

**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
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Department of Political Science and Public Administration

**ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN AFGHANISTAN:
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF ETHNICITY ON
CONFLICT AND NATION-BUILDING PROCESS**

Master Thesis

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Turkish Abstract : Bu yüksek lisans tezi, Afganistan'da etnik milliyetçiliğin tarihini ve gelişimini, etnik kimliğin çatışma ve ulus inşası süreçlerindeki rolünü, çeşitli etnik grupların analizini ve etnik milliyetçiliğin ikili etkilerini incelemektedir.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that in the preparation of this thesis, scientific ethical rules have been followed, the works of other persons have been referenced in accordance with the scientific norms if used, there is no falsification in the used data, any part of the thesis has not been submitted to this university or any other university as another thesis.

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SUMMARY

This master's thesis, titled "Ethnic Nationalism in Afghanistan: Examining the Impact of Ethnicity on Conflict and Nation-Building Process," explores the intricate relationship between nationalism and ethnic identity in Afghanistan, a country known for its ethnic diversity. The study starts with a summary of nationalism's history, including its development and the key occurrences that influenced Afghan society. It draws attention to the rise of ethnic nationalism in the midst of continuing hostilities and the desire for a stable administration, especially after the Taliban rule collapsed.

The thesis investigates how ethnic affiliations impact political dynamics, social cohesiveness, and the process of nation-building in Afghanistan by thoroughly analyzing a variety of ethnic groupings. It uses qualitative techniques, such as case studies and interviews, to get opinions from important community leaders and stakeholders. The results show that ethnic nationalism has two functions: it can increase tensions and conflicts between various ethnic groups while also giving marginalized populations a sense of identity and belonging.

In the end, this study emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge and take into account ethnic variety when developing policies meant to advance peace and stability in Afghanistan. In order to create a more cohesive and resilient society, it advocates for an inclusive approach to nation-building that honors and incorporates the diverse range of Afghan ethnic identities.

Keywords: Afghanistan, ethnicity, ethnic nationalism, the Pashtuns, ethnic conflict, nation-building, Mujahideen, Durand line.

ÖZET

"Afganistan'da Etnik Milliyetçilik: Etnik Kimliğin Çatışma ve Ülke İnşa Süreci Üzerindeki Etkisinin İncelenmesi" başlıklı bu yüksek lisans tezi, etnik çeşitliliğiyle tanınan Afganistan'da milliyetçilik ile etnik kimlik arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, gelişimi ve Afgan toplumunu etkileyen önemli olaylar da dahil olmak üzere milliyetçiliğin tarihine genel bir bakışla başlamaktadır. Taliban yönetimi çöktükten sonra özellikle devam eden çatışmalar ve istikrarlı bir yönetim arzusu ortamında etnik milliyetçiliğin yükselişine dikkat çekmektedir.

Tez, çeşitli etnik grupları derinlemesine analiz ederek etnik bağlılıkların Afganistan'daki siyasi dinamikleri, sosyal uyum ve ülke inşa sürecini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Önemli topluluk liderleri ve paydaşlardan görüş almak için vaka incelemeleri ve röportajlar gibi nitel yöntemler kullanmaktadır. Bulgular, etnik milliyetçiliğin iki yönlü bir işlevi olduğunu göstermektedir: bir yandan çeşitli etnik gruplar arasında gerilimi ve çatışmayı artırabilirken, diğer yandan marjinalize edilmiş topluluklara kimlik ve aidiyet duygusu verebilir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, Afganistan'da barış ve istikrarı ilerletmek amacıyla geliştirilen politikalarda etnik çeşitliliğin kabul edilmesinin ve dikkate alınmasının ne kadar önemli olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Daha uyumlu ve dirençli bir toplum oluşturmak için, Afganistan'ın çeşitli etnik kimliklerini onurlandıran ve içeren kapsayıcı bir ülke inşa yaklaşımını savunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Afghanistan, etnisite, etnik milliyetçilik, Peştunlar, etnik çatışma, ulus-devlet inşası, Mücahidin, Durand Hattı.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANP	Awami National Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
ISI	Inter-Service Intelligence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
TTP	Tahrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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Dedicated to the brave Afghan girls, whose pursuit of knowledge has been unjustly curtailed. Let us stand united in demanding their right to education and a future filled with hope.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the thesis "Ethnic Nationalism in Afghanistan: Examining the Impact of Ethnicity on Conflict and Nation-Building Process" sets the foundation for an in-depth investigation of the complex relationships between nationalism and ethnic identity in the context of Afghanistan's unstable past.

Problem of the Research

This article delves into the problem of ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan, specifically focusing on the impacts of ethnicity on nation-building. As a master's degree student in public administration and political science, I have chosen this topic for my thesis due to its relevance in understanding the complex dynamics of ethnicity in conflict-ridden regions.

People in any community form several social groups and are divided along various social lines. The ethnic divide is definitely the most active social separation in Afghan society, however, other social differences also split the country into multiple divisions. Individuals identify themselves according to their ethnicity, and this distinction motivates their group behavior. Additionally, this identity division has led to catastrophic outcomes like ethnic violence. Therefore, all scholars and analysts of the situation in Afghanistan must examine the phenomena of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism from an unbiased and scientific standpoint.

Ethnocentrism and ethnicity are phenomena that are not exclusive to Third World societies; they are also prevalent in Western societies. This issue has been encountered by Belgium, Spain, Canada, the United Kingdom, and numerous other nations. Numerous international wars were overlooked as a result of World War II and the Cold War (Noorzad, n.d.). Ethnocentrism and ethnicity were two such battles, but everyone ignored them because they were overshadowed by the intellectual conflict of the day. The contradictions of the nation-state were revealed on their own during the conclusion of the Cold War, when neither the Western nor the Eastern blocs had a foreign rival. Ethnic conflicts are less common in Western cultures today than in other societies, and this is because ethnicity is properly rooted in those societies. However, conditions are different in Afghanistan. While ethnocentric tendencies have existed throughout Afghanistan's history, they peaked during the overthrow of the Daud Khan

regime and the emergence of jihadist organizations. Since then, there has never been a thorough and scientific investigation of the phenomena of ethnicity, which has resulted in a dearth of knowledge about it due to the country's growing ethnic disputes.

The introduction outlines the historical evolution of nationalism in Afghanistan, emphasizing key events that have shaped the socio-political landscape. It highlights the rise of ethnic nationalism as a significant factor during periods of instability, where ethnic affiliations often dictate political alliances and social cohesion. The research underscores the dual nature of ethnic nationalism: while it can exacerbate tensions and conflicts among different groups, it also provides marginalized populations with a sense of identity and belonging.

By employing qualitative methodologies, including case studies and interviews with community leaders and stakeholders, the study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which ethnic identities influence political dynamics and the nation-building process. Ultimately, the introduction emphasizes the necessity of recognizing and incorporating Afghanistan's ethnic diversity into policy-making efforts aimed at fostering peace and stability, advocating for an inclusive approach to nation-building that honors the rich tapestry of Afghan identities.

