital sub-branch of the main westward smuggling route from Afghanistan through Iran to Europe, due to its distinctive location and large borderlands with both Iran and Afghanistan. (East-West Institute, 2015, p. 24). Besides, it is believed that some anti-governmental groups attack the borders to cover for drug trafficking and drug smugglers. Plus, they are also involved deeply in drug trafficking and try to take control of the smuggling routes that would make revenue. (Safranchuk, Ivan, 2017, p. 8).

Furthermore, the drug flow from Afghanistan using Turkmenistan and other Central Asian territories is a serious problem not merely for Central Asian countries but as well as Russia and Europe, eventually an important problem for the international community. For instance, roughly 74 percent of the world's opium, which is the basic and raw material for heroin, was produced in Afghanistan in 2012, besides, almost every year, the country exports 3,500 tons of this raw material by using Turkmenistan's routes for a significant portion of these narcotics. (Umarov, Akram, 2014, p. 26).

With Berdimuhamadov came into office, Turkmenistan had been fighting illegal drugs alongside many partners and structures since 2007, through multiple training programs; including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes in the Caspian Sea and Turkmen Border Initiatives, the European Union and United Nations Development Programme in the Central Asian Drug Action Program. Nevertheless, later on, Ashgabat began to avoid cooperation in anti-drug trafficking with Afghanistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Pakistan, citing other steps already taken as justification. (Dzardanova, Svetlana, 2016, p. 41).

Both threat of a spillover of Islamist extremism, and drug smuggling are a tremendous challenge and struggle for the Turkmen government, however, information about these challenges is rare found, for instance, when a huge gunfight with Turkmen police broke out in the capital Ashgabat in September 2008, it was unclear whether the perpetrators were Islamist organizations, drug smugglers, or both, but it was clear that the struggle was real. (Tadjbakhsh, Sharbanou, 2012, p. 48).

As the situation in Afghanistan was deteriorating as well as in the northern regions of the country neighboring Turkmenistan, and as the Taliban took control of more and more territories day by day with the withdrawal of US troops from the country, Turkmen authorities held meetings to discuss border security and a possible military staff increase in borders. On July 6, 2021, the Security Council of the country held a meeting with the country's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, he and the head of military agencies of the country discussed the unstable situation that is going on in Afghanistan and a possible enhancement in the numbers of military staff and Turkmen troops alongside the borders with Afghanistan. (Jalilov, Orkhan, 2021a).

Furthermore, while on June 6, 2021, political contacts between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan were held at the level of Foreign Ministers and the Turkmen government's neutral position, the need for coordinated initiatives in ensuring Afghanistan's stability and long-term development was emphasized in the meeting, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 2021), Turkmenistan held meetings with the Taliban as well; in a news made by Radio Free Europe (2021), the Taliban spokesman in the Qatar, Mohammad Nayeem, had spoken with them and claimed that Taliban delegation had visited Ashgabat on July 11 by invitation of Turkmen side. The delegation of the Taliban is headed by Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the head of the Taliban's political office in Qatar. Besides, according to Mohammad Nayeem, both sides of the meeting had discussed the two countries' bilateral economic and political connections, as well as security and border challenges, nevertheless, Turkmenistan had not made any announcement about the meeting. (Radio Free Europe, 2021).

Even with the meetings Turkmenistan held with both governments of Afghanistan and the Taliban, and even both sides of the clashes, the Taliban and Afghan governments had made announcements to assure that there will not be any harm to any of the neighboring countries from the current situation in the country, Turkmen officials had said that additional military

forces had been sent to the borders including officers, helicopters, and fighter jets. (Jalilov, Orhkan, 2021b) The leadership of President Gurbanguly Berdymuhamadov appears to use the same techniques that helped Turkmenistan get through the difficult late 1990s when the Taliban landed on Central Asia's frontiers, as well as by reinforcing security at the border to try to save Turkmenistan from any negative consequences during the Afghan clashes.

From the all information given above, we can come to a conclusion that illustrates Turkmenistan's foreign policy towards its neighboring country which is Afghanistan; the Turkmen government both during the Saparmurad Niyazov and Berdimuhammedov has been seeking a centered foreign policy that will benefit its national interests both in bilateral or regional relationships with Afghanistan. Two important areas shape its policies towards Afghanistan; energy concerns and possible energy routes; pipelines such as TAPI, and security challenges that may spill over to the Turkmen side of the border, such as Islamist extremism and drug trafficking. These two issues are the most significant and decisive ones when it comes to the foreign policy of the Turkmen government toward Afghanistan.

In addition, when it comes to Afghanistan's foreign policy towards Turkmenistan, the country emphasizes the non-interference and good neighborliness in its foreign policy which can be seen in Afghanistan's constitution Article 8; "The state is responsible for governing the country's foreign policy following the principles of independence, national interests, and territorial integrity, as well as non-interference, good neighborliness, mutual respect, and equal rights." (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004).

Afghanistan's foreign policy toward Turkmenistan is focused on multilateralism on the one hand, and regionalism on the other, to receive more economic benefits. Besides, given Afghanistan's reliance on energy imports, Afghanistan is aware that Turkmenistan can play a critical role in reinforcing Afghanistan's economic foundations and ensuring the country's energy supply. That is why, Afghanistan also, like Turkmenistan, has worked to enhance its relations with Turkmenistan in several areas; both sides stressed the importance of maintaining and expanding bilateral relations based on their foreign policy neutrality, with Turkmenistan's contribution to the growth and reconstruction of Afghanistan being particularly valuable and understood. These efforts have shown that the two countries are maximizing current political opportunities for bilateral relations. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

All in all, we can say that while Turkmenistan's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan is more focused on possible energy routes to transport its natural resources and border security based on a neutrality policy, who has control in Afghanistan does not concern Turkmenistan as much, Afghanistan government's political agenda is more likely to tend to the regional partnership to enhance economic ties and aids from Turkmenistan. Turkmen's government mostly seeks national interests in its ties and relations with its neighboring country, and fewer plays for kin minority politics, as we will further investigate in the fifth chapter of the study.

IV.B. Relations of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan; just like Afghanistan is a landlocked country that is located in the Central Asia region. It is bordered by Turkmenistan in its southwest, Kazakhstan in its west and northeast, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in its east and lastly, it shares a short line with Afghanistan in its south that covers approximately 145 km. Uzbekistan's territory covers a total area of 447,400 km². As we already mentioned above the country is landlocked therefore, its geography is dry, with generally flat-to-rolling sandy deserts and dunes. In river valleys and oases, only around 10% of the country's land is actively cultivated with irrigated land. The population of Uzbekistan is around 35,648,100 people in 2022 (World Bank, n.d.). Tashkent is the country's capital and largest city. Uzbek and Russian are the two main languages spoken in the country. In the late 1800s, Russia captured Uzbekistan and the country gained its independence from Russia in 1991. (Hambly, G. R.G., Smith, David Roger, Allworth, Edward, Sinor, Denis, 2023).

At the very beginning of the country's independence, Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's first President, devised five basic principles to secure the country's security, stability, and prosperity—the so-called “Uzbek model of development.” The concept was built on gradual reforms that avoid “shock treatment” in the transition to a market economy from a socialist one, while still ensuring social stability. The President outlined five ideas that include; “a) De-idealization of the economy; b) The state is the main reformist and reforms are implemented not for the sake of reforms, but for the people; c) Supremacy of law; d) Providing socio-economic security to the people, in which the state ensures at least the minimum support to those who live close to the poverty line; e) An evolutionary manner of transition to a market economy” in his book named "Uzbekistan – It's Way to Transition to the Market Economy" published in 1993. According to Farkhod Aminjonov (2016), both the rulers of the country and ordinary citizens appear to be obsessed with maintaining stability in the country, which is

why the concept of stability is used to explain the status quo. He argues that people in Uzbekistan live in peace and stability, even though the area and the rest of the world are in chaos, besides, this is something that the government can 'rightfully' claim credit for. (Aminjonov, Farkhod, 2016, p. 48- 49)

Uzbekistan's new leadership has also made it clear that security would remain a top concern for the country. The new president of the country, Shavkat Mirziyoyev in one of his first remarks has said; "We [Uzbek people] must defend our priceless treasure — peace and serenity — like the apple of our eye. It's no secret that there are elements out there trying to destabilize [the country], promote enmity and conflict, and even spill blood." He urged that to counter the challenges, ethnic and interfaith peace, as well as the rule of law, should be strengthened. (Yeniseye, Maksim, 2016)

In the manners of foreign policy; Uzbekistan's administration has worked to promote national security and sovereignty by limiting reliance on external players since the country's independence in 1991. Former President Islam Karimov and current leader Shavkat Mirziyoyev both prioritized this issue. Furthermore, Bernardo Teles Fazendeiro (2017) named this manner of Uzbek foreign policy as "defensive self-reliance". He asserts that self-reliance bears the imprint of an anti-colonial fight centered on the construction of a unique political-economic development strategy and even though all its neighbors had faced such challenges and had some similar foreign policy strategies the Uzbek government's foreign policy has emphasized separation from the 'colonial' center—or any dominant 'center, in this regard—in particular. (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Teles, 2017, p. 411)

Additionally, article 6 of the 1996 foreign policy law of the country enlightens that Uzbekistan would be free of politico-military alliances, besides, Uzbekistan's membership in the Non-Aligned Movement, which it joined in 1993, was also recognized in the statute. Both of these initiatives to reduce both military and political blocs can be considered consistent with 'defensive self-reliance'. (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Teles, 2017, p. 418)

Richard Weitz (2018) argues that the government of Uzbekistan continues to aim for balanced relations with foreign great powers such as Russia, China, and the United States. He argues that Uzbekistan's foreign policy is still guided by key principles such as non-membership in military alliances or the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union, refusal to deploy Uzbek forces beyond national boundaries or host foreign military bases, and non-interference in foreign nations' internal affairs. However, Weitz also stipulates that, despite this strategic

continuity, Uzbekistan's foreign policy approaches have changed in the last years since Mirziyoyev's election to the presidency. According to him, Uzbek officials have underlined the importance of interaction with neighboring Central Asian countries, and Uzbek leaders have adopted a more friendly tone with all of their regional peers. They have, for instance, urged for a collaborative effort to develop regional power plants and share electricity, minimizing a source of regional tension. These are the illustrating examples of substantial new policy measures that have set him apart from his predecessor's foreign policy. (Weitz, Richard, 2018, p. 10-24).

In addition, in the statements of President Mirziyoyev, we can see the country's government's openness to its neighbors and the world. President Mirziyoyev declared that to ensure regional security, Uzbekistan will preserve and maintain its friendly relations with its neighbors, plus in his statement, he stated; "We will remain firmly dedicated to our policy of being open, good neighbors, and pragmatic towards our nearest neighbors: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan." (Yeniseye, Maksim, 2016).

The recently announced "Development Strategy for 2017-2021," like Uzbekistan's 2012 Foreign Policy Concept includes "4 no's"; no foreign bases in Uzbekistan; no membership in any military bloc; no participation in international peacekeeping operations; and no mediation by any external power in the resolution of Central Asian regional issues. The law promotes national independence and sovereignty, as well as maintaining balanced relations with neighboring countries. (Tolipov, Farkhod, 2012).

Nevertheless, to achieve these long-term goals, the Mirziyoyev government has changed several strategies. The "Development Strategy," for example, establishes objectives such as: developing a security, stability, and decent neighborliness belt around Uzbekistan; enhancing the Republic of Uzbekistan's international reputation by supplying objective information to the global community on the country's ongoing reforms; and improving the legal framework of foreign policy and foreign relations. (The Tashkent Times, 2017)

On the website of the country's "Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva," the foreign policy of the country is illustrated as a 'proactive, constructive, and realistic' foreign policy strategy, as well as a prompt and appropriate response to new risks and threats. Furthermore, the website asserted that the Republic of Uzbekistan's main foreign policy objectives are to further enforce the state's independence and sovereignty, to enhance the country's role as well as to

increase the importance of the country in international politics, to start creating the most favorable conditions for ensuring national and regional security, to keep on going the progressive movement toward building an open democratic state, and to join the ranks of developed countries. (Website of Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, 2021).

The national interest-seeking and non-interference foreign policy of the Uzbek government has also shown itself in Uzbekistan's relations with Afghanistan. President Karimov stated at the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Council meeting in Minsk in October 2013 that "Uzbekistan adheres to a principled policy of non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, the restructuring of "bilateral cooperation" with Afghanistan, and the provision of help and support to an Afghan government chosen by Afghans themselves." (Weitz, Richard, 2018, p. 16).

Marlene Laruelle, (2014) in her paper named "Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan Policy: The Impact of Domestic Drivers" stated that the Uzbek decision-making process in terms of Afghanistan is still quite centralized. The President of the country not only sets the tone for all decisions, but he also makes the final decision. The Uzbek Security Council, which plays an important role in preserving national sovereignty, situates Uzbek foreign and security policy in the context of Afghanistan. Uzbek government's policy highlights its disdain for Moscow-backed international organizations, distrust of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and openness to US geopolitical goals. (Laruelle, Marlene, 2014, p. 110)

The reason for Uzbekistan's skepticism of multilateral strategies in foreign policy and disdain from international organizations was underlying in its defensive self-reliance policy that has been mentioned above. Moreover, despite the Uzbek government having joined some international organizations such as Collective Security Treaty (CST) that it withdrew in 1999, GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) Eurasec, and so on, Uzbekistan never lived up to its ideals completely. Rather, it saw them as 'goodwill summits' from which it could gain political clout. Karimov's criticism of such organizations in question whenever any kind of multilateralism and deeper economic integration were mentioned, much alone the potential of ever greater unification can be a good illustrator of his favor for bilateralism over multilateralism in his foreign policies. (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Teles, 2017, p. 418)

Uzbekistan's foreign policy concept, in particular, has given the country the freedom to join and leave international organizations to its national interests. Also, by its foreign policy concept; Uzbekistan does not belong to any military blocs and is free to leave any integration group that is transforming into a military one. The foreign policy concept's most essential message was that Tashkent will not allow foreign bases and infrastructure to be established on its soil. Which all these show the bilateral concept in the country's international affairs strategies.

This bilateralism policies of the Uzbek government can also be seen in its relations with Afghanistan, even though Tashkent encouraged some failed multilateral efforts, such as attempts in the 1990s to arbitrate between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, or Karimov's plan in 1997 to organize a 6+2 group in response to Afghanistan's civil war, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were all members of the 6+2 group, which also included the US and Russia. (This structure was expanded to NATO in 2008, becoming the "6+3 group") First and foremost, to be able to go deep into two countries' relations we have to start from the very beginning of the two countries' contact as independent states. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan proclaimed independence, which Afghanistan instantly recognized, and the two nations' relations have been mutually started ever since. Afghanistan's embassy in Tashkent was established in 1992. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

In addition, Uzbekistan's relationship with Afghanistan was tumultuous from the very beginning of the start of bilateral relations. In the spring of 1992, for example, Uzbek President Karimov accused Afghan President Rabbani's government of supporting the expansion of foreign Islamic ideologies in Central Asia, claims that were rejected by then-Deputy Foreign Minister Hamed Karzai who became the leader of the interim government that was built in 2001 after US intervention. (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Teles, 2012, p. 6)

There were no official contacts between the two countries under the Taliban's administration of Afghanistan; another example of this volatile relationship was Uzbekistan's eventual involvement in Afghanistan's civil war, particularly its support for ethnic Uzbek commander Abdul Rashid Dostum. At the very start of 1996, President Karimov of Uzbekistan publicly urged for unified Central Asian and Russian assistance for General Abdul Rashid Dostum, for him to build power in the Northern side of Afghanistan as a buffer territory against the

Taliban's control of Kabul, most likely in response to the Taliban's capture of Kabul. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 41)

Uzbekistan takes a unique approach to Afghanistan, with the government advocating both a global solution for comprehensive peace and security in Afghanistan on the one hand and bilateral commercial and economic connections on the other. For instance, in the transportation and energy sectors, Uzbekistan is one of Afghanistan's most active economic participants. Uzbekistan completed the railway branch between Hairaton and Mazar-e Sharif in November 2010, with financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank. (Isabaev, Azamjon, 2014, p. 32)

Uzbekistan has never abandoned its mistrust of multilateral structures, preferring instead for an independent security strategy based on unilateral actions and bilateral partnerships, maintaining a zero-sum mentality and a general lack of faith in multilateralism, plus Tashkent effectively adopted just its autonomous plan to combat terrorism and approach the Afghan issue in terms of operations. For instance, whenever ethnic violence breaks out between Afghanistan's ethnic groups, the Uzbek government was ready to support any anti-Taliban 'northern' forces physically, financially, and morally, even strengthening figures, such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek ethnic warlord, or Atta Muhammad Noor, a Tajik ethnic former military commander and governor of city of Mazar-e Shariff, close to Tashkent to protect the stability of buffer zones near the Uzbek border. (Cucciola, Riccardo Mario, 2014, p. 5)

Furthermore, while Uzbekistan shares a relatively short 210-kilometer border with Afghanistan and has significant border protection capabilities, it has also made its concerns about security risks from Afghanistan known globally. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on October 24, 1995, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan drew attention to the Afghan situation, which he described as "a real threat to peace and security not only in Central Asia but throughout the world." (Umarov, Akram, 2014, p. 27)

It was clear that Uzbekistan was and is concerned about the stability of northern Afghanistan. That is why, the Uzbek government was one of the biggest supporters of the 'National Islamic Movement' which is called Junbesh-e Milli-yi Islami in Dari (Persian dialect used in Afghanistan), which was created by General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who had gained support from President Islam Karimov, who believed that there must be a buffer-zone on northern Afghanistan to secure his country's border. The Uzbek government did not have relations

only with General Dostum, as already mentioned above, Atta Muhammad Noor was another most influential power in northern Afghanistan and was also supported by the Uzbek government. To be able to preserve the stability near Uzbekistan's border, Tashkent had to sustain working relationships with these two powerful figures. Furthermore, one might think that since General Abdul Rashid Dostum was an ethnic Uzbek, eventually Uzbek government might give some privilege to him rather than Muhammad Atta who has a Tajik ethnic background, nevertheless it was not the case, since Tashkent's main goal was to protect its interests and was not to strengthen kinship. (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Tales, 2012, p. 12)

Tashkent followed other strategies to preserve its interests such as the meeting between Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov who was sent by President Karimov, and Mulla Omar leader of the Taliban, for an unsuccessful attempt to gain recognition by Tashkent for the Taliban administration in return for the deportation of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which can be another point that illustrates the main concern of Uzbekistan was focused only on its security and interests not more. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 41)

On top of it, Tashkent did also take some other initiatives for the situations going on in its neighbor's territory. For instance, Uzbekistan had hosted the Afghan warring parties, and they met for the first time in Tashkent in July 1999, and the "Tashkent Declaration on the basic principles of the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan" was adopted as a result of the meeting. This paper has also been recognized as an official UN document on the Afghan settlement, demonstrating the international community's acceptance of it. (Umarov, Akram, 2014, p. 27). The abrupt terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, however, put an end to the effectiveness and long-term viability of this peace mechanism.

Relations between the two countries were re-established after the Taliban was deposed from power in 2001, and a declaration of good neighborliness was signed in 2002, under the leadership of the principles of Afghanistan's and Uzbekistan's foreign policy; The principles of the two countries' foreign policy was reciprocally based on non-interference in domestic affairs of each other. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

Although non-interference was the base for relations between the two countries, Uzbekistan had become an active player in the process of mediating the Afghan government and the Taliban. Even though the Taliban's reign was overthrown by US-led coalition forces because of the ties that Taliban had with Al-Qaeda, which was blamed for the September 11, 2001

attacks, and after the year, an interim administration led by Hamid Karzai was founded in Afghanistan, The Taliban, continued to fight alongside coalition forces and the new Afghan government. (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 48)

Since 2016- 2017, with Shavkat Mirziyoyev's presidency, Uzbekistan's authorities and their policies have helped to open up the country in general, as well as strengthen ties with Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has started to actively participate in the Afghan peace process, collaborating with a small group of key international and regional partners to help stabilize Afghanistan. For instance, Tashkent had shown its support for the United States demand on Afghanistan's neighbors to back the peace process and for that matter, following a meeting with Afghan officials in Ashgabat in December 2017, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries launched the Central Asia + Afghanistan (C5+1) framework. There have been plenty of peace measures aimed at restoring Afghanistan's stability such as; 'The Kabul Process, the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group, and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan' were the major multiparty efforts to end the conflict, plus, Uzbekistan has participated in all of these initiatives and has attempted to contribute to Afghan peace efforts. (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 48-49)

Before examining and analyzing Uzbekistan's other peace-building efforts for Afghanistan in recent years, it's important to understand the reasons behind Tashkent's excitement for establishing and preserving security and stability in Afghanistan, even though President Mirziyoyev stuck to the ideas established by Karimov, such as; 'refusal to join military-political blocs and prevent the deployment of Uzbek forces outside the nation, and non-interference in other countries internal affairs, Mirziyoyev saw several possibilities for cooperation in Afghanistan and adapted them to new realities:

- Afghanistan is seen as a potential opportunity to connect Central and South Asia.

- Afghanistan's participation in trade and economic relations.

- To create a positive image of Uzbekistan, soft power instruments were used in Afghanistan. (Nuriddinov, Umarbek, 2021)

Moreover, the threat perceptions of Uzbekistan and its concern for any type of insecure spillover from Afghanistan can be regarded as one of the most significant motives and reasons to answer why the government of Uzbekistan is that much enthusiastic to conserve stability

and bring peace in Afghanistan, besides, Uzbekistan has been impacted by Afghanistan-related issues such as drug smuggling, organized crime, illegal sale of weapons, and the migration crisis as a bordering country. (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 49) For instance, during the 1990s, Uzbekistan was particularly concerned about the militant Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Juma Namangani, the group's commander, and several of his supporters were reported to be in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan, where they attended training camps and joined the war against the Northern Alliance. During the US military operation that began in October 2001, Namangani was killed when Mazar-e-Sharif fell. Despite the interim government's president Karzai's guarantees that Afghan territory will not be used for cross-border terrorism, Uzbekistan and its northern neighbors are concerned that an insecure Afghanistan may once again become a base for insurgent activity. (Weinbaum, Marvin G., 2006, p. 14)

However, it is unclear and blurry how much Islamic threat for Uzbekistan from Afghanistan is real. Since, the precise nature of the "Islamist danger" is impossible to identify decisively, given the specific groups mentioned by the Uzbek authorities and their alleged involvement in terrorist acts. While in its fight against Islamist militants, Uzbekistan generates a large sum of money through security aid. Further, according to Joshua Foust (2010), Uzbekistan also uses the war against Islamists as an excuse to brutalize political opponents, albeit invisibly. (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p. 15)

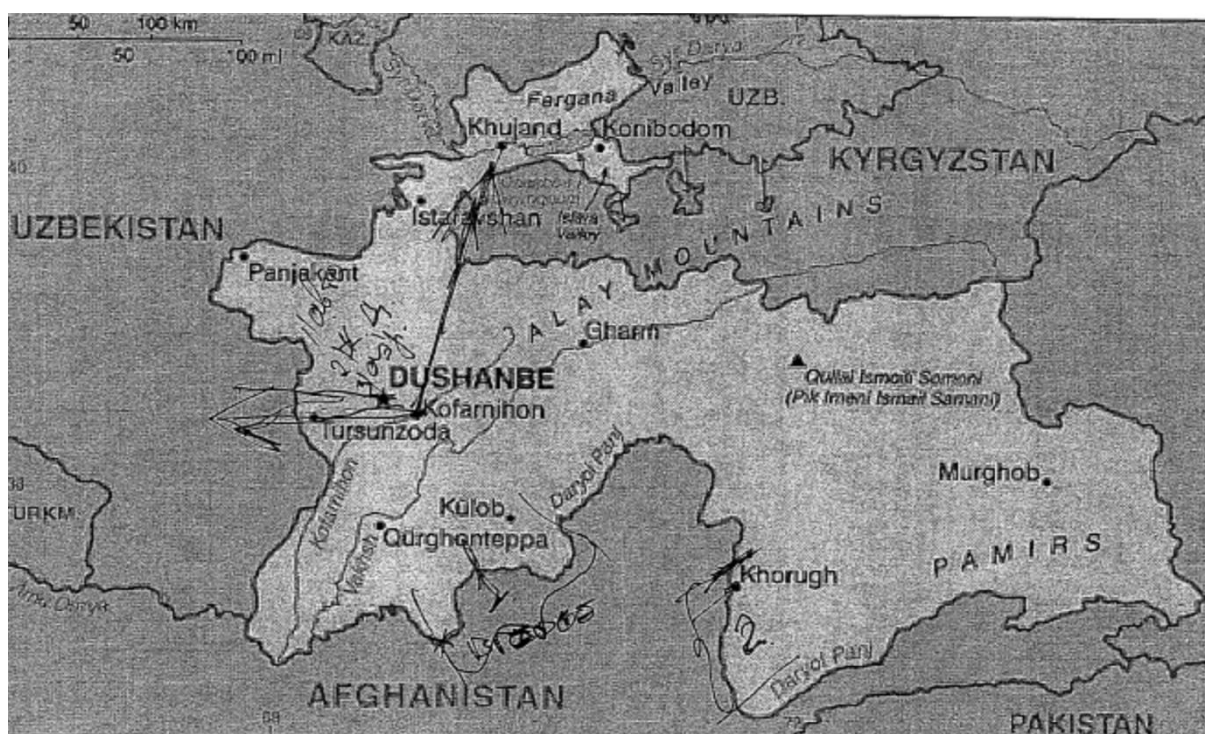
In addition to the security challenges and risk of spillovers (even though it is unclear), drug smuggling is also a very serious problem that concerns all Central Asian countries and of course Uzbekistan. According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghanistan has the most share in the production of opium all around the world, the cultivation of opium poppy that made by Afghanistan compensate for more than 80% of the world's supply, (UNODC, 2021, p. 10), one can ask why all of these matters for Uzbekistan, it is because, as already mentioned in the above it is estimated that more than 15% of drugs produced in Afghanistan, including 20% of the heroin, are transported into Europe via Central Asia.

Drug smuggling is a very serious problem for Central Asian countries, particularly for those who shares a border with Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan is one of them. The five post-Soviet Central Asian states form the 'Northern Route' for Afghanistan's drug production. As already written above, with Russia and Europe as the main markets for Afghan drugs, it's only natural

that the Northern Route – which spans over 2000 kilometers of Afghan border with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan - would be bustling. Nevertheless, the reason for the increase in the flow of drugs on this route is more than geography, the vulnerability of the borders along this route, explains the increased northward movement. (Dzhuraev, Emil, 2013, p. 49)

Joshua Foust (2010) argues that Uzbekistan has become both a sufferer and a benefactor of the drug market, with ever-increasing volumes of opium confiscated, despite persistent accusations that the government gains handsomely from its informal involvement in the trade. (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p. 11) In addition, according to Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazemi, (2014) continued drug trafficking appears to be the most likely feature of Afghanistan's ongoing conflict spilling over into neighboring Central Asia since they are asserting that according to a variety of reports, terrorism and narcotics trafficking are inextricably intertwined in Central Asia. (Bleuer, Christian, and Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 21) In contrast, some claim that there is no strong evidence that can illustrate ties between drug smugglers and terrorists. For instance, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) put claims on this issue through their study on Islamist terrorist groups in Central Asia. Besides according to the study; While the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) may have been involved in narcotics trafficking in the 1990s, however, "extensive interviews in the region imply that the IMU currently exercises far less, if any, control on the Central Asian narcotics trade today," (Sanderson, Thomas M., Kimmage, Daniel, and Gordon, David A., 2015, p. 15)

However, it does not mean that IMU or other organizations did not have any ties with drug trafficking in the Northern route; according to some analyses, while the IMU is not a major player in the drug trade, it does play a minor niche role in trafficking to fund its operations and may be in a position to significantly expand its participation in the future. (Falkenberg, Luke, 2013, p. 8) Furthermore, though there does not appear to be a proven connection between militancy in Central Asia and drug trafficking, the presence of well-established drug smuggling routes makes it simpler for fighters to cross international boundaries.



Map 3. ; Tajikistan Drug Trafficking Routes Analyzed Map

Source; (Sanderson, Thomas M., Kimmage, Daniel, and Gordon, David A., 2015, p, 16)

The key trafficking routes into and out of Tajikistan are shown on Map 3.; which was put by the authors in the lights of their discussion with a top Tajik official, plus, as can be seen in Map 3. Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries are also affected by these routes and may many others. Returning combatants could presumably use the same routes. (Sanderson, Thomas M., Kimmage, Daniel, and Gordon, David A., 2015, p. 16).

The same routes that are used to smuggle opiates can also be used to transport arms and manpower into Central Asia. Additionally, drug storage facilities may also be utilized as hideouts for terrorists fleeing government retaliation or as launching platforms for future operations. Terrorists may also use opium as a revenue source for their actions, for instance, in a location where unemployment was widespread, drug income provided the IMU to offer fighters significant wages which can be helpful when it comes to recruiting manpower. Furthermore, because of their enormous drug income, the IMU was always able to compensate locals for supplies rather than seize them, which contributed to their popular support. (Falkenberg, Luke, 2013, p. 12)

Therefore, the Uzbek government always publicly stipulates its concerns about any kind of spillover from Afghanistan and states that Uzbekistan should be prepared to strive against terrorists, smugglers, and so on. In one of his statements President Karimov publicly asserted that; “the main threat for not only Uzbekistan but also for all countries surrounding Afghanistan is the cruel war that has been continuing in Afghanistan for over 30 years. . . . Terrorism, drug addiction, drug trafficking, and various religious and ethnic conflicts . . . will escalate. . . .” (Bleuer, Christian, and Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 44)

Another important point that shapes Uzbekistan’s policy toward Afghanistan is its economic motives. Particularly, Uzbekistan had begun to play a crucial part in the country's reconstruction efforts after the intervention led by the United States. Uzbekistan has been a key foreign supplier of electricity to Afghanistan in particular. For example, in 2016, it exported 1654,1 million kWh of electricity to its neighbor. This quantity climbed to 2009,1 million kWh a year later, and to 2592,4 million kWh in 2018. (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 49)

As already mentioned above, in 2011, Uzbek experts completed a 75-kilometer, \$165 million railway project between the Hairatan border checkpoint and Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan's northern city, making Uzbekistan the first country in history that built a railway in Afghanistan. The railway move about 4 million tons of products about 33,000 tons of which was humanitarian aid, in its first year, besides the travel time for transportation of goods by rail between Hairatan and Mazar-e-Sharif was reduced to about 1 hour which was contributing to the further expansion of Uzbekistan - Afghanistan cooperation. (Asian Development Bank, 2014, p.1-10)

Furthermore, the two countries' favorable economic relations rapidly spread into other areas. For instance, Hairatan Port hosted the first formal launch of the fiber-optic underground internet network between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. With these networks, the cost of internet connectivity in Afghanistan has decreased by up to 80% since the fiber-optic network was launched, notably in the northern provinces of the country (UzDaily, 2009).

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Uzbek-Afghan Trade (Million\$)	92	30	100	205	116	169	503	877
Uzbek share in Afghanistan's total trade (%)	4	1	4	7	4	5	14	23
Afghan share in Uzbekistan's total trade (%)	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	2

Table 1. ; Uzbek Afghan Trade 2002- 2009

Source; (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Tales, 2012, p. 8)

As a result of this connectedness, bilateral trade grew primarily in Uzbekistan's favor as already illustrated in Table 1, Uzbekistan's share in Afghanistan's total trade has increased from 4 to 23 in seven years. To put it another way, Uzbekistan's exports to Afghanistan accounted for almost 90% of bilateral trade. Bilateral trade between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan increased approximately ninefold between 2002 and 2009, according to government figures, for instance, only in 2009, the entire volume of trade between the two countries was 877 million dollars (primarily petroleum, glass, steel, machinery, and industrial equipment). This accounted for over a quarter of Afghanistan's total trade with the rest of the world in the same year. (Fazendeiro, Bernardo Tales, 2012, p. 8)

According to Muhammed Fatih Ozkan and Otabek Omonkulov (2020), in 2010, bilateral trade between these two neighboring countries surpassed \$1 billion 88 million US dollars, which was the largest amount that has reached in the history of Uzbek-Afghan trade relations. Further, in the first quarter of 2010, General Motors Uzbekistan, a joint Uzbek-American car manufacturer, opened a distribution center in Mazar-e-Sharif. In 2015, Tashkent hosted the first meeting of the Uzbek-Afghan working commission on Trade, transportation, and Energy. As a result of these economic ties, Afghanistan rose to become Uzbekistan's fifth-largest export market by 2016. (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 50)

Uzbekistan has two economic projects that include Afghan territories and of course its relation with Afghanistan; the first project is the Surkhan-Puli Khumri energy project, which aims to increase electricity delivery from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan, and the second one, a transportation project to expand the current Hairatan - Mazar-i-Sharif railway to Herat. These are two projects of great importance for the Uzbek government. The latter project will have a long-term impact on Tashkent since, if completed, the railroad would be the quickest way for the country's goods to reach a seaport. (Hashimova, Umida, 2019a)

Aside from that, according to a news in BBC Uzbek (2018), Sadik Safaev, who is the first deputy chairman of the Uzbek Senate, asserts that the geopolitical and geoeconomic situation in Central Asia will change dramatically if peace is restored in Afghanistan, and the Trans-Afghan corridor will be launched, which will allow Uzbekistan to connect to the nearest seaport in 2-3 days rather than the existing 22 days. (BBC Uzbek, 2018)

In addition, in January 2017, a government delegation led by Uzbekistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulaziz Kamilov visited Kabul and formulated a “road map” to grow economic transactions between the two nations to \$1.5 billion in the following years. On top of that, Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov met with his Afghan counterpart, Salahuddin Rabbani. They discussed bilateral cooperation issues within international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and others. Besides, Uzbek and Afghan entrepreneurs signed contracts worth more than \$49.3 million for the supply of medicine and medical products, ambulances, wheat, and electrical devices, during this visit (Azizov, Demir, 2017)

Besides, to achieve this goal, the presidents of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan met five times in a short period, paving the way for President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan to visit Uzbekistan in December 2017. Many aspects of bilateral ties were covered during his visit, as was the current state of peace and stability in Afghanistan, and contracts worth more than \$500 million were inked in a variety of disciplines. (Uzbek Embassy in India, 2017) Umida Hashimova, who is a scholar on Central Asia's current affairs and works as an analyst at the Centre for Naval Analyses (CAN), argues that Tashkent is committed to expanding economic ties with Afghanistan and is actively seeking initiatives in this regard. Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Tashkent in December 2017 kicked off the collaboration. Tashkent is serious and enthusiastic about this collaboration, as words are quickly followed by action. For

instance, Uzbekistan established an Afghanistan - Uzbekistan trade zone within the Termez Cargo Center terminal in May 2019, and also Tashkent encouraged Kabul to use the terminal more actively. All of these efforts prove that Tashkent aspires to be the primary transit point for goods entering and leaving Afghanistan. (Hashimova, Umida, 2019b)

Nevertheless, despite these developments and hopes, the amount of exports and imports between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan has started to decline significantly. The cause of this deterioration is not deterioration in bilateral relations, but the emergence of destabilizing trends in Afghanistan. Furthermore, severe corruption and over-bureaucratization at Hairatan's port also have harmed trade between the two countries. (Bleuer, Christian, and Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 39)

These two points; security and economic interests, can be regarded as the most significant dimensions that make Uzbekistan enthusiastic to be a mediator in Afghanistan's tumultuous situation. However, these are not the only reasons that lie under the motivations of the Uzbek government. Lastly, the Uzbek government also wants to strengthen its international image, gain international support, and also to attract foreign investment to Uzbekistan (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 51) The Mirziyoyev administration of Uzbekistan saw the Afghan peace initiatives as a chance to demonstrate its willingness to be a key actor in peace process and by doing that showing itself as a trustworthy and peaceful actor. The reason for this was to clear Uzbekistan's negative image in the eyes of the West as a result of human rights violations that had happened during the Islam Karimov administration. (Saifullah, Masood, 2018)

Further, Uzbekistan also intends to work with the global community on Afghanistan, so it hosted an international conference on March 26-27, 2018, after the first Tashkent Declaration which was 19 years ago and was accepted by the 6+2 group. The representatives of the United Nations and the European Union, the presidents of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, and foreign ministers or high-level diplomats from a variety of countries, including China, France, Italy, Germany, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, India, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States were among those in attendance. (Omonkulov Otabek, Ozkan, Muhammed Fatih, 2020, p. 52)

This conference, however, was lacking since there were not any representatives from the Taliban even though they were invited to the conference. (Eurasianet, 2018) Nevertheless,

Uzbekistan did contact with the Taliban; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan declared that for the first time, they established contact with the group in June 2018 a few months later from the conference. Plus, in August 2018, the Taliban did come to Tashkent which was the first time the group had done so since their participation in the Tashkent “6+2” meeting in 1999. Additionally, Tashkent has eagerly agreed to act as a go-between. Meetings with the Taliban are typically scheduled in parallel to the meetings with Afghan government officials, with messages being passed from one to the other. (Hashimova, Umida, 2019c).

As already mentioned above the meetings with both sides were parallel, for instance on March 2019 Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov met with the head of the Taliban’s political office in Qatar, and later, an Uzbek delegation led by National Security Advisor Viktor Mahmudov and including Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov and other officials paid a visit to Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in Kabul and during this visit Uzbekistan had proposed hosting direct peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban according to an official statement by Afghan presidency. Minister Kamilov confirmed that Uzbekistan claims to support an Afghan-led, intra-Afghan peace process and it is ready to host meetings on this peace process, according to the statement. (Anadolu Agency, 2019).

Even when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan yet again in August 2021, Uzbekistan did not do the things it did when the Taliban had come into power for the first time in the country. For instance, Ismatulla Irgashev, the Uzbek president's special representative on Afghanistan, stated that the Uzbek administration intends to keep running road and railway connections with Afghanistan to help ship “food and medical supplies.” (Pannier, Bruce, 2021). Besides that, Uzbek President Mirziyoyev stipulated that his government keep in touch with the Taliban daily to ensure Uzbekistan’s security. (Reuters, 2021). Further, Tashkent did reach an agreement with the Taliban to continue the exportation of its electricity to Afghanistan in 2022. (Lalzoy, Najibullah, 2021).

Furthermore, since the Taliban took control of the power in Afghanistan, the Uzbek government has attempted to maintain the flow of goods, such as humanitarian aid across the Afghan- Uzbek border, further, officials of all levels, from local leaders to foreign ministers, from both countries have met to discuss matters of common concern. (Pannier, Bruce, 2022). In addition to these developments, in an interview done by Georgi Gotev, Abdulaziz Kamilov, Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, has said that; the government of Taliban that has taken the country’s control is now working to win legitimacy internationally. Therefore, this can be a

real chance for the international world to have a constructive conversation with Afghanistan's new rulers and also can help the Afghan people to resume their peaceful lives. He furthers his conversation by saying that they must prevent this nation from becoming a “rogue state,” as it was in the 1990s. The answer to the question “How have relations with Kabul been since the Taliban took power, and what constructive joint action could Uzbekistan have with the EU to avert a humanitarian catastrophe” was that they ought to refrain from isolating Afghanistan during such a challenging time and abandon the Afghan people to cope the greatest challenges they face by themselves. (Gotev, Georgi, 2021). Nevertheless, one can not say that Uzbekistan’s relationship with the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan is smooth since it could quickly deteriorate. For instance, the son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar and the militant group's defense minister, Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob, stated that the Taliban wants the warplanes and helicopters that escaped Afghan government forces to fly to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and he had also warned Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to not to try their patience, plus, not to make them feel like they were left out of option but to [reclaim the aircraft] by any means required. (Pannier, Bruce, 2022).