Purpose of the Research

The primary purpose of this master's thesis is to comprehensively investigate and analyze the intricate relationship between conflict-induced ethnic nationalism and the subsequent patterns of Afghan ethnic groups with a specific focus on the parties involved in the conflict. The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- a. **Examine the Relationship Between Ethnic Identity and Nationalism:** The study intends to investigate how ethnic identities in Afghanistan impact and mold the idea of nationalism, especially in light of the country's diversified populace and past conflicts.
- b. **Analyze the Impact of Ethnic Nationalism on Political Dynamics:** The study seeks to understand how ethnic nationalism affects political interactions, power struggles, and governance in Afghanistan, especially in light of the ongoing challenges faced by the state.
- c. **To identify and analyze the factors that contribute to the Afghan conflict in Afghanistan,** with a specific focus on ethnic groups through history.

- d. To examine the patterns and trends of neighboring countries involved in violence, taking into account the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that compel these parties to intervene in Afghanistan.
- e. To evaluate the effectiveness and impact of ethnicity on nation-building in Afghanistan, considering the methods of nation-building.

By addressing these objectives, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature on ethnic nationalism, conflict, and the specific context of the nation-building process.

Questions of the Research

This study sets out to find answers to the following questions:

1. What historical elements have influenced the emergence of ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan, and how does it appear in the country?
2. What role do ethnic identities play in shaping political context and power imbalances among different ethnic groups in Afghanistan?
3. How does ethnic nationalism influence the dynamics of conflict and the state-building process in Afghanistan?
4. What is the ethnic structure of Afghanistan and what are the fundamental ethnic groups that construct ethnic diversity?

Importance of the Research

Afghanistan is a multicultural nation that struggles with political, social, and cultural diversity. Long-term, this heterogeneity has caused Afghan society to become divided into multiple factions and to disintegrate. Given that Afghanistan is a diverse civilization from both a natural and human perspective, the process of building a nation has been fraught with difficulties. The country's geographical dispersion has led to the presence of numerous tribes and ethnic groups, which has complicated interactions between them. Additionally, the strategic location of this nation has served as a deterrent. The process of nation-building in Afghanistan has been hampered by a number of elements and difficulties, including human and natural geography, political difficulties, and economic difficulties. The previously mentioned challenges have led to linguistic, religious, and ethnic gaps in this nation. They see these disparities as the reason why the project of nation-building has failed. Today,

nation-building is the most efficient strategy to foster solidarity and achieve communal benefits, particularly in nations like Afghanistan that have not yet undergone a true nation-building process due to internal disputes and external interventions. In this nation's political life, it is seen as a significant value. As a result, this thesis has looked at and discussed the role of ethnic issues in the country.

Method of the Research

The quantitative research method has been primarily used as a data collection method for this research paper and the collection was conducted using academic publications, websites, magazines, indexes, and other publicized documents. Keeping the importance of the research methodology in mind, efforts have been made to collect the relevant research data from the most reliable resources such as Library Genesis, Research Gate, Academia, and most importantly, Google Scholar. I use English language sources as well as Farsi and Turkish sources, which helps us to look at the topic from a broader perspective.

There aren't many primary source materials available because Afghan governments didn't make any systematic documentation efforts (except from the 1979 census, which was likewise impossible to complete). Furthermore, throughout the three-decade civil war, many records were destroyed, and the veracity of the few sources that have survived is still hotly debated in the nation. Using all of these resources, I will create a case study on Afghanistan as a single nation.

After the data were collected, they were scrutinized and the most relevant information was extracted and conceptualized. Finally, the gained knowledge was applied to the relevant research parts of this study.

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

Without a doubt, a purely theoretical approach is unable to analyze and assess the ethnicity phenomena in Afghanistan. In order to thoroughly investigate the reasons for ethnicity in Afghanistan, it is required to integrate multiple methodologies and offer a comprehensive theoretical framework. There are numerous ideas that can be applied to the study of ethnic political mobilization. I have attempted to address the most significant of these theories in this essay, as well as those that may, of course, assess the post-Taliban situation in Afghanistan and offer a scientific framework in light of

it. The function of each of these theories must be briefly discussed for this purpose, and then they must be schematically combined to ascertain their relationship. Although Afghanistan has a lot of societal divides, ethnic divides unquestionably outnumber all other divides. Focusing on ethnicity, however, would be the simplest and most sensible strategy to win people over.

In academic circles, multiple theories have been put out to explain the political mobilization of ethnicity; it is outside the purview of this thesis to list and discuss each one in separation. Only four main theories that can account for Afghanistan's ethnicity issue are covered in this section.

Theory of Competition

When multiple ethnic groups are combined into a single nation-state, it leads to a situation where they strive for control of various resources, including financial resources and—above all—political positions. The work of Frederick Barth provides the fundamental underpinnings of the theory of ethnic competition. In his studies of non-industrial communities, Frederick Barth believed that rivalry for resources and resource shortages led to ethnic warfare. According to Susan Olzak, three crucial areas for launching "ethnic competition" are political privileges, economic resources, and demographic shifts.

Theory of Relative Deprivation

This theory falls under the category of "social psychology" since it looks at how people's thoughts affect their social actions. One form of frustration that arises when an individual or group of people's aspirations and desires are not met is called relative deprivation. The best-known investigator to create the theory of relative deprivation is Ted Robert Gar. He admits that every person or group of people has aspirations, goals, and desires. When they perceive that these goals are being prevented, they will feel deprived and dissatisfied, and they will naturally take action to eliminate the barriers or causes of deprivation. In other words, relative deprivation is the result the perceived difference between "what a person has" and what "sanitizes deserves" and what "wants to have".

One important aspect of the theory is that the circumstances of the group in question determine whether or not a sense of deprivation develops within it. The primary cause

of these disparities in the sense of deprivation between groups depends on the choice and determination of the comparison group. One group may be in a miserable state and its members may not feel deprived, but another group that is significantly better off than that group may feel deprived.

Elite Competition Theory

Since there is a general perception in Afghanistan that ethnic elites have an important role in causing ethnic warfare, it is imperative that this public notion be reviewed and addressed. Without a scientific viewpoint, it would be impossible to answer the fundamental question of how correct this broad understanding is.

Elite competition theory presents ethnicity as a temporary phenomena by taking an instrumentalist approach to its analysis and highlighting the part played by ethnic leaders in its emergence and motivation. According to this view, tribal leaders instill a certain level of ethnic self-awareness in their followers for their own benefit.

This viewpoint takes a limited and unduly instrumentalist approach to the ethnicity debate. Ethnic leaders and elites are the only ones that create ethnic self-awareness in their ethnic community for their own political and personal gain. It seems as though there are no ethnic demands made by members of an ethnic group in an ethnically diverse society.

Theory of Ethnic Symbolism

One of the main ideas in the theory of ethnic symbolism, which emphasizes the significance of the symbol's role, is ethnicity. This point of view holds that ethnic symbols have a great ability to inspire people of a particular ethnic group. Anthony Smith is more well-known than other theorists, despite the fact that many have worked hard to illustrate the significance of symbols in fostering national and ethnic unity. Anything that "includes beliefs, values, and attitudes" in social interactions might be broadly characterized as a symbol. Symbols can be objects, ideas, or linguistic configurations like speech. In a particular language or nonverbal expression, like being from a certain country, honoring a holy site, or recognizing a noteworthy occasion, which ambiguously conveys various meanings, generates emotions, and enhances connections.

Symbols exhibit both diverse and correlated characteristics. In this sense, symbols can distinguish between various identities since they serve a semantic purpose. So, it is easy for symbols to become controversial. The things that lead to ethnic nationalism and tribal political mobilization are myths, collective memories, ethnic customs, and shared ethnic symbols.

Limitation

While researching ethnic nationalism and its impacts in Afghanistan, it is important to note the inherent limitation of data availability. For a variety of reasons, gathering precise and thorough statistics on patterns of ethnic groups can be difficult. The first hurdle in this research was the absence of reliable, recent data on Afghanistan's population and its diverse ethnic makeup. This data gap hinders a precise analysis of ethnicity in the country.

Second, Ethnic identity is a multifaceted and intricate issue in Afghanistan, which has made it challenging to obtain impartial and evidence-based information. Many available resources on this topic are influenced by the perspectives and affiliations of their authors, often reflecting particular ethnic viewpoints. This has resulted in a fragmented and biased discourse, obscuring a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors contributing to ethnic divisions within Afghanistan.

Additionally, the researcher's access to primary sources may present difficulties for the research. Direct data collection from Afghan ethnic groups and policymakers leads to insightful information, but it may be hampered by communication difficulties, cultural differences, and restricted access to sources of firsthand knowledge.

Temporary outline

This research will be divided into four chapters: The Introductory chapter addresses the background of the study, the problem statement, the study purpose, the importance of the study, the study questions, the conceptual study model, the hypothesis, and the study limitation.

While the First chapter provides a brief overview of Afghanistan's history while highlighting its geophysical and geocultural diversity. Next, it looks for conceptual and theoretical explanations of ethnic nationalism and ethnicity.

The Second chapter titled, 'Ethnic Structure in Afghanistan analyzes the nature of Afghan society and ethnic division. It also briefly summarizes the recent trends in ethnopolitics in the region.

Moreover, chapter Three focuses on understanding the conflict and key players involved in Afghanistan, historical factors contributing to the conflict, and the impact of ethnicity on Afghan politics.

Chapter Four addresses the nation-building process and its relations with ethnicity in Afghanistan, highlighting the different methods of nation-building.

In the end, I provide a summary of my thesis project as well as a series of recommendations to promote peace, stability, and democracy in Afghanistan.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

1.1. The Basic Concept of Nationalism

Nationalism is a contentious concept that can mean various concepts to different people. Nationalism differs from ideologies such as socialism or "liberalism" in that it does not uphold a fundamental set of accepted values. The main attributes of nationalism are its changeable nature and strong devotion to multiple concepts. Indeed, patriotic claims have been made by fascists, conservatives, liberals, religious organizations, protectionists, and separatists. The definition of nationalism is one of the most common areas of disagreement. More specifically, how one defines the nation and its political goals is fundamentally tied to how one considers inclusiveness in the state (Lyon, 2006).

1.1.1. The Definition of Nationalism

Despite having many different meanings, the term "nationalism" primarily refers to two phenomena: (1) the mindset that people in a country have when they are concerned about their identity as citizens of that country, and (2) the acts that people in a country take in an effort to attain (or maintain) some kind of political sovereignty.

(Miscevic, 2023). Nationalism, according to theorists like Ernest Gellner, can be broadly defined as the belief that the country is the foundation of political sovereignty and that this political manifestation signifies the nation's destiny in the end (Lyon, 2006). According to Hobsbawm (1992, pp. 11–12), nationalism went through three important phases. Early examples of the idea of a shared identity can be found in literary, folkloric, and cultural expressions. During the second stage, groups of nationalist pioneers begin to raise awareness and unite the nation behind their nationalist objectives. During the third phase, nationalist pioneers' opinions become somewhat more widely accepted among the populace they claim to represent. The notion of a nation or national identity, what it means to be a member of a nation, and the extent to which one should care about one's country are all issues that need to be clarified.

1.1.1.1 *The Concept of Nation*

A nation is a region where the same government governs all of its citizens. A collection of people who share a history, customs, culture, and frequently a language can also be referred to as a "nation" even if they do not possess a separate political area. People in this kind of country consider themselves to be part of the same group and have a shared identity (Khaledi, 2020, p 315). In the concept of nationalism, a nation is understood as a group of people bound together by shared cultural, historical, linguistic, or ethnic traits, often with a desire for political self-determination. Nationalism emphasizes the idea that a nation should have its own government and sovereignty, leading to the formation of nation-states.

1.1.1.2 *The Concept of National Identity*

Bozonelos claims that identity, in its broadest sense, provides answers to the question, "Who am I?" "How do I want to be seen by others?" and "What is my desired future appearance?" A person's identity is shaped by a variety of elements, such as their relationships, experiences, worldview, assessment of danger and threat, and observations and experiences of morality, values, and societal mores. Identity frequently has a strong hold on traits like ethnicity, height, eye color, socioeconomic status, and so on over which people have little real influence. Identity is always formed through the socialization process, in which the person learns about themselves and considers their place in the structure of society. The way one calculates one's identity can have far-reaching effects on society. Conflict frequently follows because identity, once formed or identified, can divide people into groups of "sameness" and "differentness." Thus, the formation and results of identity itself influence the environment we live in and the conflicts that emerge. When viewed through the perspective of an identity-focused narrative, it can also aid in our comprehension of the historical record and its conflicts. Bozonelos contends in his work that our perception of ourselves as citizens of a nation is a part of our national identity. This can be anything from a more inclusive civic identity that includes a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups to a more limited ethnic identity.

1.1.1.3 *Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities"*

The use of the terms nationalism and nationality implies an emotional connection among individuals. "Nationality, nation-ness, and nationalism are cultural artifacts of

a particular kind," according to Benedict Anderson, who defines nationalism. According to Anderson (2008), "[nation is] an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." He defines imagined as feeling connected to one another even though there is little to no interaction between members of a certain group. It's a sense of connection without actually knowing someone. However, other elements such as community, sovereignty, and limitation also influence imagined communities. Anderson describes how the collapse of the powers of three ancient entities—religious communities, dynastic kingdoms, and the idea of "temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable"—has made the creation of nationalities critical. Sacred languages and religious communities started to lose their exclusive claim to "truth." Similarly, the impact of the progressive disintegration of the sacred language—Latin itself—caused religious kingdoms to continue to diminish after the Middle Ages. "The fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized," he states. According to Anderson, these shifts encourage people to look for new perspectives on time spent together, power, and brotherhood. To sum up Anderson's nationalism argument, he highlighted how print capitalism fosters a new similarity among individuals who were previously unaware of one another's existence, leading them to believe they belong to a particular group. This, in turn, is aided by modernization and the centralization of state control, which in turn fosters a growing sense of national consciousness. In Anderson's view, language is important because it enables us to "imagine" a country or its past and because it "unites" people. National educational systems also contribute to the development and maintenance of a sense of national identity.