When it comes to Afghan foreign policy towards Uzbekistan, according to Abdul Nasser Noorzad, who is a lecturer at Kabul University, (2014) given the importance of Uzbekistan in political, economic, and commercial transactions, the country's position in Afghanistan's foreign policy is critical. He asserts that refraining from meddling in Uzbekistan's internal matters and respect for its national sovereignty, cooperating on transit-transportation issues, enhancing economic collaboration, coordinating efforts in the fight against terrorism and security, developing economic ties, and fostering cultural ties are the most important aspects of Afghanistan's foreign policy toward Uzbekistan. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

To sum up, both countries were seeking positive relationships with each other while of course putting their national interests on top of their policies towards each other. Uzbekistan, mostly favors bilateral relations in its foreign relations, while still joining in the international efforts for the Afghan peace process. Plus, Uzbekistan had become more enthusiastic with the Mirziyoyev administration taking an integrative and mediator role in Afghanistan’s struggles.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was also cooperative with Uzbekistan as the two countries' relations with each other have already been written above. In short, Uzbekistan even though was a bit more enthusiastic than Turkmenistan, also puts its interests first. Therefore, the Uzbek government does not give much attention to its kin minorities in

Afghanistan when building foreign policy toward Afghanistan. In the next chapter of the study, we will analyze the policies of Tashkent towards its kin minorities.

IV.C. Relations of Afghanistan and Tajikistan

The Republic of Tajikistan is located at the center of Central Asia, and the country is bordered by Kyrgyzstan on the north, China on the east, Afghanistan on the south, and finally by Uzbekistan on the west and northwest. Tajikistan's capital is Dushanbe, plus the country also encompasses the autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan, with Khorugh as its capital. Compared to the other four Central Asian states, Tajikistan has the smallest land area in the region. (Smith, David Roger, Allworth, Edward, Sinor, Denis, Imshenetsky, Aleksandr Ilyich and Hambly, Gavin R.G., 2021). Tajikistan is also a landlocked country, which is common mostly for the countries located in Central Asia, with a total area of 143,100 km². The country has an estimated population of 8.35 million people (as of 2015). Further, Tajikistan has a multi-ethnic composition when it comes to the demographic structure of the country. Tajiks are the most populous with 67% of the country being Tajik, after them, Uzbeks come as the second largest group of the country as they cover 23% of the population in the country, Russians cover 3.5%, and 6.5%. Tajiki (a dialect of Persian that is spoken in Tajikistan) is the only official language, while Russian is also widely used by the people. (One World Nations Online, 2021)

Tajikistan is also a newly independent country just like other Central Asian countries it gained its independence from the USSR in 1991. Nevertheless, peace did not come so easily for the country, because shortly merely after one year of its independence, Tajikistan was swallowed up in a civil war, in 1992, with various interest groups fighting for control of the state. In the first multi-party elections, 9 candidates ran for the presidency, which ended up won by a former Communist Party leader. Nonetheless, the newly elected President's legitimacy remained controversial. Tensions between government supporters and opposition parties grew to the point where rival groups took up arms against each other. (Akine, Shirin, Barnes, Catherine, 2001) Regardless of constant international efforts to end the conflict, fighting continued regularly. Tajikistan's civil war cost the lives of approximately 60,000 people in the country. Eventually, the conflict officially ended on June 27, 1997, with the signing of peace treaties in Moscow between President Imomali Rakhmonov's government and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), a coalition of mostly Islamic groups. (Infoplease, 2022). Besides, Tajikistan's government implemented a policy directed at accomplishing six primary goals:

national rapprochement, stable macroeconomics, reducing poverty, necessities, infrastructure rehabilitation, and human capital development. (Gleason, Gregory, 2000, p. 3).

When it comes to foreign policy approaches of the country, the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan asserts that Tajikistan recognizes and enforces its foreign policy priorities based on state objectives and supreme national interests. Along with that, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Tajikistan, priorities should be reviewed regularly since, the geopolitical and geoeconomic features of today's world demand that and since they are subject to change depending on the level and content of the Republic of Tajikistan's relationship with nation states, international and regional organizations, as well as national and state needs. Furthermore, according to the 'Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan' that has been announced on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Tajikistan, the country is pursuing an independent 'multi-vector' foreign policy that serves the supreme state and national interests, to develop friendly and mutually beneficial relations with other countries based on unconditional adherence to international law. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Tajikistan, 2020).

On top of that, in their article named "The Rahmon Phenomenon; New Challenges for Tajikistan's Long-Standing President" Alexey Malashenko and Aziz Niyazi (2014), introduce the foreign policy doctrine of Tajikistan as a 'multi-vector approach' which means focusing on good relations with many actors simultaneously. Further, in the case of Tajikistan, it means concentrating on relations with superpowers of the region like China, and Russia, an international actor like the United States, and Muslim countries at the same time. They further their discussion by saying that given that it has been successfully implemented since the beginning of Rahmon's administration, they argue that this is the most beneficial approach for the foreign policy of the country. (Malashenko, Alexey, Niyazi, Aziz, 2014, p. 17). Indeed, Tajikistan's multi-vector approach is showing itself in its bilateral relations with various countries and international actors. Initially, Tajikistan appeared to be closely aligned with Russia's regional objectives. However, since the events of 9/11, Tajikistan has also engaged with the United States, receiving substantial aid amounting to over \$1 billion. Furthermore, Tajikistan permitted the use of its airspace and airfields by U.S. forces and the coalition. In addition to its engagement with the United States, Tajikistan's relations with Iran have been strengthening, and the country has seen significant investments from China, making it the largest foreign investor in Tajikistan. These different partnerships of Tajikistan can serve as

an example of the country's multi-vector foreign policy strategy, in which the nation attempts to preserve healthy and beneficial ties with various foreign partners to improve its diplomatic and economic possibilities while preserving its interests and sovereignty. (McLean, Wayne, 2015, p. 254)

Marlene Laruelle (2014), who is a French historian and political scientist specializing in Europe and Eurasia, and also a Professor at George Washington University stipulates that Tajikistan's foreign policy is explicitly under the president's control and is discussed within the framework of the Security Council. (Laruelle, Marlene, 2014, p. 113) Likewise, Adam Hug (2021), explains how, following the end of the Civil War, Tajikistan has slowly but steadily moved toward totalitarianism as the president has strengthened his power as well as those of his family and close friends. (Hug, Adam, 2021, p. 2)

On top of all of these points, Wayne McLean (2015), reveals how authoritarianism in the country would be beneficial in foreign policy approaches, he argues that authoritarianism – allows for prudent foreign policy decisions, which contributes to regional stability. The work of scholars like Schweller, who claims that authoritarian political systems permit the states to react to systemic challenges in the most beneficial manner, served as the foundation for his argument. He continues by stating that while states governed by a small ruling group, can respond to threats more quickly, great powers like Russia, China, and the United States must organize a variety of intersecting interests and actors, such as domestic groups, economic concerns, and military practicalities. (McLean, Wayne, 2015, p. 251)

Since we mention the policy approach of the country, now we can start to discuss relations between Tajikistan and its neighbor Afghanistan, and Tajikistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. To be able to analyze these two issues we should begin with the very beginnings of the two countries' relations. Before going deep into the two countries' relations with each other it is significant to remind that Tajikistan has a 1200-kilometer border with Afghanistan, making it the most exposed Central Asian country to Afghan instability spillover effects. With more than a quarter of the population being ethnic Tajiks from Afghanistan, Tajikistan also has the strongest ethnic relations compared to other Central Asian states. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p. 4)

Firstly, even before its independence from Soviet Russia, in 1991, Tajikistan kept close ties with Afghanistan as a Soviet republic during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Because of their acquaintance with Afghan culture and language, the Soviet Union

dispatched many people of Tajikistan to Afghanistan for military service, where they served as translators and cultural advisors to Soviet forces stationed throughout the country, and after Soviet Russia's collapse the two countries' affairs had faced a new phase with the recognition of Tajikistan by Afghanistan, on July 15, 1992, hence, the newly independent Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan established diplomatic ties. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 121).

Nevertheless, the relations between the two neighboring countries did not start smoothly, since while, the communist rule in Afghanistan came to an end in 1992, and the mujahedeen seized control of the government in Afghanistan, the newly independent state of Tajikistan fell into civil conflict, just after gaining its independence. Further, Burhanuddin Rabbani Afghanistan's new government's head (an ethnic Tajik) and his Defense Minister Ahmadshah Massoud (also Tajik) gave a chance Tajikistan's Islamic opposition to organize and start an attack against Rahmonov's government in Dushanbe from bases in northern Afghanistan and gave weaponry to the group and helped to train them. During the Tajik civil war, tens of thousands of civilians (more than 100,000) fled Tajikistan for Afghanistan (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 123). Moreover, according to Major Scott W. Tousley(1995), a staff of the US Army, Tajik refugees in the northern part of Afghanistan, had armed and supported by local Afghan officials. (Tousley, Scott W., 1995, p. 4)

Zubaidullo Ubaidulloev (2014), argues that three main points shaped the relations between the newly independent state of Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the 90s. The very first one was the collapse of the USSR that led to the independence of Tajikistan alongside the other five Central Asian countries, the second one was Tajikistan's civil conflict that turned into a war and made it hard to build control over the country, the last but not least one was the support of newly formed mujahedeen government in Afghanistan to the Islamic opposition of Tajikistan in the civil war. These factors led the two countries to have tumultuous relations at the beginning of their bilateral relations.(Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 123)

With the Taliban's coming to the governance in Afghanistan, Tajikistan had started to have more concern for its borderline and relations with Afghanistan. Dushanbe had seen the Taliban rule in Afghanistan as a security threat. Besides, Tajikistan made moves in favor of the Tajik-dominated coalition Northern Alliance which was constructed against the Taliban. Along with these developments the Tajik government not merely strongly supported the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan on diplomatic and political levels, but it also started a full

lobbying campaign in Russia, Kazakhstan, China, the United States (US), and European countries to direct material and technical assistance, such as arms, communication equipment, and food, to the forces of the Northern Alliance. (Umarov, Khodjamakhmad, 2013, p. 6). One can say that the Tajikistan government was one of the main supporters of the Northern Alliance since it had close links with the Tajik elites who were former members of Jamiat-e-Islami, particularly former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and General Ahmad Shah Massoud, also known as the “Lion of Panjshir” (Panjshir a region in Afghanistan) (Wahlang, Jason, 2021). For instance, Tajikistan had allowed for the building of a hospital made by India to treat injured resistance forces of the Northern Alliance in the province of Farkhor which was 60 km far from Afghanistan. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 124)

Even though those two Tajik elites, Massoud and Rabbani, helped the Islamic opposition in Tajikistan when they were in power, with the common enemy Taliban, things have changed drastically. Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani, together with other anti-Taliban resistance leaders like General Dostum, created the Northern Alliance, which was a Tajik-dominated one, when the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996, and the Northern Alliance need support bases to undertake operations, which led to a shaky cease-fire between the Rahmon Government and the Islamic opposition that resulted in the end of the civil war in 1997, and Tajikistan’s support for the anti-Taliban fight. (Wahlang, Jason, 2021)

All in all the two neighboring countries' relations had started as one of a kind that has unpredictable and volatile. After the Taliban fell out of power with the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 due to Taliban support for Al-Qaeda, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan once again started to have diplomatic ties with one another, and Tajikistan opened an embassy in Kabul in 2002. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 121). Moreover, since September 11, 2001, there have been three major variables in the relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan:

1. Being neighbors, the two countries recognize the importance of each other's cultural, linguistic, and geographical contributions.
2. The relationship between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iran, three Persian-speaking countries that have signed numerous cooperation agreements in various industries in recent years.
3. The relationship between the two countries in the context of coordination with the international coalition led by the United States. Tajikistan has provided significant assistance

to the multinational alliance forces stationed in Afghanistan in this regard. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 124)

On top of that Tajikistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan encompasses:

- Promoting Afghan integrity and sovereignty;
- Finding a way out of Afghanistan's problem and ensuring stability;
- Considering Afghanistan as a partner in security and energy;
- Fight against drug smuggling

Mutually, Afghanistan's foreign policy toward Tajikistan encompasses:

- Extending and deepening bilateral ties;
- Combating narcotics terrorism;
- Promoting Tajikistan in becoming sovereign and secure;
- Non-interference approach;
- Cultural connections strengthening;
- Economic relations development, along with positive participation in transportation projects (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.).

Further, for Central Asian states, and of course for Tajikistan, Afghanistan is both a source of threat and opportunities, since, while, prolonged instability in the country can be a significant cause of dangers from radicalism, terrorism, and organized drug smuggling and arms trafficking. However, simultaneously, efforts for stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan may result in a chance for the Central Asian states and particularly Tajikistan, in the areas of electricity, gas, roads, pipelines, and hydropower transfers. Besides, with the US intervention in Afghanistan, Tajikistan had renewed its perspective on its neighbor and tried to lure the attention of both the US and NATO to benefit from ongoing operations and maximize its economic interests in the region, and be able to promote their multi-vector approaches in foreign affairs. For instance, Tajikistan immediately offered its facilities, namely Farkhor, to the United States, but it was the French who eventually sealed the deal for a modest military aviation base at Dushanbe Airport. Moreover, for this very reason,

Tajikistan and other Central Asian states supported the construction of a new route that was named 'Northern Distribution Network (NDN)' for supplying ISAF / NATO. (Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, 2012, p. 40)

Even more, in February 2009, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon declared that his administration will allow non-military goods to be sent across Tajikistan to US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. This news comes at a critical time for the US-led coalition, which was looking for new ways to support the enlarged mission in Afghanistan at that time. The eastern route was under threat due to the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan's border regions, through which up to 90% of coalition military and non-military supplies pass. (Institute For The Study Of War, n.d.).

From the Tsarist time until 2005, Russian forces guarded the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border. Russia withdrew its border forces from the Tajik-Afghan border in 2005, handing it over to Tajikistan's soldiers. Since then, the United States and European countries have been fast to offer support and help to Tajikistan in the areas of border control and border security. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 125) The OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) conducted a second joint border patrol course for Afghan and Tajik border officers on November 30, 2012, based on a series of training courses aimed at improving Tajik border forces' and Afghan border police's ability to detect and stop illegal cross-border activities between the two countries. (OSCE, 2012)

The US Embassy of Dushanbe provided some strategic technical equipment to Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency to combat illegal drug- smuggling across the Afghan-Tajik borderline. (US Embassy in Dushanbe, 2015). In addition, while Dushanbe had enjoyed its gains from collaboration with the USA, it also had Russia's assistance in the manner of Afghanistan. Hence, the Tajik government joined a that was established under the Russian leadership on 7 October 2002. Besides, according to Orhan Gafarli (2016), Dushanbe and other Central Asian countries were developing policies that are related to Afghanistan under the CSTO and Shangai Cooperation Organization, another international organization that deals with Afghanistan-related concerns, (SCO) umbrella. (Gafarli, Orhan, 2016, p. 131) Nargis Kassenova, also stipulates that Tajikistan is largely reliant on Russian military and economic support when it comes to addressing Afghanistan-related concerns, and it is interested in building CSTO capabilities. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p. 4)

When we view these actions of Tajikistan, it is natural to say that Tajikistan is attempting to maintain a multi-vector foreign policy that was already mentioned above, to maintain autonomy and benefit from numerous sources of aid. Moreover, Tajikistan had joined international organizations and seeks assistance more than the other two Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan; Akram Umarov asserts that Tajikistan's foreign policy is mostly focused on supporting the international coalition's efforts in Afghanistan. In the short and medium run, Dushanbe's foreign policy in the resolution of the Afghan conflict is mostly centered on supporting the international coalition and of course, gaining credits, as well as grant guidance for the application of construction projects (power lines roads, railways, etc.) that pass through Afghanistan's territories. (Umarov, Akram, 2014, p. 26)

Nevertheless, while Tajikistan had enjoyed great powers' assistance and support, it had also continued its bilateral relations with Afghanistan. With the Taliban's fall in 2001, Afghanistan and Tajikistan have developed close ties with one another, since both two countries share strong cultural, ethnic, and linguistic roots that link them with each other, as well as both of them have common security and economic intentions. While Afghanistan seeks to increase commerce with its northern neighbor to obtain economic benefits, Tajikistan prefers a steady Afghanistan to combat narcotics trafficking across the border and terrorist activities that threaten Dushanbe. In addition to that, Abdul Nasser Noorzad (2014) argues that the alignment of Afghanistan and Tajikistan in their understanding of regional issues and opportunities has paved the way for deeper cooperation. He states that both countries have been attempting to prevent the spread of radicalism and prepare the path for regional security to be restored. Besides the fact that these two nations are landlocked, advantages such as possessing abundant natural resources like oil and gas can help to build bilateral relations and attract more investment to overcome physical barriers, and improve the level of collaboration between the two neighboring countries. (Noorzad, Abdul Nasser, 2014, n.p.). Due to the sheer civil wars that affected both countries at the time, Tajikistan and Afghanistan had minimal economic links at the start of the post-Soviet period. Furthermore, the countries lacked the essential transportation infrastructure to facilitate cross-border trade and collaboration.

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
AFGHANISTAN	1.3	2.0	0.3	3.8	1.6	1.1	2.3	2.7	3.2
PAKISTAN	0.8	1.8	3.8	7.5	2.4	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.3
IRAN	—	1.6	1.5	12.2	15.5	24.9	23.9	20.1	39.9
INDIA	—	0.1	0.2	0.3	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.1	34.4
TOTAL	1.8	5.5	5.8	23.8	20.5	27.3	27.5	23.1	77.8

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2010 compared to 2001
AFGHANISTAN	6.6	7.4	11.7	15.5	25.1	39.2	92.5	71.1	92.1	29.0
PAKISTAN	0.1	0.1	0.5	2.0	0.4	1.2	1.7	6.6	21.6	72.0
IRAN	44.0	75.1	55.9	67.6	110.3	136.4	216.2	55.4	5.2	
INDIA	31.5	3.2	3.5	1.5	9.6	8.6	57.5	29.6	55.4	1.6
TOTAL	82.2	85.8	71.6	86.6	145.4	185.4	367.9	235.0	370.3	4.6

Table 2. ; Tajikistan's Trade Volumes with Southern Countries, (\$ millions)

SOURCE; (Umarov, Khodjamakhmad, 2013, p. 7)

Even though Tajikistan-Afghanistan trade almost tripled between 1993 and 2001, this was still little in comparison to Tajikistan's commerce with India and Iran at that time which can be seen in Table 2. above. The Tajik-Afghan trade situation improved dramatically shortly after the fall of the Taliban from power. This was aided not just by the decrease of political tensions that exist on both sides of the border, but modern transportation infrastructure was also being built. Specifically, the completion of the new Sherkhon Bandar–Kabul transport route and the following construction of a road bridge throughout the Panj River. Afghanistan in the years between 2001 and 2010 greatly surpasses Iran, India, and Pakistan in terms of trade volume growth with Tajikistan as Table 2. is illustrating. (Umarov, Khodjamakhmad, 2013, p. 7)

In 2002, the first bridge that ties two countries with one another was completed. The bridge was built in Tem district, near the Tajik town of Khorog, by the AKDN (Aga Khan Development Network) in collaboration with the Afghan and Tajik governments. Besides, following the completion of the bridge, a weekly market was formed, producing jobs and offering a trading arena. Between the two countries, there are currently five bridges and

related marketplaces, with a sixth bridge under construction. Every week, about 1,000 traders make use of these exchanges. (Hakimi, Hammed, Price, Gareth, 2019, p. 28).

Transboundary trade was flourishing. The settlements of Ruzvay in Darvaz district, Khumragi in Vanj district, Tem in Khorugh town, and Ishkashim in Ishkashim district are the four points of border trade on the border with Afghan Afghanistan. These sites are critical in supplying essential supplies to the people of Afghanistan's Northern provinces such as Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, and so on. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 129) Despite these developments and the increase in trade between the two countries, Afghanistan is far beyond being an important trade partner for Tajikistan, since, in 2012, it shared only 4.4 % of Tajikistan's export while in imports it was even less with 1.5 %. Along with that lots of the commerce between these two countries encompass re-export goods that come from Russia, China, and Pakistan. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 25)

Nevertheless, even though, Afghanistan is not a significant partner for Dushanbe at the time, it does not mean that it does not have the potential to be one in the future, besides, hydropower is another key area of collaboration. While Tajikistan has a vast hydroelectric potential and the region's largest hydropower resources, Afghanistan does not have such natural sources like its neighboring countries do, such as oil, and gas, Kabul has long struggled with energy and electricity. Therefore, Afghanistan needs energy and Tajikistan is aware of it, hence, competes with neighboring Uzbekistan for electricity export to Afghanistan. To be able to illustrate the need for energy in Afghanistan we must mention that in the mid-1990s only 0.01 percent of the Afghan people had a chance to reach electricity. However, with the energy exports from neighboring countries, especially from Central Asian countries and Iran, this number had begun to go up by 2001, and while the percentage of people that has access to electricity increased to 45 in 2009, in 2014, the number went even higher with the 90 percent of the population access to the electricity. Therefore, Central Asia's and of course Tajikistan's export of electricity is an important and growing source of energy supply for the energy-struggled country. While Uzbekistan has the biggest share of electricity supply in Afghanistan, Tajikistan's electricity exports are complementary to Uzbekistan's. With the help of the World Bank and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, in 2002, Tajikistan's government, the AKDN, and the International Finance Corporation developed 'Pamir Energy' which is Tajikistan's first public-private collaboration, and Pamir Energy began to supply Tajik electricity to Afghanistan in 2008, and by 2018, while 208.000 people from Tajikistan had reached electricity thanks to Pamir Energy, the

number of people that had accessed to the electricity was 40.000 in Afghanistan. (Hakimi, Hammed, Price, Gareth, 2019, p. 15-18).

Even with the Taliban's coming back to rule in Afghanistan on August 2021, Tajikistan, just like Uzbekistan, continued to supply electricity to the country. While Uzbekistan's government has engaged in creating a working relationship with the Taliban during the previous several years, Dushanbe has not engaged with the new ruler of Afghanistan. Regardless, it is not preventing electricity export from Tajikistan to Afghanistan; power continues to flow, even though not in the same manner as before. (Putz, Catherine, 2022).

Hafiz Mohammad Amin, the CEO of DABS (Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, Afghanistan's electricity body), flew to Dushanbe in late December for meetings with the government. The two parties agreed to a supply contract for 2022 after two days of negotiating. Tajikistan will supply Afghanistan with 1.5 billion kWh of electricity which is worth 69 \$ million, according to Taliban officials and DABS's official Facebook page. (Lalzoy, Najibullah, 2021). Transportation can be regarded as another crucial part of the Tajikistan - Afghanistan partnership. Tajikistan might be considered one of the key transit routes to Afghanistan due to the length of its border with Afghanistan. Both countries recognize the importance of constructing bridges across the Panj River and expanding road networks and infrastructure in this regard. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 130).

Further, Afghanistan also is a strategic and key location for Tajikistan since its natural sources can be transported to energy-poor countries of South Asia such as Pakistan Power — literally including pylons and pipelines – rather than products is likely to be the key to the Silk Road's successful resurrection. Three significant programs;

- TAPI (which was already mentioned above,
- The Central Asia–South Asia 1000 (CASA-1000)
- Turkmenistan–Uzbekistan–Tajikistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan (TUTAP)

Each of them at different phases of development, aims to transport power and gas from Central Asia to South Asia, and all three of them include Afghanistan. (Hakimi, Hammed, Price, Gareth, 2019) On top of that, while being able to use power coming from Central Asia for itself, Afghanistan will also be able to serve as an intermediate country as a result of these projects. Even more, these initiatives are projected to help Tajikistan achieve energy

independence and economic progress, as well as contribute to Afghanistan's stability and reconstruction and regional cooperation in Central and South Asia. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 130).

Aside from the energy, security challenges such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, cross-border and the possibility of any kind of clash across the border, also make the two neighboring countries work with each other to combat any kind of threat to their security. Moreover, as already mentioned in the previous parts of the study, Afghanistan has a tremendous share in opium poppy harvest and trade, and Tajikistan just like other neighboring countries is a route for the illegal trafficking of opium poppy. Besides, just like with the case Turkmen – Afghan border, the case is the same in Tajik – the Afghan border, too; illegal trafficking of opium poppy is mostly believed to be carried out with the support of illegal armed groups, hence often resulting in clashes. (Safranchuk, Ivan, 2017, p. 8).

Narcotics trafficking has been so widespread, and its impact on the area has been so negative, that Russia has directly accused the US of intentionally harming Moscow's interests by failing to do enough to combat the smuggling problem. In a speech to the German Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin in March, Viktor Ivanov, the head of Russia's federal anti-narcotics service, remarked that; "The production of opium poppies in Afghanistan has grown 40 times since the start of the NATO campaign in 2001" (Nicola, Stefan, 2010). Furthermore, Joshua Foust (2010) claims that Tajikistan transports the majority of opium smuggled northward from Afghanistan, in such large quantities that government complicity is nearly a given. He furthers his discussion by mentioning that; smugglers were open on how the much-publicized new building across the Amu Darya River would make trafficking drugs much smoother than ever before. (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p. 10-11)

Additionally, even Tajikistan's law is structured to allow youngsters to be able to carry a relative amount of drugs with them. Therefore, drug smugglers who are aware of this law have turned their eyes to children to perform their immoral work since Tajik law prohibits youngsters under the age of 14 from being punished as adults. (Aliev, Iskandar, Shohjamolov Mirzojalol, 2010). Nevertheless, Foust (2010) stipulates that the Tajik administration's very existence is threatened by the fraud that always coincides with large-scale opium trafficking. Therefore, Tajikistan, in particular, seizes a large volume of opium, in part due to the drug traffickers' disarray, and in part because Tajikistan's government appears more keen on putting an end to the trade. Besides, every year, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan capture growing

numbers of opium poppies being smuggled across the border, even though the UNODC recognizes that these amounts represent a small percentage of the region's overall opium trade. (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p. 11).

On top of that, Zubaidullo Ubaidulloev says that in the fight against drug smuggling cross-border, Tajikistan and Afghanistan had started to work together. The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan signed an agreement in Kabul back in 2005 on collaboration in combatting the illegal trade of narcotic substances, psychedelic drugs, and their compounds. For example, in Afghanistan's Faizabad and Kunduz, a representative of the President of Tajikistan's Agency for Drug Control was working. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 131).

Conversely, in their study, Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazemi (2014) assert that anti-narcotics attempts in Tajikistan are “a joke” according to an anonymous Western government official. Tajikistan's stabilization after the civil war was aided by drug smuggling. The Tajik regime permitted the drug trade at the time because it wanted to offer its loyal officers a role in the peacetime economy and for the government's survival. At the same time, rebel leaders shifted their focus away from battling the government and toward their drug smuggling activities. They argue that these accords aided in the deepening of narcotics' presence in the country's power structure. Now, if Tajikistan's regime tried to detain high--level smugglers and their supporters in structures of the government, the result could be instability and fatal conflict. They also give a note from Hillary Evans, who is a narcotic trafficking researcher; she argues that “my ultimate conclusion: without the profits of the drug trade, Tajikistan would be a failed state, which is not in anyone’s interest”. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 25).

Further, kidnappings, murders, violent conflicts, and other forms of violence have been and continue to be perpetrated against people of Tajikistan living in near border areas. Residents have been kidnapped and livestock has been stolen by Afghan smugglers regularly. Afghanistan is a primary destination for Tajik women kidnapped and coerced into commercial sexual exploitation, according to the US State Department. (Foust, Joshua, 2010, p. 12). Along with that, the Dushanbe administration has always been concerned about religious fanatics accessing its territory over the border, and the routes, that drug smugglers are using which are shown in Map 3. above, can make the route and crossing the border much easier for fanatic combatants.

According to Ivan Safranchuk, for so many years, the threat posed by a militant incursion into Central Asian republics was modest, since the region experienced an outflow of radicalists, many of whom went to fight in countries like Chechnya, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Afghanistan. He argues that, in the situation of Afghanistan, Central Asian governments sought deals with the US and other international forces fighting there to combat militants of Central Asian descent throughout the 2000s. Nonetheless, the possibility of their reappearance cannot be completely ruled out. Some ties between Central Asian fanatics and their brethren in their own countries are likely to have been maintained. (Safranchuk, Ivan, 2017, p. 10).

Though Central Asian regimes may exaggerate the danger of Islamic extremists to maintain power, obtain financial benefits, and justify internal repression, there is still a threat. However, the majority of borderline intrusions and violent occurrences are linked to the \$2 billion worth of opium and heroin smuggled from Afghanistan, largely through Tajikistan rather than extremists' intentions to cross the border, besides, despite its involvement in drug trafficking, the Taliban has little interest in destabilizing its northern neighbors, contrary to popular belief. Along with that, terrorism of course is a security concern for Central Asia, and policymakers must treat it cautiously and professionally. However, the most critical matter in the area is the impact of government counter-extremism measures on the remaining 99.995 percent of the population, not the effectiveness of terrorist groups in recruiting 0.005% of the population. The threat of terrorism has been exploited by governments in the region to consolidate their grasp on power, restrict civil freedoms, and oppress their people. (Lemon, Edward, 2018, n.p.). Thus, official persecution, rather than any Islamist danger, appears to be the greatest threat and challenge to Central Asian institutions and social structure.

Furthermore, while the Tajik government prefers to identify most of the political criticism of the government with Islamism, and Islamism with spillovers from Afghanistan or international Jihadism in the manner of Al-Qaeda, any Islamist insurgency, on the other hand, is primarily a domestic one. Moreover, an increasing number of Uzbek and Tajiks believe in the Islamist discourse of more social justice and less corruption, as well as the liberty to openly practice Islam and get religious instruction. (Laruelle, Marlene, 2014, p. 118).

Nevertheless, the Tajik government may exaggerate the very existence of Islamic extremists spillover to their territory from Afghanistan, but there is still a threat to the border security posed by clashes that have been occurring alongside the Tajik – Afghan border, even these clashes were mostly between Taliban and Afghan military. For example, there were 38

military confrontations on the Tajik-Afghan border between 2011 and 2013. Between 2014 and 2016, this number more than doubled to 76, with another 29 occurrences noted in 2017. (Lemon, Edward, 2018, n.p.).

There is also a risk of refugee flow from Afghanistan to Tajikistan territories. Therefore, in these risk scenarios, Tajikistan's government of course will seek any kind of support or cooperation against these threats. Besides, Tajikistan, as well as Afghanistan, was demanding a major role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for peacebuilding, and stability in Afghanistan; for instance, China under the umbrella of SCO had agreed to begin operations to combat any kind of terrorist actions in the borderline between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. (Gafarli, Orhan, 2016, p. 135).

Tajikistan also joined to Heart of Asia/ Istanbul process that is aimed to focus on cooperation region-wide in terms of security and developments of Afghanistan. On top of that, the Tajik government had its initiative for cooperation; Tajikistan's President Imamoli Rakhmon invited his Russian, Afghan, and Pakistani counterparts in Dushanbe for discussing any possible joint operation and cultural and business exchange within a framework of quadrilateral, at the summit of SCO that was held in Russia, in 2009. (Kassenova, Nargis, 2014, p. 25).

Last but not least, Tajikistan's and Afghanistan's governments were collaborating in the fields of education and science, too. Tajikistan has a lot of experience teaching people in Afghanistan with mid-level and higher qualifications in a variety of fields. Cooperation like this has a long history stretching back to the Soviet era, and it still exists today. Further, Tajikistan's medical, polytechnic, and agriculture universities are home to a large number of Afghan students. Tajikistan's government awarded 50 scholarships to Afghan residents to study in Tajikistan in 2013. In addition, 234 Afghan students are studying in Tajikistan's universities and other educational institutions as of October 2013. Furthermore, Tajikistan and Afghanistan relations were carried out not just bilaterally, but also through the Tajikistan – Iran - Afghanistan and Tajikistan – Afghanistan - Pakistan trilateral frameworks, as well as the Tajikistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan – Russia as a group of four. According to Zubidullo Ubaidulloev, the Tajik-Afghan relations that were founded on equality and mutual benefit, were fruitful, without a doubt. Three Persian – speaking countries; Tajikistan – Afghanistan – Iran had tried to engage with each other and therefore, they inked numerous cooperative projects in terms of transportation that encompass building railways and routes for

automobiles and trade, particularly the flow of oil, and gas between the trio. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 131-132).

Dushanbe's desire to work together with Afghanistan in terms of trade is Afghanistan's potential market and its location where Tajik natural sources can be transported to the energy-poor countries of South Asia. As we already mentioned above Tajikistan competes with Uzbekistan for the Afghan market and needs energy not less but maybe more than any country in the region. Reciprocally, Afghanistan's foreign policy towards Tajikistan has been shaped by national interests. Kabul seeks any potential partner that will enhance its position in terms of economy, construction, geopolitics, and so on. All in all national interests of both of the two neighbors led them to deepen their relations with one another, seek and develop potential partnerships in lots of terms such as trade, combatting terrorism, combatting drug and human smuggling, increasing security, and bringing stability in the region.

To sum up, Tajikistan's foreign policy towards its struggling neighbor, Afghanistan, is a mix of both bilateral and multilateral approaches which also can be regarded as a 'multi-vectorial one which we already mentioned in previous parts of the study. Tajikistan, just like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; the other two Central Asian countries which share a borderline with Afghanistan, puts its national interests forward other than anything. Dushanbe, of course, wants peace and stability in Afghanistan, yet this desire existed purely because of any spill-over risk and risk of instability in the region. Tajik's government, of course, works together with great powers like the US for peacemaking for Afghanistan, yet, the primary reason for that is seeing opportunities and advantages in doing so, for instance, it can get financial aid, and attract foreign investment to itself. Besides, while Dushanbe conducting these policies towards Afghanistan, it pays less attention to its kin minorities just like the other two neighboring Central Asian countries. In the following chapter of the study, Dushanbe's kin state policies towards its kin minorities in Afghanistan will be discussed.

V. KIN POLITICS ACROSS AFGHAN -CENTRAL ASIA BORDERS

Central Asian countries and Afghanistan are sharing a common history that links them in a lot of terms and one of them is ethnicity. Three Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan have kinship ties with the country; Afghan Turkmen which links the country with Turkmenistan, Afghan Uzbeks which links the country with Uzbekistan, and lastly, Afghan Tajiks which links the country with Tajikistan. Hence, the relationship of the mentioned ethnic minority groups and three Central Asian states can be named kin minority- kin state.

Furthermore, the main elements and strategies of kin minority policies of kinstates towards their kin minorities who live in different countries can be listed as; humanitarian aid, military aid, trade center investment, cultural investment, construction of religious places, regional and social empowerment, creating conferences, constructing institutions, creating market places, constructing schools, educational opportunities in kinstate, scholarship.

In this chapter of the study, we are going to examine if three neighboring Central Asian countries have any kind of strategies towards their kin minorities, we are going to ask; “Does neighboring Central Asian countries have any kind of kin-state policy towards their kin minorities in Afghanistan?”

Moreover, we are going to analyze if there is any people-to-people connection between kin brothers by asking the question; “Is there any kind of connection between the peoples of neighboring Central Asian states and Afghanistan?” In this part of the study, seeking answers to these questions will be the top priority. Plus, we will analyze each kin minority with their kin states.

V.A. Turkmenistan’s Kin Policy towards Afghan Turkmen Community

Turkmens of Afghanistan, as already written above, are believed to account for 3% of Afghanistan's population, making them the second most populous Turkic-origin ethnicity in the country, and they are making the second largest and most important group of the Turkmen diaspora after the Iranian Turkmen. Further, Turkmens are not particularly numerous in Afghanistan; but, like other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, they have co-ethnic brothers beyond the border; the bulk of Turkmens, with 77 percent of the country's population, live in Turkmenistan, while 2 % lives in Iran. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107). Moreover, in the studies on Afghanistan Turkmens, different estimates have been made about the arrival dates of the Turkmens to Afghanistan, their settlements, and the Turkmen population.

The majority of Turkmen living in the north of Afghanistan immigrated from Çarçöv, Lebap, and its surroundings, which are the territory of today's Turkmenistan, especially during the October Revolution. Afghan Turkmen are divided into two as; “oturumdar” Turkmen the ones who inhabited the region from the very beginnings and “vacant” homeland immigrants. It is said that the homeland Turkmen fled their homeland and settled in Afghanistan because of the famine they experienced in their homeland which is Turkmenistan’s territory now, in the 1900s, and also because of the confiscation of their properties during the Stalin era in the 1930s and the persecution they experienced at that time. Vatani Turkmen fled and settled in Afghanistan because of civil wars, revolutions, and communist regimes, while oturumdar Turkmen have been living for almost a thousand years in the region. (Şahin, Savaş, 2016, p. 1147). Along with this, within Afghanistan, ethnic Turkmen are less socially and politically organized and engaged than ethnic Tajiks and ethnic Uzbeks, Afghanistan's two other major Central Asian ethnic groups. Their communities are constructed and shaped by the tribes, and each tribe has its head named as ‘aksakal’, and the tribe's leaders have the right to decide what to do in all matters within the tribe. (Joshua Project, 2023).

All Turkmen of Afghanistan are aware of their tribes, since they have a popular belief in knowing their ancestors. (Şahin, Savaş, 2016, p. 1146). Therefore, Afghan Turkmen mostly are loyal first and foremost to their extended family; secondly to the clan that they are belonging to, and lastly to the tribes they are in, the state of Afghanistan may come in last for them. While, in the 1970s, there were some glimpses of a sense of national belonging that the Turkmen were developing for the Afghan state, and that was seen as enhanced attendance in national elections, even at that time, yet, national devotion continued to be secondary and they were more devoted to more traditional loyalties as always. (Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations, n.d.a, p.7).

On top of that, it is better to mention that in Turkmenistan, other ethnic backgrounds are not as populous as it is in other Central Asian countries. Uzbeks with 9 percent and Russians with 7 percent do follow the Turkmen in the country which makes Turkmenistan more homogeny than other countries in regards to ethnicity. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107). Moreover, Turkmen – Afghan border line was shaped artificially, not based on any kind of ethnic division, and existed not later than the 19th century when the great powers of the time; Tsarist Russia and Great Britain, agreed on a ‘buffer zone’ between their spheres of influence before this agreement and construction of a border people of Central Asia were governed mostly by

tribes that were subject to authorities of Bukhara, Khiva, and Persia, and they were moved freely in the region. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 108).

That is why it is natural for ethnic Turkmen to be this disintegrated around the region. Besides, even after the construction of the artificial borderline, there were still some movements across the border until the 'Bukharan Revolution' in the 1920s against the Soviet influence on the region, the movement was led by 'Basmatchi' a local resistance movement that was founded footholds and emerged in the northern part of Afghanistan. After Soviet Russia claimed power in the region, many Turkmen fled to the Afghanistan territories, besides during most of the Soviet time, borders maintained to be closed both in physical and administrative manners. (Abdullayev, Kamoludin, 2018, p. 68).

Even though, Afghan Turkmen had their relatives across the border, because of the strictly controlled borders by the Soviet regime, transborder movements were difficult, and because the Afghan Turkmen's opinions, particularly those of their tribal elites, were unfavorable to the Soviet authority, there was little need for them to retain strong ties with their co-ethnics on the other side of the border. The Afghan Turkmen diaspora's interaction with their northern relatives, as well as the Soviets in general, was defined by caution. The historical knowledge passed down by ancestors of refugees fleeing the Bolshevik dictatorship in the 1920s and 1930s was mostly unfavorable. While the Soviets were mostly concerned about the Central Asian diasporas in Afghanistan, particularly the Turkmen diaspora, because they were thought to have a higher level of resistance than other minorities, surprisingly, the Turkmen's opposition has not evolved into a significant national movement on either side of the border. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 110).