In "Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," Benedict Anderson explains that "it is imagined because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, but in each's mind lives the image of their communion." Using Anderson's definition as a guide, it may be stated that a Pashtun will never meet or even recognize the names of more than a few of his fellow Pashtuns. He is unaware of their activities at any given moment. He, however, is very sure of their consistent, anonymous, concurrent action.

1.1.2. Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups

The "process or phenomenon that underpins or gives rise to ethnic groups" is known as ethnicity. Attempts to link "group belonging" to "cultural, biological, or territorial" characteristics are a crucial component of this "process." The process of attachment and identification "cohesion, solidarity, and belonging" are thus related to ethnicity. Inherently, the characteristics of group solidarity and identification suggest that ethnicity is a "mobilization around difference" and a "consciousness of differences" (Eller, 2002.p.8). When discussing ethnicity and ethnic groups and how they differ from racial groups, Bruce Cohen states: "An ethnic group is a group whose members have the same cultural characteristics." These traits include nationality, language, and religion. Racial and ethnic groupings differ in that whereas members of racial groups tend to share physical traits, members of ethnic groups do not always share physical traits; instead, they share cultural traits.

According to Eller, an ethnic group is a collection whose members share characteristics, habits, and racial or cultural ties that allow them to identify and support one another. Therefore, it may be argued that ethnicity as an identity and group connection has both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, it aims to address the complaints of formerly marginalized groups; on the minus side, it implies that men from one ethnic group must despise another. The politics of ideology have given way to the politics of ethnicity, which means that disputes will continue to be fought in different ways. Different scholars have placed emphasis on different aspects when defining ethnicity.

1.1.3. Nationalism: Civic and Ethnic

Throughout history, nationalism has manifested itself in many ways and taken on distinct forms. Social scientists do, however, have a temptation to divide nationalism into two broad and basic groups. There is a general disagreement among academics regarding the roots and nature of nationalism, as evidenced by the two categories' oppositional conceptualization in various sources as "political vs. cultural," "Western vs. Eastern," and more recently, "civic vs. ethnic" nationalisms (Anthony, 2018).

In basic terms, Weberian thought distinguishes between two primary varieties of ideal nationalism. The first is the idea of nationhood that is revolutionary-democratic

or "civic" and unrelated to ethnic and religious identity¹. Ethnic nationalism, the second particularistic form of nationalism, is primarily associated with race, ethnicity, and language in the thoughts of its supporters. A claim to territorial sovereignty is a corollary of ethnic nationalism, which is the declaration of a collective identity based on a myth of shared biological ancestry and an extension of the kinship principle to an extensive population. (Warikoo, 2017.p.120).

The concept of "ethnic nationalism" can also be used to describe any movement that bases political nationhood on shared, objective cultural traits like language, religion, and folklore. The belief that the nation's inherent oneness, based on shared lineage and/or manifested in particular cultural forms, is what fascinates ethnic nationalism, which is seen to support authoritarian, chauvinistic, and intolerant types of governance. Lyon (2006) argues that a key element of ethnic nationalism is identity. Parekh defined identification as "how one identifies or defines and distinguishes oneself, and with whom one consequently feels a sense of identification." Both individual and community self-definition are facilitated by it.

1.2. Defining Nationalism and National Identity in Afghanistan

The population of Afghanistan is extremely diversified in terms of cultural background, ethnic origin, and ethnicity. However, the arguments over the definition of ethnic identities and their significance in national politics indicate larger patterns in academic studies of nationalism and ethnic politics. Depending on the conceptual and normative approach taken, there are significant differences in the number of ethnic groups and the social and political significance of ethnic boundaries (Ibrahimi, 2023).

From the turn of the 20th century until 1929, Afghan nationalism was evident in the country's hegemonic institutions, including the Afghan state schools, newspapers, laws, and national public events like the Grand Assembly, Loya jirga, and National Unity Day. It was also evident in the writings of Afghan Nationalists. Hegemony in this context refers to "the idea that man is ruled by ideas, not just force." (Thomas, 1975).

¹ Civic nationalism is the claim of a population's collective identity and right to political and territorial sovereignty based on loyalty to an existing or potential state with a specified territory and a shared set of political principles. Everyone who chooses to engage in a shared political culture, regardless of ethnicity, is, in theory, included in civic nationalism.

In fact, the Afghan state began legitimating its position of power by ideas as well as force around the beginning of the twentieth century. These beliefs were deeply rooted in the state's hegemonic institutions, including the army, schools, and ceremonies that promoted the notion of an "Afghan" country. Afghan nationality was defined and territorialized in article eight of the country's first constitution (1923): *har sekha nafar-e che pa mulk da Afghanistan ka de, pa har din aw mazhab che wee, tabean aw da rayat da Afghanistan balal kizhee*. One example of how nationalism developed in Afghanistan in the early decades of the twentieth century is this new national concept, "that everybody who was residing in Afghanistan without regard to their religious beliefs and affiliations was an Afghan citizen." (Shir, 2012: p 12).

Afghan nationalists promoted the new national concept that all people are Afghan and that Afghanistan is *da afghanano watan*, or the homeland of Afghans, as the basis for national identity and unity. However, they also ignored the claim that Afghanistan was a colonial state. Kabul wrote², "This dear homeland of Afghanistan, also known as *Eein watan-e aziz Afghanistan*, has not been the land of Persians, nor Turks, nor Indians, nor Chinese." This type of argument that Afghanistan has always been an Afghan land stood in direct opposition to the political, intellectual, and historical description of the nation. Outsiders have long recognized and maintained that Afghanistan was a British and Russian invention. In order to avert any Imperial Russian advances eastward towards India, the British in the nineteenth century saw the creation of the present-day Afghan area as a "buffer" between British India and Russia. In contrast, Russia saw the establishment of a "buffer" Afghanistan as a strategy to keep the British out of central Asia. Afghan nationalists, however, objected to the claim that Russia and the British were responsible for creating Afghanistan. For them, Afghanistan was *a tarikhi-e Afghanistan*, or ancient Afghanistan, which was a nation before the British and Russians began colonizing it in the nineteenth century. The "ancient name of Afghanistan was Ariana; the oldest name of Afghanistan that lasted from 5,000 B.C. until the fifth century A.D." was their contention. Afghan nationalism claimed that in addition to the ancient name Ariana, "Afghanistan's other

² Anjuman-e Adabi Kabul, the Kabul Literary Society, was founded in 1931, and Kabul was its literary magazine. The two Persian publications of Anjuman-e Adabi Kabul, Kabul magazine and Salnamah-e Kabul, Kabul Annual, were founded with the goal of reforming and integrating Afghan literary forms and methodologies as well as chronicling the country's historical poets. Check out Salnamah-e Kabul by Anjuman-e Adabi Kabul.

historical name was Khurasan, which lasted from the fifth century A.D. until the nineteenth century."(Khaledi, 2020:p 64-68).