Moreover, even Turkmenistan was created as a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1925 under the Soviet Union, and efforts were undertaken not merely to transfer authority more broadly among the existing tribal systems, but also to foster a feeling of shared Turkmen identity. This was welcomed with only little accomplishment, and it became an absorbed identity inside the greater Soviet identity. The need for local control had increased as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) fell apart; the Supreme Soviet of Turkmenistan, for instance, announced its authority over the USSR legislation in 1990, but the identity of the nation was still unidentified. Therefore the structural challenges confronting President Niyazov, who was chosen as the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Turkmenistan in January 1990 and proclaimed President of Turkmenistan in October 1991, even before officially obtaining

acknowledged independence in December, were similar to those faced by many other newly independent Soviet predecessors, Central Asian countries, to keep the country together and free from bigger neighboring countries. Even though Niyazov had been one of the least reformist members of the Soviet leadership in the run-up to independence, supporting the rebellion against Gorbachev and initially resisting calls for freedom, once the country gained independence, he set about not just establishing a new state, but also attempting to construct a common national history and identity, firmly intertwining it around his personality and portraying himself as the symbol of those national principles. In establishing the identity of Turkic peoples, he drew inspiration from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's legacy, whose honorary surname means 'Father of the Turks,' and in 1993, he would grant himself the title 'Turkmenbashi' or "Head of the Turkmen". (Hug, Adam, 2019, p. 5).

Hence, even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Turkmenistan's declaration of independence, the newly established Turkmen regime mostly focused on 'nation-building' in their territories rather than binding with their co-ethnic relatives across the border. (Abdullayev, Kamoludin, 2018, p. 62). Turkmenbashi, as Turkmenistan's first president Saparmurat Niyazov was known, swiftly devolved his country into isolationism in international affairs, which called also as 'positive neutrality' that is mentioned in the previous chapter. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 111).

On top of that, the Turkmen of Afghanistan was not active politically as much as other Central Asian communities that are living in Afghanistan. Besides, even the societies that produced today's Afghans were distinguished by considerable statelessness until the end of the eighteenth century. The most important frames of political reference for identification and action on which power was founded were villages, valley communities, clans, tribes, and religious groups. Along with that, the Afghan population was organized into small, mostly non-spatial communities, and they saw the Afghan state and its territory as abstract, if not outright hostile. People in rural Afghanistan were uninterested in politics in Kabul, the capital. As a result, ordinary Afghans have not expressed a political resolve to challenge the state's ethnic hierarchy. Moreover, ethnic division and gaining the power to build a state based on ethnic backgrounds had begun to exist only in the 19th century, while Afghanistan's territories were shaped artificially and not based on any ethnic community. Ethnic groups remained a foggy concept for the Afghan people, identities and group interests, at the same time, were commonly connected with geographic units rather than ethnic communities, such as a region, a clan, or a section of the country, and ethnic groups were not acknowledged as frameworks

for collective political action up until recently, only, when the Afghan conflict broke out in 1979, ethnicity became a political-military force to deal with. (Schetter, Conrad, 2003, p. 3-4-5).

Despite the ethnicization of civil wars that have enveloped Afghanistan, the Turkmen population has attempted to maintain a 'neutral attitude'. Turkmen who were mostly controlled by their tribes, decided to have a neutral stance during the Soviet and Taliban domination and avoided being in any part of the uprising, they did not take any role in Northern Alliance or did not build a resistance for themselves. (Joshua Project, 2023).

The Turkmen community's decision to remain out of the post-Soviet Afghan conflict, however, has come at a political price. The ethnic Turkmen had no voice in the Bonn peace agreement since they had no warlords or power brokers to represent them on the national stage. The agreement between four Afghan parties formed a six-month interim administration with government positions shared among the signing factions, which were mostly Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. (Recknagel, Charles, 2002).

Moreover, because of their neutral position, they did not reach out to their ethnic brethren in Turkmenistan for any kind of support. Further, Turkmenistan also did not reach or give support to its Turkmen diaspora in Afghanistan unlike other neighboring Central Asian countries, and preserve its 'positive neutralism' stand, yet, even had some contacts with the Taliban when the group came first into power. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 51). Hence, we can say that after the independence of Turkmenistan, both the Turkmen government and the Turkmen community in Afghanistan were too preoccupied with their struggles (Turkmenistan with its 'nation-building' interests, and Afghan Turkmen with the problems Afghanistan was having) to be able to build deep and influential relations with each other. Moreover, Turkmenistan does not put high attention to interacting with the Turkmen diaspora, and rather, the Turkmen government pays attention to only its citizens living in Turkmenistan territories.

Nevertheless, even though the main concern of the Turkmen administration in Ashgabat was nation-building, there were some efforts, even if it is not that deep and effective, Ashgabat put; the Humanitarian Association of the World Turkmens or HAWT, in short, one of the illustrations of these efforts. HAWT's mission is to bring Turkmen people from all around the world and from Turkmenistan together. Saparmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan's first president launched the HAWT in May 1991. The World Turkmen Humanitarian Association and the

World Turkmen Association are two more names for the organization. The HAWT has 27 branches in 15 (27 as of 2019) countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden, according to its official website. (Gulina, Olga R., 2021).

In one of the conferences of HAWT held in Turkmenistan, President Gurbanguly Muhammedov declared; “We are building the bridges of friendship and unity in the hearts of people, developing economic and cultural ties with our compatriots living in different parts of the world, promoting unity of all Turkmen and strengthening the international prestige of Turkmenistan,” on his welcome message to the delegates of Turkmen ethnics all around the world. (Turkmenistan.Ru, 2012). Further, Afghan Turkmen, also, have been invited to the Humanitarian Association of the World Turkmen's high-profile conferences since the early 1990s. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 123).

On top of that, HAWT is holding conferences, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan's website these conferences aim to even further unite Turkmen throughout the world, deepen their unity and brotherhood, and renew and expand the new content of engagement in the sake of prosperity, friendship, peace, and long-term development. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Of Turkmenistan, n.d.). Other than conferences, HAWT is publishing a newspaper that is released in the name of ‘Turkmen Dunyasi’ (World of Turkmen). The newspaper is issued twice a month and is intended to enlighten the international community as well as Turkmen people living abroad about Turkmenistan's social, economic, and political successes. It was formed by Turkmenistan's Cabinet of Ministers and the Humanitarian Association of World Turkmen. (Gulina, Olga R., 2021).

Turkmenistan has been impacted by massive migratory flows from war-torn Afghanistan, even though not to the same extent as other nations in the region. It has acted as both a first transit stop and a last destination for refugees looking for shelter and a better life. By 2004, over 13,000 refugees had been granted asylum in Turkmenistan, the majority of who were ethnic Turkmen from Afghanistan, whose integration into Turkmen society was believed to be smoother than that of other ethnic and national groupings. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 122).

Along with that, particularly, after the fall of the Taliban from power, the connections between the two governments had started to build, thus, there were some connections between Afghan Turkmen and the Turkmenistan administration. Even though, the Turkmen government has no strong feelings for or support for Turkmen in Afghanistan that manifests

in any form of political support, the Turkmenistan government funds assistance programs in Afghanistan (primarily medical aid, education, and agriculture) that primarily benefit ethnic Turkmen, even though they are not economically significant. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 52).

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the president of Turkmenistan, met with members of the Turkmen community in Afghanistan on April 28 of 2008. The Turkmen president stated that many Turkmen are living in Afghanistan, who was disconnected from their ancestral home because of fate, that the Humanitarian Association of the World Turkmen will assist them in any way possible, and that the Turkmen state will strengthen and develop cultural and humanitarian ties with its neighbor Afghanistan. He declared that the government plans to publish books about Turkmen history, folk art, and fiction. He also stated that all circumstances will be put in place for students from Afghanistan to study the language of Turkmen in Turkmen's higher educational institutions. Moreover, Berdimuhamedov had said; "The Turkmen state will always take care of every Turkmen whichever country he lives in". "In turn, the ethnic Turkmen should take care of the international prestige of Turkmenistan and do their best to tell the world about Turkmen and their kind deeds". (Turkmenistan.Ru, 2008)

Additionally, there is a mosque that has been built by Turkmenistan in the Aqina district of Faryab province of Afghanistan, a school has already been constructed in Balkh province, a local hospital in Faryab province, and a maternity facility in Herat province on the initiative of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. Furthermore, Ashgabat delivers power to Afghanistan's Northern provinces at a discounted rate. (Turkmen Portal, 2020). Afghan Turkmen mostly lived in these provinces as Map 2. illustrates.

Besides, in March 2002, Ashgabat and Kabul reached an agreement to provide medical assistance to Afghan citizens on the border. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with the Turkmen administration and US Agency for International Development (USAID), has been striving to construct reproductive medical centers in the southeast of Afghanistan to be able to reach out to inaccessible communities and help Afghans living near or on the borderline. (Reliefweb, 2003). Moreover, as we can observe in Map 2., all of these initiatives of the Turkmen government were taken part in the regions where ethnic Turkmen and the Uzbek populations of Afghanistan are more populous.

With, in 2017, a Turkmen – Afghan Trading House opened in the city of Mazar-i Sharif, where also ethnic Turkmen are populous. A representative delegation which consists of industrial and business circles from Turkmenistan came and took part in the festivities marking the trading house's launch. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 2017).

In addition to all of these, now ethnic Turkmen also had started to seek assistance and help from Turkmenistan which they declared as ‘Ata Toprak’ which means ‘Fatherland’. In an interview (2016) made with Afghan Turkmen made by Azatlyk Radiosy; ethnic Turkmen want assistance from Turkmenistan in terms of electricity, construction, and education, hospital. In the news, one of the interviewed Aziz Sadiq, head of Balkh Turkmen Council, asserted that 30 Afghan students went to study in Turkmenistan, nevertheless, the number of ethnic Turkmen in this group is less, that may be 5 or 6 of them being ethnic Turkmen. Abdul Gaffar Bayhan an ethnic Turkmen who lives in the Jouzjan district of Afghanistan, stipulates that ethnic Turkmen need medical assistance from Turkmenistan, and Turkmen administration should build educational institutions and run these institutions just like Türkiye even though it is located more far than Turkmenistan to Afghanistan. Further, they argue that projects that are promised by Turkmenistan’s foreign minister are mostly on the territories where Turkmen live, they that these promises should be reflected in actions, Turkmenistan is helping Afghan Turkmen but it is not sufficient numbers. (Azatlyk Radiosy, 2016).

Abdulhekim Mahdum, founder of ‘Ipekyolu’ an institution that gives scholars and accommodation to ethnic Turkmen, argues that they sent 20 Turkmen students to Türkiye and 3 of them to India to take higher education, while they can not send any students to their ethnic brethren Turkmenistan, and he said that their co- ethnic should assist and help to the Turkmen students to take higher education in Turkmenistan. (Azatlyk Radiosy, 2014).

Besides, two interviewed Afghan Turkmen sisters in their 20s who live in Kabul, seek help from Turkmenistan as they say;

“Our expectation from the state of Turkmenistan is to help Afghanistan, particularly Afghan Turkmen, in education and humanitarian terms, to help build bridges between two ethnic brothers” (Interview with Afghan Turkmen).

In addition, a man in his 30s who lives in Mazar-i Shariff listed his expectation like this;

“What I want from the people of Turkmenistan is that they should be aware of their Turkmen brothers and sisters across the country, and build a social bridge between

us. I want the state of Turkmenistan to help Afghan Turkmen who suffer from too many things. Since we are in the minority here, we can't raise our voices but if the Turkmenistan government would do this for us, for their kin, it will be more effective. Besides, I think that they should be more open about the idea of Afghan Turkmen getting an education in their fatherlands and their native language.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmen).

Another example of Afghan Turkmen's seeking help from the Turkmen government is; Marchak, a borderline territory in Afghanistan, which was already encircled on three sides by the Taliban in March 2014; on the fourth side was the Murghab River, which was crossed by Turkmenistan. Communication between the region with the rest of Afghanistan had been cut off, moreover, the Taliban had made it harder to enter and exit the region, even for medical reasons, therefore, elderly people from the town had requested local Turkmen officials on the other side of the border to allow Afghan Turkmen to travel from Baghdis to Turgundy in Herat Province via Turkmenistan, which seems as a third option for the villagers since according to Dowlet Maween, Marchak border post chief, other two options were receiving treatment in the town or otherwise end up dying. Maween said he had raised the issue with Turkmen officials numerous times and had received assurances that it would be transmitted to higher-ranking officers, but he had still been unable to receive a response. Maween informed that he was “begging for forgiveness” from Ashgabat officials, specifically President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, whom he described as “the president of all Turkmen.” (Pannier, Bruce, 2015,).

Further, when Marchak has been encircled on 3 sides for a long time by the Taliban. The Murghab River, on the north, and the Afghan Turkmen border seems to be the only way to leave the village, plus this looks to be where the majority of villagers fled the conflict. Locals who fled from the conflict had attempted to enter Turkmenistan but had been sent back by Turkmen borderline authorities. (Radio Free Europe, 2015).

Afghan Turkmen had not sought only educational, or medical assistance, but, also militarily. Since, the Taliban, did continue to become a burden for the country even after the fall from power, the group had tried to capture areas where near Afghan- Turkmen border where mostly Afghan Turkmen are living. Therefore, Afghan Turkmen living in the border region, who claimed that the Afghan government is not strong enough to combat insurgencies, had started to take up arms to defend themselves and fight against the Taliban and other forms of illegal

groups that territories in the region. Afghan Turkmen declared their need for any kind of support from the Turkmen government, Emir Allahveren, a warlord who formed a group to defend his village, stated that he and his 80 men will also protect the borders of Turkmenistan from Aqina to Mezar-i Sheriff, in turn, he seeks help from Turkmenistan where he regard as 'fatherland'. (Radio Free, Europe, 2014).

Gurbandurdy, who is a former ethnic Turkmen warlord from Karkin in the Jowzjan district, rallied his supporters to protect the region by constructing patrols and trying to fight against the Taliban. He declared that the Taliban began kidnapping and murdering people in his town, therefore, leading him to pick up his weapons once more. Gurbandurdy and his personnel anticipated Ashgabat to help with border infrastructural reinforcements, but no meaningful actions had been made thus far. Border service officials affirm that the Gurbandurdy forces' defensive actions have protected that section of the cross-border reasonably safe, stable, and clear from narcotics trafficking. However, it is unclear whether Ashgabat has ever provided significant border security support to its diaspora in Afghanistan. (Baizakova, Zhulduz, 2015).

Further, in another news made by Radio Free Europe, ethnic Turkmen declared their desperate need for support. Besides ethnic Turkmen had claimed that they had to sell their livestock to be able to buy arms and weapons to use in the fight against the terrorist groups. He declared that they did not receive any kind of support from the Afghan government, or Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, while both of the Central Asian countries bordering his village and furthers his claim by saying that these terrorists groups even tried to harm and get to the Uzbek and Turkmen borders. (Radio Free Europe, 2017).

Nevertheless, Turkmenistan's stance makes it harder to help Afghan Turkmen in terms of conflicts that had been happening on the Turkmen-Afghan border. Although not in big numbers, Turkmenistan is helping ethnic Turkmen in terms of medical, educational, and humanitarian aid, However, military help for Afghan Turkmen would be crossing the line and would be harming Turkmenistan's 'positive neutral' stance in international relations. Besides, when discussing Afghanistan, Turkmen officials have mentioned the country's UN-accredited neutral status and sought solutions to the struggles that are happening on the borderline with Afghanistan. For instance, in 2015, Turkmen guard officers met with Taliban men, After being apprehended, the insurgents informed Afghan television: "They [Turkmen border guards] said: 'We will not give you a place here. We are neutral,'" said the hostage. When questioned who said it, the imprisoned militant answered, "People of Turkmenistan. They

said, 'We will give you bread, eat this bread then go away.'" Moreover, this confused stance of the Turkmen government is showing itself in indecisivity getting help to protect its borders, since firstly earlier in 2015, Turkmenistan had requested assistance from the USA to guard its southern border with Afghanistan according to the US military officials, then later Turkmenistan's administration had declared that it does not help or assistance of the US to protect its borders. (Kucera, Joshua, 2015).

While rejecting any help from the US, Turkmenistan decided to take Russian training assistance and buy weaponry from Russia, according to Russian media, before Turkmenistan had consistently refused to accept Russian assistance, in fact, Ashgabat still contends openly that there was no concern along the Turkmen - Afghan border. Yet, visits of commanders of pro-government paramilitaries or local militias that are fighting against the Taliban and that is also referred to as the "Arbaky" force to Turkmenistan is a bit suspicious, since getting a visa from Ashgabat is not that easy, besides some of the Arbaky commander Allaberen Karyadar, from Afghanistan's Jowzjan Province's Fayzabad area, had recently come back to Afghanistan from Turkmenistan. He claimed he was in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan's capital, for treatment of his eye. The visa and medical treatment were both uncharged. (Pannier Bruce, 2017).

The increasing danger at the border and deterioration of security shows itself in the killing of Turkmen soldiers along the border (Ariana News, 2014), and these may explain the visits of the ethnic Turkmen commanders to Turkmenistan. However, according to Zhulduz Baizakova, even though there is a rising awareness of the risk across the Afghan – Turkmen border, the Ashgabat administration has so far was not successful enough to reach out to Afghan Turkmen and engage. (Baizakova, Zhulduz, 2015).

In short in this manner, we can say that while the Turkmen administration tries to protect its neutral position and thus far tried to stay as far away as possible from Afghanistan's struggle, when there is an increasing threat, the Turkmen government may take some actions for the protection of its border. Plus, while taking action, ethnic Turkmen can also come to Ashgabat's mind. Ethno-cultural affiliations may be a component in the Turkmen administration's foreign policies toward Afghanistan, however, they are not decisive ones. Besides, for several reasons, kin minorities in Afghanistan might not also even have separatist goals over the last decade. Their objectives were primarily to obtain influence over the other ethnic communities within the country rather than to join other countries with which they connected ethnically, for example when we asked Afghan Turkmen if they want to be a

citizen of Turkmenistan most of them answered ‘no’ and a few were confused to answer this question, they have declared that they have more freedom in Afghanistan even if it is a war-torn country, and they say they may visit Turkmenistan but being a citizen of Turkmenistan is another thing that they are suspicious about. For instance, a man in his 30s who lives in Mazar-i Shariff says;

“I am a bit confused to answer this question, I would love to go visit my fatherland but being a citizen of Turkmenistan is a bit engrossing since I have heard that Turkmenistan has very strict rules, I do not think that I would be able to speak of my mind freely as I am doing right now, even after Taliban rule people in Afghanistan has more freedom of speech than people of Turkmenistan” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens).

Nonetheless, the lack of advocacy for independence does not mean to exclude the formation of partnerships and ethnic affinities, plus, Afghan Turkmens also has seen ethnicity as a reason for intimacy, for instance when we asked if ethnicity is a reason for intimacy, a girl in her 20’s who lives in Jowuzjan province of Afghanistan stipulates that;

“Yes, it is a reason for intimacy. Because sharing the same language, the fact that our families raised us with the same tradition makes me look like them and makes me feel close.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens)

Further, another interviewee, a man in his 50’s who lives in Mezar-i Shariff stated that;

“Ethnicity is the biggest reason to feel connected with people other than your family, you share the same language, customs, and traditions, which make people bind even more, for instance even though I live in the same country with Pashtuns, Hazaras, and so on, I could not build deep relationships with them, firstly the language is the barrier, I can not fully explain myself to a Pashtun but I can do it with a Turkmen even they live in a different country.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens).

Further, as Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh (2012), an Iranian – American scholar who is also a UN consultant in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, counter-terrorism, and radicalization, argues that assistance for kin minorities exist, nevertheless, it has little impact on the utilitarian and careful Central Asians', hence for Turkmen, decision-making. Officially, the Central Asian countries, as well as the Turkmen administration, would wish to leave the issue of national peace and reconciliation to the Afghans, rather than be perceived as actively promoting ethnic

intervention. Besides they would suffer bad consequences if they had separatist tendencies since they also have a multi-ethnic demographic structure. (Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, 2012, 42)

In short, even when there is a connection between ethnic Turkmen and Turkmenistan, the Ashgabat administration firstly seeks national interests, and may later build a connection with its ethnic brethren since, even if it is not clear, they may seem to the Turkmen government closer than other ethnic communities of Afghanistan, visit of Turkmen President to Afghan Turkmen can be a good example for this claim. Further, even though Turkmenistan's positive neutral stance, Afghan Turkmen did not receive any kind of military aid, Turkmenistan has done humanitarian aid, constructed hospitals, schools, and religious constructions, built trade centers, in the provinces where Afghan Turkmen are the most populous. All of these can be regarded as kin policy strategies of Turkmenistan.

When it comes to people to people connection between the people of Turkmenistan and their ethnic cousins across the border we should mention firstly that 'border' itself is a new concept that occurred in the 19th century, before that people of Central Asia were free to move and this movement is one of the very core reason why the region that includes Central Asia and Afghanistan has multi-ethnic demographic structure and share similar ethnic communities.

Along with that, people-to-people communication between two ethnic brothers is a bit strict due to Turkmenistan administrations' policies, for the time being, all activities are limited to those permitted by the government, and hence remain very limited in scope and accessibility. Nevertheless, these activities mostly were focusing on the Turkmen minority in Afghanistan's northern regions. Furthermore, an extremely stringent visa regulation applies to foreign nationals, including Afghan Turkmen, which is severely hindering free transborder relations between the two countries. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 122-123)

We have asked some questions to Afghans Turkmen to analyze their perception of Turkmenistan and its people, besides to find if they have any connection with their kinship both physically and emotionally. One of our questions was if they have any relatives across the border, and we got similar answers from all participants; they declared that they had relatives across the border but they do not have any connection with them they saw strict border rules as one of the main reasons. Further, a man in her 50s who lives in Mezar-I Sharif said that;

“Unfortunately, my father was very young at the time he came to Afghanistan, that is why I do not have any connections with my relatives across the border, but I am sure we have some relatives there, because my big brother had a chance to visit Turkmenistan, during his visit he claims that there were people who know my father and that is why they hosted my brother in their homes” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens)

Additionally, even Afghan Turkmens and Turkmen people share the same ethnicity, has a common history, and may be related by blood, long years of Soviet rule and socialized people of Turkmenistan may differ from their ethnic brethren. Ethnic Turkmens in Afghanistan and people of Turkmenistan stay foreigners, with past ethnic links may be unable to surpass the several roadblocks to closer ties with each other. When we asked what they think of Turkmenistan as a state and its people; a woman in her 50s who lives in Kabul capital city of Afghanistan said that;

“Turkmenistan is our fatherland, and the people that live there are our brothers and sisters, our ancestors were living together, for instance when my grandfather came to Afghanistan because of the Soviet invasion of their territory, his brothers and sisters did not leave their lands and stayed there, however nowadays we can not build a relation with them since we lost contact because of too many things such as their regime, the conflict in our country, and different values that we faced during the separated years. Besides they don't value religion as much as we do, they have become more secular and value Russian culture over our own one”.

When we asked if sharing ethnicity is a reason for intimacy she said;

“If the border rules between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan was easier to cross, maybe then there would be an intimacy between us, however, unfortunately, it is not the case” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens)

While two Afghan Turkmen sisters' in their 20s and who lives in Kabul, capital city of Afghanistan, and recently came to Türkiye for their education stated that;

“We think that the Turkmen of Turkmenistan are separate from us because they were under the influence of the Soviet Union and although we try to preserve our own culture, we are more or less influenced by the Afghan culture and we live according to it. We think that the people of Turkmenistan do not accept us as Turkmen because they

think that we fled without defending our country. Why we get this idea; because it is a thought that can be said to be accepted and spoken by our family elders and Turkmen people around us.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmen)

Another interviewee was a man in his 60's who lives in Kunduz and he said similar things with the former one, he declared;

“After all, we are all brothers and they are Turkmen, they are just assimilated because people of Turkmenistan were under Russian influence, they have distanced themselves from religion, while Afghan Turkmen were able to protect themselves more. There is no nationalism situation in Turkmenistan, they don't have any intention to gather Turkmen in the world.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmen)

Moreover, a man in his 30's and lives in Mazar-i Shariff declares that;

“We share similar patterns of culture, customs, and traditions, hence, it is natural to have the same values, our ancestors lived together, laughed together, faced hardships together, and as their grandchildren, we may have the same blood. Nevertheless, there are some differences as well, my friends or relatives who visit Turkmenistan says that Turkmen people have become very secular, they do not value Islamic teachings as much as we do, plus they do not value our language, in their daily life they use Russian more than the Turkmen language, which is very sad to hear.” He furthers; *“I do not think sharing the same ethnicity would let people be closer, I feel closer to Uzbeks, Persians, and Pashtuns who live in Afghanistan rather than Turkmen people who live across the border. We may have some similarities such as language and culture but we do not share the same lands, do not live under the same flag which makes us different”* (Interview with Afghan Turkmen)

Nonetheless, there seem to be a few cross - border exchanges between ethnic Turkmen in Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, even though they were fairly limited. For instance one of the interviewee girl in his 20s who lives in Jowuzjan declares that;

“My father's ancestors came from Lebap district of Turkmenistan, he may know someone who lives there, but unfortunately I do not know anyone across the border” (Interview with Afghan Turkmen)

Mostly on the Afghan side of the fence, various groups of individuals (political-military actors, previous migrants, government officials, students, merchants, and some other locals) engage with neighboring Central Asia on a limited scale, primarily in northern areas. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 3).

The matter of refugees will come to mind in the cross border activities, even if this matter has not always been an illustration of the transborder interactions between people. Besides, Turkmenistan has been impacted by massive population movements from its war-torn neighbor Afghanistan, though not to the same extent as other nations in the region. Multiple waves of Afghan migrants crossed the Afghan –Turkmen border, and settled in Turkmenistan, particularly in the second half of the 1990s, and as already mentioned in the above many of these refugees from the AfghanTurkmens, whose assimilation into the Turkmen society was anticipated to be easier than that of other national and ethnic communities. (Šír, Jan, Horák, Slavomír, 2016, p. 122).

In addition, drug smuggling, even if it is not for a good cause and is illegal, can be another issue that makes transborder interactions possible for the two ethnic brothers across the border since as written in the previous chapters Turkmenistan's being one of the most important for drug smuggling route and since, Afghan Turkmens had started to harvest opium, too. According to the Azatlyk Radiosy, Afghan Turkmen start to harvest opium due to economic challenges they face. (Azatlyk Radiosy, 2017).

At the moment with the global network's growth, interaction and connection between people have been increasing, hence it can also be the case for the ethnic Turkmens of Afghanistan and people Turkmenistan, the co-ethnics of two countries can build a connection from the bottom, not waiting for politicians to build some connections.

On top of that, such relations may be beneficial even for interaction between the countries, since when people start to be aware of what is happening in the region that they are living, they can also build some social pressure on the authorities of their country to do more or to build more communication and interaction. Besides people-to-people, connections may help to eliminate prejudices that have influenced bigger discourses about each other.

People to people connection between two ethnic brethren across the border may build bottom an integration that will boost relations and interactions between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, and this people-to-people communication may be smoother and easy for the

same ethnic communities rather than different ones since they have common history, culture, traditions, and language.

Nevertheless, even to be able to build such strong communications among the people of Turkmenistan and ethnic Turkmen of Afghanistan there should be governmental effort since it is not easy to build such connections without government support in the authoritarian regimes of Afghanistan and Central Asian states. For instance when we asked Afghan Turkmen interviewees if they want borders to be more transparent; the answers were the same all of them want more transparent parents and easier regulations to cross borders, they believe it is one of the main reasons that they do not have any kind of connection with their ethnic brethren across the border. An Afghan Turkmen girl in her 20s who lives in the Jowuzjan province of Afghanistan asserts that;

“I want borders to be open and transparent in this way we may build some relations with others and we can easily visit our fatherland, if border policies were easier to cross we may even find our relatives across the border. Besides, in this way we can even be seen by the Turkmen government, they would know our existence and struggles.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens)

Further, two Afghan sisters from Kabul brings another aspect;

“Our expectations from Turkmenistan...to be able to travel to our fatherland more easily, but we also understand the president of the country, Berdimuhammedov; Afghanistan has been in the grip of war and terrorist activities for many years, and these terror actions may spillover to Turkmenistan easier if Turkmenistan ease visa regulations and permit everyone to enter the country, Berdimuhammedov does not want any risk of spillover which is normal. However, the Turkmen government can bring us social and humanitarian aid here in our country, maybe it can be a bridge between ethnic groups in different ways.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmens)

A man in his 30's who lives in Mezar-I Sharif even though he wants borders to open; he asserts that he can understand strict regulations of Turkmenistan by saying;

“Of course, I would want the borders to be more open, in that way we may have built some social connections with people of Turkmenistan, but I can understand why Turkmenistan has strict border policies, there are lots of drug trafficking going on

borders, therefore it is natural for Turkmenistan to be more recessive.” (Interview with Afghan Turkmen)

Therefore, for strong ethnic ties between two ethnic cousins, Turkmenistan should be more open, should try to boost ethnic cousins’ interaction and communication by following easier visa regulations, reaching out to ethnic Turkmen, by strengthening common language, historical, ethnic ties, and Afghanistan should be free from conflicts that seem as a threat for the stability of the region, therefore, a threat for its neighbor.

All in all, Afghan Turkmen’s interaction both with the Turkmen government and the people of Turkmenistan is not strong, yet it does not mean it can not be strengthened. Further, it does not mean that Turkmenistan has completely forgotten Afghan Turkmen and does not have any kind of kin minority strategies towards Afghan Turkmen. Since, even though the scale was limited, Ashgabat has done humanitarian aid, constructing buildings such as schools, and mosques, in the territories where Afghan Turkmen were populous.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the impact of kin minorities; it is not enough to be decisive and have an effect on bilateral relations between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Turkmenistan follows its neutral position when making foreign policies. Although assistance for kin minorities exists, it has little impact on the utilitarian and careful Turkmen, decision-making. Officially, the Turkmen administration would wish to leave the issue of national peace and reconciliation to the Afghans, rather than be perceived as actively promoting ethnic intervention. Besides Ashgabat would suffer bad consequences if it had separatist tendencies since Turkmenistan also has a multi-ethnic demographic structure, which can be a reason for its caution.

V.B.Uzbekistan’s Kin Policy towards Afghan Uzbek Community

Ethnic Uzbeks of Afghanistan are believed to be fourth (some estimated as the third) the most populous ethnicity in the country and the most populous Turkic community in the country that approximately compensates 9 to 10 % of the country’s population. Afghan Uzbeks’ social community structure is also based on tribes like Afghan Turkmen, and they are also mostly populated in the north and northeast of Afghanistan, particularly alongside the Uzbekistan border. (Durkin, J. Keller, 2008-2009, p. 13).

Uzbeks, like Turkmen, also have their co-ethnic brother across the border in the Central Asian countries and it is estimated to be the most populous Turkic group of the region; as it is

understandable, Uzbeks are the most populous in Uzbekistan, they cover 72 percent of Uzbekistan's population, in Tajikistan this percentage is 24, 14% of Kyrgyzstan's population, 9% in Turkmenistan's population, and lastly 9% of Afghanistan's population are Uzbek. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107).

Uzbek movements from Central Asia to Afghanistan have been documented since at least the 16th century or earlier. The emergence of particularly Uzbek jurisdiction in Afghanistan traces back predominantly to the era when the Uzbeks pushed into Khorasan, battled with the Shi'ite Safavid dynasty in Iran, and managed to make inroads into western Afghanistan, and even Kabul, where they had attacked in 1623. Uzbeks had clashed with Moghul India's armies in the provinces that are now eastern Afghanistan and periodically retreated to Balkh, Maimana, and Shiberghan. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Uzbeks had created independent bekdoms here, which occasionally partnered with Uzbek monarchs in Transoxiana. (Naby, Eden, 2007, p. 5-6).

In 1751, Afghan (Pashtun) monarch Ahmad Shah captured the lands along the Amudarya River's southern bank, including Balkh, Maimana, Bamyan, Andkhoy, Shiberghan, and other parts up to Badakhshan, which had been populated by Turkic tribes who have already considered themselves as Uzbeks. Nevertheless, these lands did not stay permanently and the ruler of the region changed in different periods until the Russo-Afghan borderline deal, following these agreements Uzbeks found themselves in modern-day Afghanistan. In October 1872, an agreement between two great powers, Russia and Great Britain, was used to finalize the deal, and shaped the official border line between Afghanistan and occupied Central Asia. Moreover, large numbers of Uzbeks also migrated to Afghanistan in the 1920s and 1930s from Central Asia where the inhabitants were being Sovietized. The Uzbeks who fled from Central Asia and seek refuge in Afghanistan were mostly from Namangan, Kokand, or Andijan, where now these territories are part of Uzbekistan. (Nurkulov, Nurshood, 2020, p. 21-22).

Therefore as Eden Naby (2007) states; Uzbeks that live in Afghanistan can be divided into three groups: (1) those who have always resided in Afghanistan, dating back to the Shaybanid period in the 16th century or earlier; (2) those who came south before to 1917; and (3) those who migrated as a direct outcome of Bolshevik and Soviet action in the area. (Naby, Eden, 2007, p. 4). Further, Uzbeks acquired rivalry and dislike towards Pashtuns when Amir Abdur Rahman gave away their land to the Pashtuns and declared them superior to Uzbeks. These

events also caused Uzbeks to band together, and they start to become more informed and aware of politics and start to become more unified. To illustrate, the Uzbek armed groups united in the 1990s when the Pashtun-dominated Taliban emerged in Afghanistan. (Ahmad, Ayaz, 2018, p. 222)

As already mentioned earlier, Uzbeks like Turkmen also have a tribal structure in their community, nevertheless, this tribal organization has almost vanished among sedentary groups who live in urban areas, however, while it still exists among nomadic Uzbek tribal groups. Besides, sedentary Uzbek groups have become more important and effective in the political solidarity of ethnic Uzbeks of Afghanistan. (Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations, n.d.b, p. 2).

On top of that, with the communist regime in Afghanistan, they had a chance to seek equal rights for themselves and had opportunities such as publishing poems, newspapers, broadcasting radio programs, and so on in their language. Along with the Soviet evacuation from Afghanistan in 1989, Uzbeks had started to push for equal political power and autonomy in the governance of Afghanistan, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum became an advocate for Uzbeks' interests in Afghanistan, thanks to his authority over the Northern regions, Uzbeks did not have their very own political entity until General Abdul Rashid Dostum resigned from the Najibullah administration. Unlike ethnic Turkmen who protected their neutral stance during the Taliban rule, ethnic Uzbeks played an active role in the Northern Alliance and fought against the Taliban. As a result, after the regime fell, Uzbeks became even more important in Afghanistan's military and political life. (Nurkulov, Nurshood, 2020, p. 22).

Additionally, even though, some groups migrate to Afghanistan, Uzbek's existence in the territory is much longer than that since before the Russian- British agreement no line or border restricts them from movement and settlement. Further, it is important to mention that, just like the Afghan – Turkmen border, the Uzbek - Afghan border line is also an artificial one that is not based on ethnic background, this border line divided Uzbeks and restricts movement.

Along with that, when it comes to their relations with their co-ethnic brothers across the border and the Uzbekistan government, firstly, although Central Asian people, hence Uzbeks, share ethnicity, language, and religion with northern Afghans, the Soviet Union's legacy has limited to built strong connections between ethnic brothers in several ways. After Central Asian territories ruled by Russia and Central Asia became a member of the Soviet Union,

borders started to produce cultural and socioeconomic divides between them, separating towns from one another and placing them on separate pathways of history. For instance, while Central Asians became more secular, Islam remained to play a significant role in the lives of their co-ethnics who were living in Afghanistan. (Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, 2012, p. 39).

Moreover, even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Uzbekistan's declaration of independence, the newly established Uzbek regime was mostly preoccupied with 'nation-building' in its territories rather than binding with their co-ethnic relatives across the border. (Abdullayev, Kamoludin, 2018, p. 62).

According to Matteo Fumagalli (2007), the official doctrine of the Uzbek state is more concerned to define the state's role in the world than defining what the 'nation' means for them. This is more about identifying Uzbekistan as a national state than creating the norms of 'Uzbekness'. He argues that a quick examination of the country's official doctrine and ideology reveals that the 'territorial' triumphs over the 'ethnic' for the Uzbek administration. The Uzbek government used the concept of national liberation as a theoretical foundation to place perceived external dangers inside the rhetoric of order, peace, and stability. (Fumagalli, Matteo, 2007, p. 111). One of the main reasons for this attitude is lying with Uzbekistan's population structure. Uzbekistan, just like other countries in the region, is a multi-ethnic country, Uzbeks consist 72 % of the population, Russians consist 12%, Tajiks 4%, and others consist 12% of the population. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107). Therefore, if Uzbekistan would seek and support any ethnic-based partition in its region, this may inspire other ethnic people who live in Uzbekistan except Uzbeks, hence any kind of conflict based on ethnicity can spillover to Uzbekistan. Besides, the Uzbek government has placed more focus on the country's integration than to deepen bonds with its ethnic neighbors.

Matteo Fumagalli (2014) claims that there are three reasons why the Uzbek administration did not follow ethnic-based policies; first and foremost, newly independent Uzbekistan, just like other Central Asian countries, did focus on 'state-nation' building on its territories and was preoccupied with constructing state structures, rather than binding with their co-ethnics across the border, the second reason for the hesitance of Uzbek administration to engage with Uzbeks living abroad was lying on the importance of interstate bilateral relations given by Uzbekistan government, last but not least, all the obstacles and issues in politics, business, and culture, that face Uzbeks who lives abroad, and the opinions of Uzbeks abroad

themselves may be the cause of the absence of active relationships. (Fumagalli, Matteo, 2014, p. 118).

Moreover, even though around seven million ethnic Uzbeks reside as a minority in five nations that have a border with Uzbekistan, they have several shared problems, such as having an absence or rather limited accessibility to education in their language, an absence of political representation, barriers to speak their language openly, and, most obviously, a limited connection to their native Uzbekistan. For instance, in Afghanistan, approximately there are between 2.5 and 3.5 million ethnic Uzbeks (although the exact number is disputed).

The majority of them do not have the choice of attending Uzbek schools. Both Uzbek-language textbooks and Uzbek-speaking instructors are in short supply. When reflecting on her upbringing in Afghanistan, Nazeela (an Afghan Uzbek girl) recalls, "I never got the opportunity to attend a college that educates in my language. I had friends who were Uzbeks but still would not identify themselves as such out of fear". All of these reasons will lead to a limited connection between ethnic brothers around the world. Nevertheless, all of these do not mean that the Uzbek administration did completely forget ethnic Uzbeks living abroad. Especially, with the accession of President Mirziyoyev, things appear to change slightly. To project a better, more welcoming image of Uzbekistan, several initiatives have been taken to improve relations with ethnic Uzbeks overseas. (Uralova, Niginakhon, 2021).

When it comes to ethnic Uzbeks living in Afghanistan they had some links with Uzbekistan's administration even during Islam Karimov's reign. Since, unlike ethnic Turkmen, ethnic Uzbeks were more active in politics, as well as in military issues in Afghanistan, they did build some ties and did access some support from their ethnic brethren in Uzbekistan. As already written above, Uzbeks had their representative for these issues; General Abdul Rashid Dostum did study in the schools of the Soviet military and then becomes the leader of 53. Troop during the Soviet-backed Dr. Najebullah's governance. General Abdul Rashid Dostum, especially during the Taliban rule, did gain some support from Uzbekistan's government led by Islam Kerimov. Tashkent and Dostum remained close all through the mid-to late-1990s. Further, General Dostum received considerable financial and military support from Islam Karimov president of Uzbekistan. In addition to this, Dostum's soldiers would occasionally cross the border and would go to Termez, Uzbekistan, to rest after tough battles against Taliban forces in Afghanistan. (Rotar, Igor, 2014).

Besides, Tashkent did support Dostum in other areas except for military support, for instance in the 1990s, Tashkent did give free power to the Dostum's stronghold city Mazar-e Sharif among other things. (Pannier, Bruce, 2016). Moreover, during the Taliban rule, Uzbekistan recognized Dostum's party "Junbish-e Milli-yi Islami-yi Afghanistan" as its official equivalent in north Afghanistan by opening a consulate in the city of Mazar-e Sharif in 2002. However, Antonio Giustozzi believes that financial support was "puny if indeed there was any" at that time. (Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, 2012, p. 42).