The renowned Afghan historian Mir Ghulam Mohammad Ghobar (1897–1978) argues that the idea that Afghanistan is a colonial construct is a created one in the introduction of his well-known work *Afghanistan dar Masir-e Tarikh*, or *Afghanistan in the Course of History*. "The orientalists and their imitators played with the history of nations of Asia and made it an ardent toy of colonialism," he said in the book's foreword.

In order to create a national concept domestically, Afghan nationalists rejected the notion that Afghanistan was a colonial construct and presented Afghanistan as an old nation, as is seen from Ghobar's forceful rejection of the notion that colonization created Afghanistan.

1.3. Historical Background of Afghanistan

There were notable distinctions in nationalism and ethnic identity beliefs from one period to another and from one group to another. Afghanistan has been a major crossroads for empires, nations, cultures, and languages throughout its ancient and current history. In short, over its history, the nation turned into "a highway of conquest," as Arnold Fletcher originally put it (*Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest* 1982). In his book, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Ahmad Rashid (2010) rightfully states, "Afghanistan's location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia has made it a strategically important region for thousands of years. Its position between major powers like Iran, India, the Arabian Sea, and Central Asian states has given its territory and mountain passes significance since the earliest Aryan invasions 6,000 years ago" (Rashid, 2010,p.7). As shown in ([Hata! Başvuru kaynağı bulunamadı.](#)) Located in south-central Asia, Afghanistan is a landlocked, mountainous nation that shares borders with China in the far northeast, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, Pakistan in the south and east, and Iran in the west. Afghanistan covers an area of 647,500 square kilometers, making it somewhat smaller than Texas.

The currency is Afghani, the capital is Kabul, and the people are referred to as "Afghan. Afghanistan came into being in its present form after passing through different stages. Its brief history can be explained as:

1.3.1. The Pre-Islamic Period

The pre-Islamic period in the historical background of Afghanistan is marked by a rich and diverse cultural heritage influenced by various civilizations, including Indo-Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Mauryans, Kushans, and Sassanids. This period, spanning from ancient times to the 7th century CE, played a crucial role in shaping Afghanistan's historical and cultural landscape.

1.3.1.1. Early Civilization and Aryan Influence (c. 2000 BCE – 600 BCE)

Afghanistan's history dates back to the early Bronze Age, these settlements show an obvious relationship with the Indus Valley civilization. They may well have been part of the trading and agriculture network that supported the great urban centers of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in present-day Pakistan (Qayum et al., 2017.p.45). At Morasi, a large brick shrine complex shows pieces of evidence of a Mother Goddess fertility cult. Around 2300 BCE, a more culturally diverse site was found in Khosh Tapa, which is 150 miles northeast of Kabul and close to the Khawak Pass, a historical intersection of the Middle East, India, and Central Asia. Around 1500 BCE, Dashli, located in the central northern plains close to Mazar-e Sharif, is another remarkable Bronze Age urban site. It included the remaining of grand palace, exquisite domestic and imported Iranian ceramics, and weapons made of copper and bronze (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007).

Researchers are unable to make any firm claims regarding the language or ethnicity of the first urban residents in the absence of any written records. They might have shared ancestry with the inhabitants of the advanced civilizations of that time, whether they lived in Mesopotamia to the west or the Indus Valley to the east. However, the linguistic picture at least becomes somewhat clearer in the first part of the second millennium B.C.E. Mundigak, an ancient town, had two short-lived destruction episodes caused by marauders from Iran and Central Asia. However, it was unable to survive new attacks in the mid-second millennium, and for the next two millennia, it faced repeated invasions of nomadic groups (Mustafa et al., 2024.p.541).

1.3.1.2. Assyrians, Medes, and Persians

According to the Roman historian Arrian, the first Middle Easterners to conquer Afghan territory were the Assyrians (eighth century B.C.E.). They governed most of

Iran, and they may have gone as far as Kandahar in southern Afghanistan; if so, they made no permanent mark on the country. The Medes, a group of tribes in northern Iran related to the Persians, followed the Assyrians. The Western tradition of historical learning begins with the ancient Fertile Crescent and then carries on to Greece. It examines the Persian Empire from the perspective of a Westerner looking east. The Achaemenian emperor Darius was defeated by Alexander the Great who occupied the territory that is now Afghanistan. The Seleucids, Alexander's successors carried on influence in the region and Greek cultural influence spread during their rule (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007).

1.3.1.3. Mauryan and Buddhist Influence

The Buddhist influence and Mauryan rule in Afghanistan had a major impact on the religious, cultural, and architectural landscape of the area. Cities like Balkh and Gandhara were important centers of intellectual and spiritual activity during this period, and Afghanistan emerged as a significant hub for Buddhist scholarship and artistic growth. The Mauryan Empire peaked under the rule of Emperor Ashoka (268–232 BCE). Once a fiery warrior, Ashoka became a Buddhist after seeing the destruction caused by battle. After that, he helped Buddhism grow throughout his realm, including Afghanistan, by promoting its teachings.

1.3.1.4. Kushan Empire

The Parthians nomadic Iranians people arrived in Western Asia in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. In the modern-day territory of Afghanistan, they made large inroads. Almost 100 years later from the North, another Indo-European group the Kushan entered Afghanistan dominated most parts of the country and established an empire. The Kushan kingdom expanded from the Kabul River Valley to conquer the tribes of central Asia. The Kushans dynasty, which ruled over the Pamir Mountains in the north and the Ganga River Valley in India, took control of Afghanistan around the middle of the first century BC (Qayum et al., 2017.p,47-48).

1.3.1.5. Sassanid and Hephthalite Rule

Following the decline of the Kushans, Afghanistan came under Sassanid Persian control. The Hephthalites (White Huns) later took over in the 5th century CE but were eventually defeated by a coalition of the Sassanids and Western Turks. About 1750 to

Middle Ages Afghanistan was part of Khorasan. Kabul, Kandahar, and Ghazni have shaped the frontier area among the Khorasan and Hindustan (Qayum et al., 2017).

1.3.2. The Islamic and Mongol Conquests

By the early 7th century, Afghanistan was a mix of Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions. However, the arrival of Arab Muslim armies in the mid-7th century marked the beginning of Islamization, eventually shaping the future of Afghanistan's culture and society. The Muslim Arabs overthrew the Sasanian dynasty in Persia in 651 AD. Twenty years later, the Muslim Arab armies conquered Kabul in 671 AD, and the Hindu Shahis and Kabul Shahis, while maintaining their rule, agreed to pay tribute to the Arabs. During the two centuries following the Arab domination of the territories of modern Iran and modern Afghanistan, during the reigns of the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphs, at least forty Arab emirs ruled from the centers of Merv, Balkh, Herat, Tus, Jurjan, and Nishapur, and the provinces of Transoxiana, including Bukhara and Samarkand, were also included (Khaledi, 2020). The Arab Muslims' victory against the Sassanians at the Battle of Qadisiya in 637 marked the beginning of a 100-year campaign to subjugate the Afghan tribes and spread Islam. In Afghanistan, Islam eventually crowded out all previous religious traditions, and Islamic law and custom took root all over the country. Arabic became the language of religion and to a degree of law and culture. All of the older writing systems in Afghanistan were replaced by the Arabic alphabet and many Arab words entered the local languages. Islam has proven to be the strongest and at the times the only, unifying factor for Afghanistan's varied ethnic groups.

The Arab Abbasid and Samanid dynasties had fallen from power in Central Asia by the eleventh century. The first Islamic dynasty to establish itself in Afghanistan was the Ghaznavid Dynasty. Genghis Khan's Mongol army conquered all of Central Asia in 1220. Afghanistan was still divided until 1380, unless Timur took the kingdom. He strengthened and grew the Mongol Empire. Afghanistan was ruled by the successors of Timur until the early 16th century (Mustafa; Nagera & Nawaz, 2024.p.543).

1.3.3. The Pashtun Rulers

After gaining control of the area in 1504, the Mughals struggled with the Iranian Safavi Dynasty for control of Afghan land for the next 200 years. Following the death

of the great Safavi king Nadir Shah in 1747, the Durrani dynasty, which was ruled by indigenous Pashtuns, took control of Afghanistan for the ensuing years. The first Durrani monarch to unite the Pashtun tribes was Ahmad Shah, the father of the Afghan country. By 1760, he had established an empire with strong foundations that stretched to Delhi and the Arabian Sea.

It is generally accepted that Afghanistan became an independent state in 1722, when Ahmad Shah Abdali took power. His most loyal Pashtun commander, Ahmad Khan Abdali or Durrani, had the chance to establish an independent administration in Qandahar in 1747 after the abrupt and brutal death of Nadir Shah Afshar (1747), the final ruler of the Turkic Afshar tribe (Shahrani, 1986). According to Dubow (2009), the "North half of Afghanistan has been firmly a part of Persia in the past." During the time leading up to the Durrani Pashtun conquest in 1747, the terms "Afghan" and "Afghanistan" were used to refer to a specific ethnic group. Dolot, a French researcher and anthropologist, was the first to refer to Afghanistan as "Groupe Ethnique," classifying Afghans into multiple ethnic groups. The phrase "ethnic groups" did not exist until the 19th century, and more accurately, it was not until the middle of the 20th century that "foreign academicians and the governments began to divide Afghan society into ethnic categories by the differences in language, sect, culture, etc." (Boboyorov; Poos & Schetter, 2009). A significant turning point in the history of the large area bounded by the rivers Oxus and Indus was marked by the establishment of the Durrani monarchy in 1747, at which time the Pashtun ethnic group made up the vast majority. Several states arose and collapsed on the land that is now Afghanistan following the Achaemenid Period (Mazhar; Samee & Goraia.2012. p.98).

According to anthropologist and Afghanistan specialist Nazif Shahrani (1986), the rise of Pashtun tribal authority on the national scene coincided with Afghanistan's independence as a distinct political entity in the middle of the eighteenth century. "The very substance of political developments and state building in Afghanistan is the sociology of Pashtun dominance over the other ethnic communities in the country," he contends (Shahrani, 1986.p.25).

All Pashtuns were unified under a single governmental center for the first time under the Durrani empire. Tribal Pashtuns represented the majority of the empire's armed forces, and the Pashtuns were given preferential treatment by the state over its

other subjects. The Pashtuns were subject to lower taxes than other groups, and their tribes—particularly the Durrani—were the main beneficiaries of governmental spending and land distribution excess. To put it briefly, the Pashtuns had formalized military, political, and economic supremacy in Afghanistan during the Durrani era. Afghanistan was mostly a Pashtun nation even after the empire fell apart, but because of intrasynaptic disorder, the central government had little authority over the different areas. However, the Durrani Pashtuns were the only candidates for leadership during this time, and their military and political supremacy in interethnic interactions was undeniable (Ahady, 1995).

Tribal and ethnic groups have long been the foundation of the Afghan state. However, ethnicity was less significant than tribes during the reign of King Ahmad Shah Baba since Kandahar, the capital, was exclusively inhabited by Pashtuns and had no other ethnic groups. However, there were dozens of tribes within the Pashtun tribal confederation, and these tribes were further subdivided into sub-tribes and sub-sub-tribes. These divisions were frequently at odds with each other at all levels. Some Pashtun tribes still battle more frequently than ever before. For instance, the Barakzai and Popalzai tribes are currently the two principal Pashtun groups engaged in political rivalry. Each district, province, and region still has its own tribal politics, therefore these two tribes are not unique instances (Amiri, 2016.p.505).

Since ethnic groups from all over Afghanistan were present in Kabul and tried to influence government, Amiri also thinks that when the Afghan state's capital was moved there, ethnic considerations began to have an impact on politics. Importantly, the Pashtuns suffered as a result of this development: Since the capital moved to Kabul, the tribal Pashtun dominance has declined generally, despite the fact that the most significant Pashtun tribes still have a significant influence on national politics. As a result, one of the main elements affecting Afghan politics became to be ethnicity. Numerous ethnic groups that identify as belonging to the Afghan nation-state yet use their native tongues, dress differently, and follow various customs. The disparities between Afghanistan's several ethnic groups have persisted over time.

Generally speaking, all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups share cultural or religious connections. Turkistan is an area in northern Afghanistan where Uzbeks and other Turkic peoples, such as Turkmens and Kazaks, are prevalent. Prior to the 1880s,

Uzbeks had a rather autonomous life under their own leaders and beggars until the Afghan (Pashtun) Amirs gradually overran them and eventually expanded their dominion over Turkistan (Qeyam, 2012). The Pashtuns (Afghan), the country's largest ethnic group, were split along the eastern boundaries between Afghanistan and Pakistan by the Durand Agreement. Hazaras have settled in the central highlands of Bamyan and its environs, making them the sole ethnic group living inside Afghanistan's boundaries. Nonetheless, Hazaras have maintained tight and robust religious links with the Shia regime in Iran.

An important part of the broader strategy for Afghanistan's political rehabilitation was ethnicity. It was recognized as the primary line of combat in the Afghan War, and the international community's political decision-making was influenced by the need to establish ethnic balance in all governmental matters. (Schetter, 2005). With regard to equal socio-political prospects for all ethnic groups, the Afghan people require an extensive renovation of their current form of governance. Every ethnic group, especially the non-Pashtun ones, was hopeful about their sociopolitical futures and grateful to the international world, notably the United States, following the Taliban's defeat in their first domination.

1.3.4. Colonial Era and Ethnic Divisions

Afghanistan's history in the 20th century is essentially international. In addition to international actors, such as British and Russian in the early century and Soviet and American during the Cold War, it was the scene of a confrontation between universalist ideologies, such as capitalism and communism, Islamism, and secularism. Furthermore, Afghan leaders positioned themselves as influential figures on a worldwide scale. They actively positioned themselves as representatives of the non-Western, decolonizing world within the UN and participated in global phenomena like non-alignment, Pan-Asianism, and pan-Islamism. Equally important, Afghan authorities had to define statehood and nationhood at a time when the global geopolitical landscape was rapidly evolving, a challenge that the international community faced in the shifting political climate of the twentieth century (Leake, 2022.p.272).