Dostum did visit Uzbekistan occasionally even after the Taliban rule, to be able to gain support from the Uzbek administration for enhancing more power within the politics of the country. For instance in 2014, just after Dostum's relations with President Ashraf Ghani had entered into turbulence, Dostum did visit Uzbekistan unofficially. He even visited former President Islam Kerimov's tomb. The Uzbek authorities, just like they were in the 1990s, are aware of the potential benefits of establishing a buffer zone in the area of Afghanistan where the majority of the population is Uzbek. Rafik Saifulin, an Uzbek political scientist who supports the government, argues that; "Dostum is one of the most secular officials in Afghanistan, and the Central Asian government benefits from his approach. Nobody wants the Taliban to come close to their borders." (Rotar, Igor, 2014). On top of that according to Malik Mansur (2018) an Uzbek journalist who is publishing articles in Amerikaovazi (Voice of America), Dostum's return to Afghanistan from his exile in Türkiye may strengthen Tashkent's hand in Afghanistan's politics. (Mansur, Malik, 2018).

According to Kamoliddin Rabbimovga, an Uzbek analyst, Uzbekistan always had good relations with the ethnic Uzbeks of Afghanistan. He continues by saying; "Now, there are changes (with the new government in Uzbekistan), but it can be called limited changes. During Karimov's time, very cautious and secret cooperation was established with the Uzbek leaders in Afghanistan. Karimov saw the Afghan Uzbeks as a 'buffer zone' between the Taliban and Uzbekistan. Today's new government recognizes the presence of millions of Uzbeks in Afghanistan and allows its youth to study in Uzbekistan. There is a mindset of restoring cultural, economic, and political cooperation with Afghanistan, not only with Uzbeks but establishing full cooperation with the country." (Mansur, Malik, 2018)

At the beginning of September 2018, the head of the delegation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, visited Afghanistan and returned after holding talks with President Ashraf Ghani and several officials. Further, there are reports that

Komilov met with representatives of the Uzbek community in Afghanistan during the trip, but Tashkent did not officially provide any information about this. Moreover, even though Dostum has been the main leader for Uzbeks in the north for many years, even before Dostum's return, large-scale demonstrations were held in the northern regions where Uzbeks live, demanding the release of his comrade Nizamiddin Kaisari from detention and the return of the general himself to the country. Kamoliddin Rabbimov argues that Dostum should not be the only person to communicate for Tashkent about Afghan Uzbek-related issues. He says that; "I think that the new government should not limit itself to giving priority to only one person, General Dostum, in relations with the Uzbeks in Afghanistan. He has to work with many people who influence public opinion, and he has to look for new leaders. Because, as we know, General Dostum's resources are getting more and more limited. A new generation is growing up, and new personalities are emerging. In such a situation, it will not be right to rely only on Abdul Rashid Dostum," (Mansur, Malik, 2018)

Uzbekistan did build relations with Afghan Uzbeks through Uzbek leader Dostum, this relation was made mainly because Uzbekistan was concerned about any type of spillover of the conflict in its territory, one can say that just like its neighbor Turkmenistan, Uzbek administration did also seek its national interest, but while seeking those interests its ethnic brethren Afghan Uzbeks was one of the first group to look after.

Indeed, ethnic affinities may influence the foreign policies of Uzbekistan towards Afghanistan, but they are not the deciding factor. Moreover, since Uzbekistan also has a multi-ethnic population structure, Uzbekistan may not intervene as much. Nevertheless, besides military and political support which seems more related to Uzbekistan's national interests, Uzbekistan did support Afghan Uzbeks in other areas as well. For instance, Uzbekistan did accept Afghan students to study in Uzbek universities through a program that was founded in Termez, Uzbekistan, in 2017, "The Education Center for Afghan Citizens". Students from Afghanistan, even though, this does not imply that the center was just established for ethnic Uzbeks; rather, it was done so to strengthen bilateral ties with Afghanistan, the majority of students were Uzbek in ethnicity, were offered 18 undergraduate and 19 secondary (vocational) courses. Further, nearly 100 students graduated with degrees in Uzbek language and literature. Besides, according to Nematullah Noori, an Uzbek from Afghanistan, "The majority of pupils that traveled to Termez during the first year were ethnic Uzbeks. But the majority of pupils in the next years were Pashtuns. The Uzbek language should, therefore, be a requirement for selection by the Uzbek government." To raise

awareness of the suffering of ethnic Uzbek youth living in tough circumstances without parental care in Afghanistan and to offer some help, the charity campaign “For Peace” was started in Uzbekistan in 2020. To send to Afghan Uzbeks, the campaign gathered Uzbek-language textbooks, novels, and stationery. (Uralova, Niginakhon, 2021).

In addition, when it comes to the people-to-people connection between the two ethnic brethren across the borders, one can observe that there is an absence of ethnically based ties and commonalities, as well as a lack of cross-border relations in Afghan – Uzbek borderline. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 41). Indeed, the Amu Darya River separated the ethnic Uzbeks of Afghanistan from their ethnic brothers. There were no shared ties between them for a long time. Early in the 20th century, when borders were strengthened, Central Asia had a socialist revolution that drastically altered the socioeconomic makeup of the region's people. While four decades of conflicts continued to undermine and impoverish Afghan people below the river, seventy years of Soviet administration resulted in the isolation of Central Asians but instead relatively high levels of socioeconomic development and literacy. Because of the varied paths that kin across borders have taken, traditional bonds have been broken. While their ancestors in Afghanistan largely maintained their traditional rural lifestyle and tribal traditions, Turkmen, Tajiks, and Uzbeks of Central Asia grew more sophisticated, urbanized, and acquired loyalty to national governments. (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 35).

Afghan Uzbeks had no opportunity to attend universities, or schools, to pursue an education in Uzbekistan. There were barely a handful of instances, where wealthy Afghans (with questionable backgrounds) could send their children to live and attend school in Uzbekistan. The most unfortunate aspect was that modern Afghan Uzbeks had no idea what Uzbek literature was all about. They were unable to read Uzbek literature based on Cyrillic lettering, and there is little Latin-script literature even in Uzbekistan itself because the country's attempt to switch to the Latin alphabet has either failed or at the very least halted. (Sattarov, Rafael, 2018).

The border lines, which are not based on ethnicity but rather are artificial, only served colonial powers while preventing racial and religious harmony and the mobilization of groups of people who shared a common culture, history, language, and ethnicity. Further, as already mentioned above the Soviet influence that Central Asian people, eventually Uzbek people, had faced did separate them from their ethnic brethren across the border in many ways. The

very first one is the language, for instance, while Uzbekistan has been using officially the northern dialect of Uzbek, firstly in Cyrillic script due to Soviet influence and now is using in Latin-script literature, Afghan Uzbeks have been using the southern dialect of Uzbek, in Arabic-script literature, moreover, while northern dialect of Uzbek has Russian words in their language, southern Uzbek dialect was influenced by Persian. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2020).

Moreover, knowledge about the people across the border is very limited on both two sides, only a handful of people on either side of the border were informed about people on the other side through visits or relationships with people on the other side, hence perceptions of people living on the two other sides of the border were primarily based on information they obtained through television, social media, and rumor. In a research named “Strangers Across the Amu River” it is written that the most of Afghans interviewed said that the primary distinction between Central Asian nations and their neighbor Afghanistan was that the former had better living circumstances due to what they saw to be a far better security situation over there. The interviewees in Kaldar, a district of the Balkh province of Afghanistan, for instance, believed that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on the opposite side of the border had considerably greater freedom of speech. (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 26).

According to a widespread viewpoint held by many Afghan respondents in the survey, Central Asians were not very devout Muslims because they did not place a lot of value on religion due to their extreme liberalism, which was a bad trait. A madrasa instructor from Hairatan remarked; “I have not been there, but I heard this from one of the villagers who was detained by Uzbek border guards for bringing licorice root (Shirin boya) from the Uzbek side, the fact that he never once heard the call to prayer (azan) while he was imprisoned in one of their jails indicates that the people of Uzbekistan are not at all religious.” A head of a village in Kaldar asserted, “I am sure that no ordinary person has spoken to anyone on the other side of the border in the last seven or eight years.” The Provincial Council Candidate and Head of the District Development Assembly (a component of the National Solidarity Programme; The Afghan government established the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) to improve Afghan communities' capacity to choose, organize, manage, and track their development initiatives and establish community development councils (CDCs) as local governance institutions) in Khwaja Bahauddin frankly stated that “I only know the president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov. I lack even the most fundamental knowledge of the rest.” On the Afghan side, the

opinions of those who lived on the opposite side were primarily formed depending on the little information they were able to gather through television as well as social media. Afghan Turkmen and Afghan Uzbeks in the Hairatan district of Afghanistan were able to watch Uzbek television channels. (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 27)

In contrast to their impressions of Pakistanis and Iranians, whom they perceived as meddling in their internal matters, Afghans saw Central Asian communities from a positive to a neutral point of view, with no one voicing hostility towards people on these sides of the border. Further, despite their lack of knowledge of local matters, they complimented the Central Asian countries for not interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs, in contrast to their other neighbors. Although there was little sense of co-ethnicity, individuals thought of communities on the other side of borders as neighbors or, at best as brothers and friends. On top of that, because it was believed that the Uzbek government purposefully forbade individuals from developing relationships with those who lived on the Afghan side, the Uzbeks of Hairatan stated they had no familial or blood links with co-ethnic communities (Uzbeks primarily) on the other side. (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 29)

In short, even though there was some humanitarian, educational, and even military aid for Afghan Uzbeks, the ethnic card has a little effect both in foreign policies of the Uzbek administration and in relations between ethnic brethren across the border. As already mentioned, the reason for the former, building a 'nation' in its territories was more prior than building relations with their kin across the border, the reason for the latter is that people from both sides had faced different paths of history and challenged differently, even they had a common history, language, and lifestyle, separation with border did actually differentiate them with each other, as already written in the above, while Afghans had preoccupied with different types of conflict and struggles, with Soviet rule Central Asian communities did alienate from their kin and even from their own cultures.

V.C. Tajikistan's Kin Policy towards Afghan Tajik Community

Ethnic Tajiks of Afghanistan are the second most populous group in the country, they are consisting approximately %30 of the country's population. Besides, the term 'Tajik' is not widely used or known in the country; rather they call themselves 'Farsiwan' which means people who speak Dari (a dialect of the Persian language). Unlike the Afghan Turkmen and

Uzbeks, who have tribal community structures, the Tajiks do not have such tribal connections and they often describe themselves with their residential birthplace such as Kabuli, Mazari, Samangani, and so on. Tajiks make up a sizable portion of the population of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital city, as well as other northern and northeastern regions including Samangan, Baghlan, Panjshir, Takhar, Badakshan, and Parwan. (Rubin, Barnett R., 2002, p. 30).

Among Tajiks in Afghanistan, the tribal group system has vanished. It has been replaced with bonds to the community, families, and the village. Tajiks do not have a tribal social structure, unlike Afghan Turkmen and Uzbeks. Tajiks frequently embrace the social and cultural norms of their neighbor, especially in the capital city of the country Kabul and the central plains. They do not have a strong ethnic or tribal community. (Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations, n.d.c, p. 2).

In Afghanistan, Tajiks outperform other ethnic groups in terms of economic and social development and urbanization; they are “more urbanized, better educated, and more likely to manage enterprises or occupy government employment.” Further, Tajiks have a protracted and bitter competition with the Pashtuns, for dominance and power. Even though the core of Afghanistan's intellectual class is made up of Tajiks, who are also very wealthy and politically powerful, only twice have members of the ethnic Tajik community ruled Afghanistan: the first time was Habibullah Kalakani (Bachae Saqqa), who reigned shortly from January to October 1929, and the second time was Burhanuddin Rabbani, who served as president from 1992 to 1996. (Ubaidulloev, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 122).

Afghan Tajiks are another ethnic group that has ethnic links with the neighboring Central Asian countries of the country as its name suggests, this country is Tajikistan with approximately 64 percent of its population, besides Uzbekistan has Tajik groups, which cover 4 percent of Uzbekistan's population, in it, too. (Kara, Hasan, 2006, p. 107). As already written in the previous chapters, the lands that compensate Afghanistan and Tajikistan were a borderless territory until recently and people were free to move from one region to another, plus the borders lines that Afghanistan and Tajikistan share were not based on any ethnical background but an artificial one. Therefore, it is very natural to have people who share common ethnicities across the borders of the two countries.

Tajiks living in Afghanistan identify themselves as belonging to the same ethnic group as Tajiks in Tajikistan. The Tajik and Afghan populations share linguistic traits and historical

origins. Although there is considerable cultural commonality, there are clear differences between the two nations due to their diverse national political histories. Many families have members who reside on opposite sides of the border yet they have been described with different nationalities; Tajik or Afghan, due to the country they are living in. However, they still have kinship and blood relationships. Both Badakhshan in Tajikistan and Badakhshan in Afghanistan are examples of the places where these families live, as are Kulob and Takhar, Qurghonteppa, and Kunduz. Besides, tens of thousands of civilian refugees (more than 100,000) emigrated from Tajikistan to Afghanistan during the Tajik civil war. (Ubaidullov, Zubaidullo, 2014, p. 121-123). Further, The Tajiks of Badakhshan are associated with the Tajiks living in the neighboring Pamir mountain area of Tajikistan by their dialect and Shiia faith, however, both groups are minorities within their own Tajik populations. (Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations, n.d.c, p. 13).

When it comes to the Tajikistan government's perception of Afghan Tajiks, we can say that Dushanbe is a bit more proactive than the two other neighboring Central Asian states, especially Turkmenistan. For instance, Dushanbe has indeed been clear about its aspirations for Afghanistan, including the establishment of an administration that is representative of Afghanistan's Tajik majority, while Turkmenistan had engaged with the Taliban for its interests. (Klyszcz, Ivan U., 2021). Further, Tajikistan had initiated the World Congress of Tajiks and Persian Speakers (WCTPS), and in 1996, all international Tajik groups, including Afghan Tajiks, joined the very first WCTPS that is the only pan-ethnic organization in Central Asia with a permanent executive committee, a yearly magazine called Payvand (Liaison), and the president of the kin-state himself is the Tajik initiative WCTPS. (Ferrando, Olivier, 2009, p. 44)

Another example of this proactivity of the Tajik administration can be a statement made by Tajikistan's President Rahmon, during discussions with visiting Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Dushanbe on August 25, 2021, he argues that the safety and rights of Afghanistan's ethnic Tajiks, who, make up nearly half of the nation's population (based on Tajik presidential service), are the most crucial issue for his country. (Radio Free Europe, 2021).

Besides, when Panjshir Valley, which had never before been exposed to the Taliban rule, and the last stronghold of Taliban resistance, did fall into the Taliban's hands for the very first time Tajikistan becomes a place of refuge for National Resistance Front members, such as

Ahmad Massoud, (son of Ahmad Shah Massoud who was an Afghan Tajik guerilla that did resist to the USSR during its invasion of the country and fight against the Taliban by forming Northern Alliance) Amrullah Saleh, former government's vice president and now the self-declared interim president of Afghanistan, and Abdul Latif Pedram, the leader of the Afghan National Congress Party. (Sanz, Alba, 2021).

According to Republic World, (2021) an Indian Media and News channel, the Northern Alliance reportedly received military hardware, weapons, and other supplies from Tajikistan as part of a significant display of support for the Afghanistan Resistance's uprising against the Taliban. Republic World puts claim that early on August 23, 2021, when helicopters imported military hardware, weapons, and food supplies for Massoud's army, the rebel forces received their first reinforcement from Tajikistan. Furthermore, even though Tajikistan did deny any support to Northern Alliance, according to reports, photos from Afghanistan show Tajikistan's helicopters dropping weapons in Panjshir. Republic World furthers that the Northern Alliance has been attempting to import tools, weapons, and ammunition to combat the Taliban. (Methri, Gloria, 2021).

Along with that, Tajikistan had prized Ahmad Shah Massoud and former president of Afghanistan Burhanuddin Rabbani with the highest honor, just after the Taliban took over power in the country. The honor was granted to Massoud and Rabbani "for their support and assistance in organizing inter-Tajik peace process in 1993-1996," as stated on the Tajik president's official website. The honor is given in commemoration of the crucial contribution the two leaders contributed to putting an end to Tajikistan's civil war. (Chaturverdi, Amid, 2021).

Further, in response to the expansion of the Taliban, some Russian commentators assert that the administrations of Tajikistan would work to help and collaborate with their respective coethnic populations and leaders in northern Afghanistan. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 29). Moreover, Tajikistan's position against the Taliban was the same as the Taliban's first rule of Afghanistan; Dushanbe did support Northern Alliance which is led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, in his fight against the Taliban. To begin with, for instance, Tajikistan did allow India to build a hospital in the Farkhor district of the country, for fighters of Ahmad Shah Massoud and Northern Alliance, plus in Dushanbe, Massoud kept a home on Karamova Ulitse, and he had his employees and staff. The Indian envoy began meeting Ahmed Shah

Massoud here regularly to talk about the surprisingly fluctuating fortunes of the conflicts in Afghanistan, where money was sufficient to sway combatants. (Sudarshan, V., 2019).

Nevertheless, the ethnic Tajiks of Afghanistan are not the main reason for all of this support for the Northern Alliance or the firm stance of Tajikistan against the Taliban regime, it is the risk of spillover; Tajik government is extremely concerned about Islamist extremists who have taken refuge in Afghanistan. Tajikistan is concerned about potential threats from Tajik citizens who have “fled into northern Afghanistan.” Real worry exists that the Taliban are harboring such militants and that they would destabilize Tajikistan. Further, Rahmon is also eager to portray himself as a protector of Tajiks, many of whom resist the Taliban, because his blatant anti-Taliban position is “popular in Tajikistan,” according to Paul Stronski, a Central Asia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, so this works well for him. “Elections are not something the government should be concerned about, but they should be concerned about the public's perception of them. Tajiks make up Afghanistan's largest minority. If you are perceived as the protector of Tajiks in Afghanistan, you get favor at home.” (Wheeldon, Tom, 2021).

On top of that, Imamoli Rahmon is attempting to strengthen his stature as a wise old statesman by exploiting his stance on the Taliban. Being regarded as a regional leader in pushing back against the Taliban can help President Rahmon to enhance his global clout. International attention has also been drawn to the Tajik president's stance on the Taliban, the aim of Rahmon seems to work notably that of French President Emmanuel Macron, who has invited him to visit Paris for discussions on October 13 as a result. Engaging with senior international peers is challenging for Central Asian leaders. Meeting influential world leaders like Macron, a Westerner, hence enhances his credibility. He seemed to try establishing himself as a wise old man with this. Consequently, this firm stance against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan raises Rahmon's credibility both internationally and domestically. (Wheeldon, Tom, 2021). When it comes to taking action for the people of Afghanistan, just one year before the Taliban took control of the country for the second time, Imamoli Rahmon came to the Tajikistan part of Badakshan, the border line of the two countries, and addressed the Afghan people from there and promised to provide various support. (Tolo News, 2020).

Tajikistan was the only nation in the area to pledge to accept up to 100,000 Afghan refugees after the Taliban's takeover. Besides, even though, Uzbekistan also talks about diversity and is worried about the status of Uzbeks in Afghanistan Tashkent regards Uzbeks of Afghanistan

as only Afghan citizens, while Dushanbe largely sees Tajiks as “its people” or members of the Tajik diaspora. (Umarov, Temur, 2021).

Nevertheless, Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazimi (2014) assert that in an interview with an expert from Tajikistan; Tajik analyst highlighted that before Karzai's ascent to power, the Tajik elite had considerable support for relationships with Afghan Tajiks like Rabbani and Massoud. Following 2001, nevertheless, there was less of a focus on shared ethnicity in relationships among the elite, and this feature of the relationships was de--emphasized. Before 2001, shared ethnicity was stressed more, but after that Tajik leadership did not place ethnic worries concerning Afghanistan foremost on its policy agenda. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 27).