Afghanistan is not normally regarded as a "decolonized" state, according to Leake. It was never directly colonized or officially a part of any empire. Its historical

destiny, however, was unquestionably intertwined with that of its neighboring Russian and British empires from the early nineteenth century. Examining Afghanistan throughout the 20th century demonstrates the complex, even conflicting, relationships between decolonization and international organizations. However, Afghanistan was also one of the few nations that was essentially "re-colonized" as a result of the Soviet occupation, which lasted from 1979 to 1989. In this sense, Afghanistan's history is both distinct and universal.

Afghanistan was the focus of the 19th-century colonial struggle, which was known as "The Great Game" due to its strategic location as a buffer between British India and hegemonic czarist Russia (Reed, 2010). The "Great Game" of the nineteenth century had a big impact on the current political climate in the area. Additionally, it provided the Pashtuns with their first experience with a contemporary military force during the three Anglo-Afghan Wars in 1839, 1878, and 1919. Russia and Britain decided to establish a buffer in the form of Afghanistan between their spheres of influence following unsuccessful attempts to advance within the country. Reed (2010) claims that these colonial powers continuously meddled in Afghan internal and international affairs, such as when Russia hosted and supported Abdur Rahman prior to his rise to power in the Kabul Emirates. Through "forward policy," which included stipends and treaties like the one signed at Gandamak in May 1879, where Yakub Khan gave up all of Afghanistan's external affairs, the British government in India maintained strict control over Afghanistan's external affairs. This prevented advancements in technology and international relations into the 20th century. The Durand Line Agreement, signed in 1893, established the present political boundaries of Afghanistan between Czarist Russia and Britain.

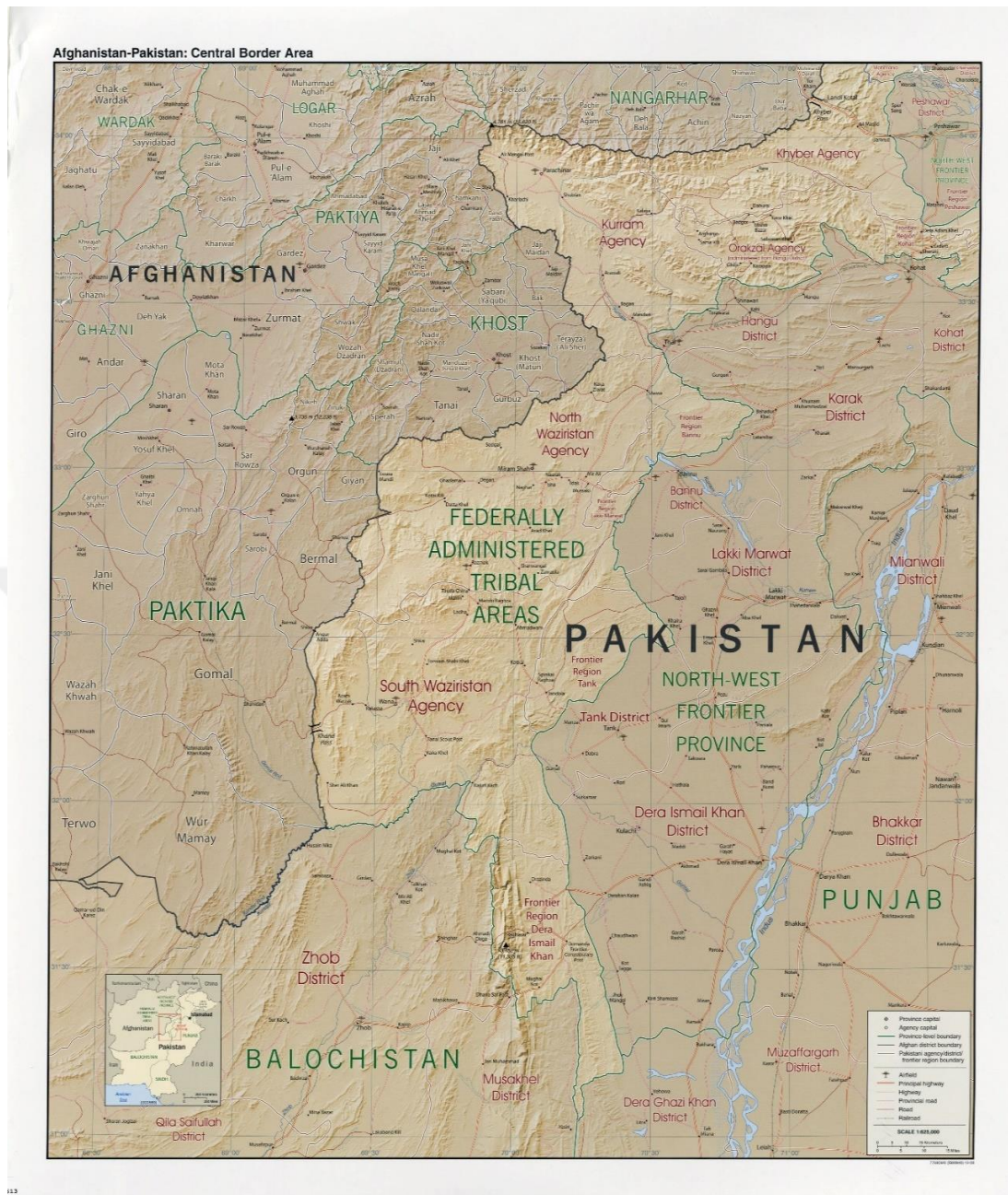


Figure 1. Afghanistan-Pakistan: Central Border Area

Source: (Afghanistan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online, n.d.)

There is mistrust regarding the demarcation of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan because Abdurrahman Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan, and a British delegation decided to draw a line known as the Durand Line between British-India and Afghanistan. (Figure) illustrates This line significantly divided Pashtuns and other ethnic groups. This agreement established the boundaries between Afghanistan and the British colonial area. But this agreement did nothing but increase dissatisfaction. Residents of the area, known as Pashtuns, were split in two. While one segment of the

ethnic group was in contemporary Pakistan, another was in Afghanistan. (Ali, 2015.p.6).

Abdur al-Rahman, popularly referred to as the "Iron Amir," dispersed subtribes and tribesmen with little political and military authority by ordering large-scale internal migrations of Pashtuns in the 1880s. Ethnic cleansing and hatred among the displaced resulted from this, and hostility is still common today. But as part of their cycle of inheritance, the migrant Pashtuns claimed new territory (Abraham, 2013).

During the reign of Abdul Rahman Khan (1880–1901), modern Afghanistan emerged, which had two distinct impacts on Pashtun authority. The Pashtun majority in Afghanistan was greatly reduced by the Durand Treaty of 1893 between British India and Afghanistan, which also stripped the latter of authority over half of the Pashtuns. On the other hand, Pashtun dominance was solidified throughout Afghanistan by the pacification of Hazarajat, the relocation of the Pashtuns to the north, and the consolidation of central government authority with regard to the provinces (Ahady, 1995).