Olivier Ferrando (2009) argues that at the beginning Tajikistan, in its pursuit to establish its recently independent nations, frequently promoted diasporic rhetoric that embraced all individuals of the same ethnic group, regardless of their host country. Nevertheless, the main purpose behind this diaspora rhetoric was based mostly on domestic, aimed at increasing national awareness of the people living in Tajikistan territories. This rhetoric did not develop into a pronounced foreign policy doctrine that is followed by the Tajik state towards nations accommodating Tajik minorities who live outside of Tajikistan territories. (Ferrando, Olivier, 2009, p. 43-44).

Along with that many of Dushanbe's audacious claims seem to still only in text. For instance, it seems impossible that the 100,000 refugee pledge made by Dushanbe would be carried out anytime soon. Ramazon Rahimzoda, the interior minister of Tajikistan, stated that the country was unable to accommodate many refugees or asylum seekers because “no single international organization has provided practical assistance in creating infrastructure for taking in refugees and asylum seekers in the last twenty years.” (Umarov, Temur, 2021).

Tajikistan seems more inclined to send Afghan refugees back, for instance, based on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) press release, local officials of Tajikistan canceled all recently arrived Afghans' resident licenses at the end of July 2021, besides, even though that residency cards are a necessity for refugee claims. Additionally, the Commission for the Determination of Refugee Status in the country has stopped reviewing refugee requests. Due to these harsh asylum rules, recently arrived Afghans are currently not authorized to be in the nation therefore, there are risks of fines, detention, and deportation for them. (Ranjan, Rohit, 2021).

When the communication and relationships between the peoples of these two countries are mentioned compared to other Central Asian nations, Afghanistan and Tajikistan may have more in common in terms of cultural bonds. Intellectuals from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, including scholars, writers, filmmakers, singers, and students, are increasingly interacting culturally. To be able to frame an illustration of these interactions between the two countries people we did some content analysis. First of all, we did examine the Instagram account of an Afghan entertainment streaming platform which is named “Tuti TV.” We tried to analyze how many Tajikistan people are following Tuti TV’s Instagram account. Even though we can’t track the exact number or percentage of Tajik (who are from Tajikistan) followers, but (by analyzing people who put Tajikistan’s flags on their page) one can see that there are lots of Tajik people on Tuti TV’s Instagram account has as followers.

Moreover, some singers are from Tajikistan and who did interviews on Tuti TV; such as Shabnam Surayo a famous Tajik singer, and Sadriddin another well-known singer of Tajikistan. Besides, when we look at the comments from the interviews, we can analyze that comment were made by both Afghan and Tajik people and includes positive messages such as compliment from Afghan people to Tajik people or the other way around. Along with that lots of singers from both sides did some duets, such as the duet song of Qais Ulfat, an Afghan singer, and Shabnam Suroyo; they sing a song from Ahmad Zahir a popular Afghan singer. Shabnam Surayo in the interview said that “I love Afghan people, they love me and appreciate my art, my songs, we are neighbors and we share the same language... .. our traditional clothes look alike the pattern of it is the same... .. even though the dialect and some words are changing, the language we have is the same hence we can communicate with each other without a difficulty.” She also adds that Aryana Sayeed a well-known Afghan singer, is also famous in Tajikistan and people love to listen to her. (Tuti TV, 2021a).

Another interview was with Sadriddin, he asserts that; “Afghans are not foreigners for us, we are brothers, we share language, culture, and ethnicity. It is a big pleasure for me that my works are appreciated by Afghans. I want to be a bridge between the two countries by using art, and entertainment, and other singers share the same aim and become a bridge between two nations” he furthers “ I want to give concerts all around Afghanistan, Ahmad Zahir was my idol, and even in my childhood I used to sing Afghan songs.” (Tuti TV, 2021b)

Furthermore, another good example of these interactions can be the visit of candidates of Afghan Star, an Afghan singing contest program, to Dushanbe. During this visit, they gave a

concert to both Afghan people who live in Tajikistan and Tajik people. Plus, apparently Afghan Star candidates seemed to be not having any problems communicating with Tajik people by using their dialect of Persian. (Afghan Star Youtube Channel, 2018).

Along with that, an Afghan TV program named 'Bamdade Khosh' visit the bazaars in Dushanbe and communicate with Tajik sellers. Generally, all Tajik sellers welcome Afghan reporters, a Tajik woman said that Tajik people all love Afghans, and they are like their brothers, the customs and traditions of both countries are the same. Another Tajik seller woman claimed that they have a lot of permanent Afghan customers, and she furthers that they built relations aside from the bazaar and they visit each other at houses and invite each other to their celebrations. (Tolo Tv Youtube Channel, 2018)

According to a study named 'Strangers Across the Amu River: Community Perceptions Along the Tajik–Afghan Borders'; although contacts had been broken, family ties dated back several generations in some places, including Davaz, there were also some new, if sparse, family ties that had either developed during the interwar period when Tajiks from Panj and Kumsangir temporarily sought safety in Afghanistan or as a result of fresh connections forged through the bridges and bazaars of Badakhshan. Nevertheless, trade is the primary basis for human interaction rather than kinship along the border. Afghan people had a weak sense of co-ethnicity and saw populations on the other side of the borders as neighbors at best as brothers but mostly only as a neighbor, While Tajiks, despite they view Afghans as foolish people (jahel) that was made up of the war-torn country, had a more romantic picture of communities across rivers. Even though they were aware of the ethnic diversity of northern Afghanistan and the presence of Uzbeks, Turkmen, etc. there, they regularly conveyed their kinship by referring to them as "our Tajiks" (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 4).

For instance, a 65-year-old doctor from Hamadoni shared a widespread sentiment: "They are a part of our nation, even though they are more primitive than we are." Further, even though people from both sides of the border mostly learn what is happening across the border from media channels, it seems that because of the similarities in culture and language as well as the more open political system in Tajikistan, which allowed for exchanges, Afghan people generally appeared to have more accurate information about Tajikistan than they did about Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan. (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 27- 28).

Nevertheless, on both sides of the border, most people do not know one another, since history, geography, and politics have all worked together to restrict unfettered interactions between co-ethnic groups across borders. Further according to 'Strangers Across the Amu River', among Afghan people, relatively few have ever visited any of the Central Asian nations or interacted with anyone from the other side. (Tadjbaksh, Shahrbanou, Iskandarov, Kosimsho, Mohammadi, Abdul Ahad, 2015, p. 34).

To be able to examine the cross-border connection from a Tajik perspective, a senior analyst of Afghanistan's Analysts Network; Thomas Ruttig was in Dushanbe, in his interview with people of Tajikistan, it seems they had some prejudice against their ethnic brethren. For instance, one of the interviewees; a Tajik taxi driver had asserted that "Afghanistan? I haven't been there, though. We are democratic Muslims, whereas they practice Sharia law." Another Pamiri Tajik has said that; one could notice the contrasts between Tajiks and Afghans at the six border markets that were frequently held on an island in the border river Panj: "While our people would arrange their items elegantly on tables and stands, the Afghans just spread them out on the ground in the dirt." Another interviewee, who works as a researcher in Dushanbe, had asserted that Afghans also have some prejudice against them, "They don't see us as Muslims" he said. (Ruttig, Thomas, 2013).

In addition, there is not much support for Afghan Tajiks among the broader community in Tajikistan. There was hardly any sympathy for Afghans, not even Tajik Afghans, according to a survey conducted, as "they had nothing in common." Even among people who had been to Afghanistan, negative attitudes predominated. This attitude toward Afghans, as well as Tajik co-ethnics beyond the border, is notably evident in Dushanbe. (Bleuer, Christian, Kazemi, Said Reza, 2014, p. 27).

Further, in a youtube video shared by a channel named 'My Expat Diary', YouTuber made interviews with Afghans who live in Tajikistan's Vahdat city which is half an hour far from the capital Dushanbe; most interviewed Afghan people in video declared to want to go other countries such as Canada, America, because they have relatives there and the living conditions are better than Tajikistan. Besides, when they asked how Tajik people treat them; they said it depends on people and circumstances, and one girl claimed to face racism in Tajikistan. (My Expat Diary, Youtube Channel, 2022)

According to Al Jazeera News around four thousand Afghans living in Tajikistan as refugees. Rokshana Abdol Mohamed, who lives in Tajikistan as a refugee for four years, argues that

their life in Tajikistan is hard, and her elder son can not go to university. According to the news, local laws do not allow Afghan refugees for having a permit for working, get access to the government education system, or live in the capital Dushanbe. (Al Jazeera, 2014).

To summarize ethnic relations between the two co-ethnics, at least in socio-cultural terms, the peoples of both countries have some knowledge about each other. Nevertheless, even though Tajikistan seems to be more connected with Afghanistan in socio-cultural terms than other Central Asian countries neighboring Afghanistan, the Soviet influence in Tajik history and life, and complexity in Afghanistan, in short, history, politics, and geography, had separated people of the same origin living in two different countries. Tajikistan, similar to the other two Central Asian states, is cautious towards Afghanistan and Afghan Tajiks. Even though the Tajik president makes some speeches about shared kinship, Dushanbe puts its interest first. Further, the Tajik administration is focusing nation-building on its territories more than anything.

CONCLUSION

The geographical area encompassing present-day Afghanistan and Central Asia has witnessed a multitude of historical events that have significantly influenced the ethnic composition of Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. Over the course of history, various khanates, kingdoms, and states have risen and fallen, fostering diverse societies and ethnicities in the region. People freely migrated between different areas, contributing to the region's multi-ethnic demographic makeup. The establishment of borders between states resulted in the division of ethnic brethren, giving rise to kin minorities within the region. For example, certain ethnic communities in Afghanistan share ethnic ties with Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Consequently, these three Central Asian countries can be considered kin states for those sharing the same ethnicity in Afghanistan, and these individuals constitute kin minorities within those three states. The connection between a state and minorities residing beyond its borders, who share a common history and identity with the state's citizens, is defined as a kin state and kin minority.

The primary objective of this study was to examine the impact of kin minorities on the diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian countries: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The research employed a qualitative approach with a comparative analysis of relevant literature. Additionally, quantitative data were gathered, involving the collection of numerical information. The assessment of demographic aspects in both Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, including the number of minorities in Afghanistan and the proportion of their counterparts in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, benefited from quantitative data collection. Furthermore, analyzing the extent of trade between each nation and Afghanistan, as well as the prevalence of drug trafficking between Afghanistan and these three Central Asian nations, was made more efficient through the collection of numerical data. These quantitative insights aim to provide a clearer understanding of the regional dynamics.

During our examination of relevant studies, we identified a notable gap in information regarding the influence of kin minorities on the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian States. The existing studies tended to securitize the relations between these nations, with a predominant focus on security aspects. In response to this gap, the current study aims to contribute academic research that delves into the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian countries. The prevailing

research on the foreign policies of Central Asian states towards Afghanistan has primarily centered around security concerns, understandably given the tumultuous nature of the region. However, the existing literature has largely overlooked the role of kin minorities in these relations. Considering that the actions of kin states may significantly impact these minority groups, it is essential to incorporate this dimension into the analysis of bilateral relations in the region.

In this researches the main question was; “What is the place of kin minorities in building bilateral relationships between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian states?” Additionally, there were also some sub-questions that this study tried to conduct and find an answer to, these questions were listed as;

- 1) How the region’s multi-ethnic demographic structure and kin communities has been historically constructed?
- 2) How are the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring Central Asian countries?
- 3) Do neighboring Central Asian countries have any kind of kin-state policy towards their kin minorities in Afghanistan?
- 4) Is there any kind of connection between the people of neighboring Central Asian states and Afghanistan?

Based on our analysis and reviews, the conclusion drawn is that kin minorities do not play a significant role in shaping the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors. The Central Asian countries, primarily focused on fostering a 'nation-building' consciousness within their borders, prioritize consolidating this consciousness domestically. Despite their own multi-ethnic structures, these nations tend to avoid interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The policies of the three Central Asian countries toward Afghanistan are driven more by national interests than by kinship ties.

In their interactions with Afghanistan, these Central Asian states are guided by their national interests, emphasizing trade and security considerations. The three countries view Afghanistan through two main lenses: as a potential market for their goods and a gateway to the South Asian market, and as a source of potential conflict spillover. Consequently, their

policies towards Afghanistan are primarily shaped by these dual perspectives, rather than a significant consideration of kinship ties or the influence of kin minorities.

In the case of Turkmenistan, whose foreign policy is grounded in a 'neutral position' officially recognized by the UN, the significance of ethnic relatives beyond its borders is relatively limited. The information provided leads to the conclusion that Turkmenistan's foreign policy towards its neighbor, Afghanistan, is centered on serving its national interests in both bilateral and regional relations. Key factors influencing Turkmenistan's policies include energy considerations, with a focus on potential energy routes such as the TAPI pipeline, as well as security issues like Islamist militancy and drug trafficking that may pose a threat along the Turkmen border.

Similarly, Uzbekistan prioritizes its national interests in the formulation of foreign policies, with ethnicity playing a minor role in decision-making. The emphasis on building a cohesive "nation" within its borders takes precedence over establishing ties with ethnic relatives across the border. Uzbekistan's relations with Afghanistan are primarily shaped by national interests, viewing Afghanistan as an opportunity to connect Central and South Asia and as a potential market for Uzbek goods and energy resources. Even historical support for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan against the Taliban was driven by the desire to prevent spillover conflicts and establish a buffer zone for security reasons. In summary, both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan prioritize national interests over ethnic considerations in their foreign policies, particularly concerning Afghanistan.

In line with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan places its national interests as a top priority. While Dushanbe certainly desires peace and stability in Afghanistan, this aspiration is primarily motivated by the potential threat of instability spreading throughout the region. Tajikistan's interest in cooperating with Afghanistan in trade is influenced by Afghanistan's dual potential as a market and its strategic location, facilitating the transportation of Tajikistan's natural resources to energy-deficient nations in South Asia. The competition with Uzbekistan for the Afghan market, which has substantial energy needs compared to other regional countries, is a significant factor in Tajikistan's approach. Moreover, Dushanbe's increased activism in addressing the rights of Afghan Tajiks, particularly under the Taliban rule, is driven more by concerns about the risk of conflict spillover and the desire to build a positive international image. Tajikistan's involvement in Afghan Tajiks' affairs can be seen as a strategic move to mitigate potential repercussions and establish a favorable perception on

the global stage. In summary, Tajikistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is molded by a careful consideration of its national interests, encompassing regional stability, economic opportunities, and strategic positioning.

Indeed, despite varying degrees of affinity with their respective kin minority groups, the foreign policies of all three neighboring Central Asian states toward Afghanistan are predominantly driven by national interests rather than kin state-kin minority relationships. The adherence to a non-interference policy in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, in line with their foreign policy doctrines, underscores the limited role of military aid for their kin minorities. Providing military assistance to kin minorities is considered a sensitive and boundary-crossing aspect for these Central Asian nations.

Even in cases where Uzbekistan extended support to certain militias, such as Dostum, it was motivated primarily by national interest rather than a direct focus on kinship ties. This underscores the pragmatic approach of Central Asian states, emphasizing the importance of strategic and geopolitical considerations over ethnic or kinship affiliations. In essence, the national interest of these countries serves as the guiding principle in shaping their foreign policies towards Afghanistan, with a careful avoidance of direct interference in internal Afghan matters based on their established foreign policy doctrines.

Nevertheless, other than military aid, all three Central Asian states did follow other main elements and strategies of kin minority policies such as; humanitarian aid, trade center investment, cultural investment, construction of religious places, regional and social empowerment, creating conferences, constructing institutions, creating market places, constructing schools, educational opportunities in kinstate, scholarship.

Moreover, when it comes to people-to-people connection, it was very limited due to long years of alienation of kin brothers across the border, therefore, building a bottom-up relationship that can impact bilateral relationships in those countries also seems hard. Interaction between people of the same ethnicity, that live cross-border, is not strong enough to affect state policies, rather these interactions are mostly affected by the policies. Still, we can say that Afghan Tajiks and Tajikistan people have more contact with each other, as we find and highlight in the study; they have known each other's singers, singers from both countries makes duet with each other and singers of Tajikistan are well known in Afghanistan. However, even these contacts were not enough to effect the two countries' bilateral relations.

We conduct some interviews with Afghan Turkmens who live in different areas of the country. The interviews were structured due to individuals' concerns about their authoritarian governments. When we approached for interviews, they were apprehensive about the study; however, sending the questions in advance helped alleviate their worries, leading to a more relaxed atmosphere. These interviews aimed to highlight the ideas and perspectives of Afghan Turkmens towards their kin brothers and kin state. In interviews most of the interviewees answered the same about their expectations from Turkmenistan; all wanted support for Afghan Turkmen especially in terms of education, besides building a social bridge between ethnic brethren, since they had no people-to-people connection with their co-ethnics. We had arrived at a conclusion that Afghan Turkmens were not exactly aware of their kin state or their kin brothers across the border, nor they had ties with people of Turkmenistan, most of the interviewees based their knowledge, about Turkmenistan and its people, on stories they heard from someone else. In the case of the Afghan Uzbeks and Afghan Tajiks, we reviewed and analyzed a study named "Strangers Across The Amu River" that conduct some interviews with these people. We had derived a similar conclusion here, as well; most of the interviewees had no connection with people across the border and based their knowledge on television, or on stories they heard from someone else.

In this study we mostly focused on related literature, even though we had some interviews with Afghan Turkmen people these interviews were online virtual interviews, we could not conduct face to face field study because of numerous reasons; first, people's fear of their countries' authorities, for instance, we had reached more Afghan Turkmens than we interviewed, nevertheless they were afraid to do interviews, second, with the conflicts were going on in the region, especially in Afghanistan and Taliban's comeback to power made it harder to travel to Afghanistan and to do a detailed face to face interviews, surveys and so on, besides restricted visa policies of regions' countries primarily Turkmenistan is another restriction for traveling to the region, thirdly, this study was conducted amidst the exceptional global health circumstances that emerged during the onset of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the research, lastly the research was titled to a time frame which can also be described as limitation of this study since it restricts study to go deep. Therefore, future studies about this issue can be done by conducting a detailed field study, research that is based mostly on field study and interviews from both sides of the borders can highlight the parts that this study has lacked.

This research aimed to elaborate on studies about bilateral relations between Afghanistan and its three neighboring Central Asian states, which are mostly securitized in related literature. Besides, to be able frame impact of kin minorities who lives in Afghanistan, in foreign policies of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan toward Afghanistan. This study can be regarded as a good source for analyzing perceptions of Afghan Turkmen towards Turkmenistan and its people since the study conduct some interviews with them. Moreover, this research contributes to further studies to conduct different points of view regarding the research field.

To conclude, this study's findings can be summarized as follows; present foreign policies of Central Asian states towards Afghanistan are mostly based on security and trade, rather than putting a focus on kin minorities. Furthermore, even though assistance for kin minorities does exist, it has little impact on the utilitarian and careful Central Asians' decision-making. Officially, the neighboring Central Asian countries would wish to leave the issue of national peace and reconciliation to the Afghans, rather than be perceived as actively promoting ethnic intervention. Besides they are afraid that they would suffer bad consequences if they had separatist tendencies, since they also have a multi-ethnic demographic structure.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan should take into account their kin minorities when formulating policies toward Afghanistan. This approach can help establish a social bridge among kin brethren, fostering improved relations between these Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. Additionally, recognizing the significance of kin minorities can aid in safeguarding national interests in Afghanistan by cultivating a network of supportive groups among these kin minorities, essentially serving as a form of influential leverage.

Given the current challenges posed by the Taliban's rule, especially in the context of Central Asian states not officially recognizing the Taliban government, foreign policy toward Afghanistan may become more complex. The power shift is likely to heighten the securitization of policies in the region. However, despite these challenges, it is essential for Central Asian countries not to overlook their kin minorities. Instead, they can utilize these minority connections as a foundation for building relationships with the new leadership in Afghanistan. This strategic use of kin minorities can contribute to the development of diplomatic ties and stability in the region.

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