1.3.5. Post-colonial Period and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism

A significant percentage of ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan has its roots in postcolonialism, which emerged after the Emirate of Afghanistan gained independence from the British Empire in 1919 during the Third Anglo-Afghan War ("Afghan Nationalism," 2024). Amanullah Khan was declared the new Amir of Afghanistan in February 1919. At the ending of the Second Afghan War (1878–80), he promptly rejected the Treaty of Gandamak, which had granted the British authority over Afghan foreign affairs (*Third Afghan War and the Revolt in Waziristan | National Army Museum*, n.d.). In Afghanistan, the Third Anglo-Afghan War (1919) was the least violent of the three recorded British colonial conflicts, While Amanullah's ambitious reforms aimed to modernize the country, they faced significant resistance, leading to his downfall. The Musahiban clan, a group of influential advisors and military leaders, took power and implemented a more cautious approach to reform. They focused on economic growth, education, and bureaucracy, which contributed to the emergence of an urban middle class. However, the Pashtunistan issue, a territorial dispute with Pakistan over Pashtun-inhabited areas, became a central focus of Afghan foreign policy. Discriminatory behaviors against non-Pashtuns and attempts to

Pashtunize other groups were manifestations of Pashtun nationalism, which was more ethnocentric and ingrained in the nation's political and cultural life (Bordonaro, 2023.p.83).

The 1978 coup further increased the prevalence of ethnic politics. In following decade of war, national cohesion damaged (Amiri, 2016.p.506).

An estimated 1.5 million Afghans lost their lives in the Soviet-Afghan war. It is estimated that 90,000 Mujaheddin militants were murdered, with 56,000 of those deaths occurring between 1980 and 1989 (Rashid, 2010). The conflict caused about 3 million internally displaced people and over 5 million refugees to flee to Iran and Pakistan (Lyon, 2006). By 1990, Afghans made up 44% of the population, both internally and internationally, and 42% of all refugees worldwide were Afghans. All told, the war has directly affected more than half of Afghanistan's people through displacement, injury, or death.

The Durand Line dispute took secondary significance to the broader Cold War battle after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, particularly as Pakistan sided with the United States. Mostly from the Pashtun tribes on the Pakistani side of the border, Mujahideen groups were recruiting in Pakistan to fight the Soviet government in Afghanistan. This insurgency persisted until the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, giving rise to localized armed groups that contributed to the later civil war in Afghanistan, which ultimately ended in the Taliban's ascent. Its administration, meanwhile, has insisted that the Durand Line is invalid and illegitimate regardless of who has held power in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still demanding the repatriation of Baluchistan and Pashtun lands so that it can have access to the Arabian Sea. Afghanistan and Pakistan are still at odds over the Durand Line. (Afghanistan | History, Map, Flag, Capital, Population, & Languages | Britannica, 2024).

When the mujahideen took power in 1992, ethnic politics became even more evident. Afghan nationalism evolved into ethnic nationalism over the next two years. The commanders of the mujahideen frequently used the protection of their own ethnic group or local communities as the justification for their military actions. "Kabul was divided among different factions, with each faction representing an ethnic group and region," a local resident at the time claimed (Amiri, 2016). During this time, two things occurred. First, armed groups were favored by the general population only because

they were from the same ethnic group or geographic area. As a result, in areas with a diverse population, conflicts between these groups began to emerge. Second, In locations where a single ethnic group dominates, as the Pashtun districts of southern Afghanistan, rivalries between tribes began to emerge. An Alekozai from Kandahar named Mullah Naqibullah Akhund, for instance, turned against Gul Agha Sherzai, a Barakzai from the same area. Kandahar, a symbol of southern Afghanistan, was ultimately split between commanders who supported the tribes and factions of these two power brokers.

The civil war, which has brought about many horrible events, was specifically caused by the exploitation of ethnicity. The traditional distribution of power among the ethnic groups has been altered by the Afghan civil war. The fact that non-Pashtun ethnic groups are now more powerful than they were many years ago serves as proof of this. The non-Pashtuns formed political parties and achieved political influence on par with the Pashtuns during the Afghan civil war and resistance to Soviet intervention. They had an excellent opportunity to demand that their ethnic identities—Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, and Turkmen—as well as their political and linguistic status be acknowledged. "If I make an analogy, the ethnic war or the Afghan civil war looks like some fighting of American wrestling, where each wrestler struggles for his own victory but sometimes makes a short-term deal with his rivals to decrease his enemies," Qeyam wrote in his article. Unfortunately, in the brutal arena of Afghanistan, ethnic leaders engaged in the same kind of wrestling (Qeyam, 2012,p.15).

It is also thought that one of the primary causes of the Taliban's rise was the dispute between these commanders and the impact of their fighting on the local populace. Both the inter-tribe conflicts at the province level and the seemingly unsolvable ethnic strife at the national level appeared to have a possible solution in the Taliban, an organization that at the time stood above ethnic and tribal violence. However, ethnic nationalism has been increasing since 9/11³, even in spite of this brief partial control of racial violence (Amiri, 2016).

³ 9/11 or nine-eleven is the term used to describe the events that occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in New York.

The beginning of American military action against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, as well as the sad and devastating 9/11 terror attacks on American soil, gave the search for a government that might replace the Taliban a new sense of urgency. Hamid Karzai was elected president of the post-Taliban Afghanistan at a conference held in Bonn on December 5, 2001, after the Taliban had been decisively defeated. From then on, opium production surged, the Taliban persisted in attacking the vulnerable nation, NATO began to supervise security there, and the US maintained a presence there (Ali, 2015.p.7).

In 2009, Karzai won the election again because Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, his opponent, pulled out due to spreading electoral fraud. When Dr. Abdullah Abdullah ran again in 2014, he was met with yet another round of rigged elections. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and his opponent, Ashraf Ghani, accused each other of cheating, which led to the cancellation of the 2014 elections. A National Unity Government was established after US Secretary of State John Kerry stepped in. The newly created position of Chief Executive was taken by Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, while Ashraf Ghani was given the presidency.

Taking everything into consideration, the desire for statehood based on tribal considerations gave rise to Afghan ethnic nationalism. It was believed that the only way to obtain political power was through the state and nation. Although no objective census using a scientific technique has been undertaken since Afghanistan became a political entity, the Pashtun-ruled government has consistently provided a fictitious and skewed estimate of the Pashtun population to support their claim to be a majority. However, the criteria of ethnic and religious majority and minority are irrelevant in a civic and democratic nation-state. However, an individual's citizenship is more significant. Given that the "nation-state" is a contemporary concept that distinguishes between contemporary industrial countries and more traditional agrarian societies. However, in Afghanistan's instance, it remained largely tribal and was only marginally impacted by contemporary democratic and civil procedures. Thus, the nationalist movements in Afghanistan that have been tribal, religious, and ethnically oriented for centuries since 1747 have little to do with the nation-state's perspective. (Warikoo, 2017).

CHAPTER TWO

ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF AFGHANISTAN

2.1. Ethnic Structure and Religious Diversity of Afghanistan

The term 'Afghan' refers to all those who reside inside the political borders of Afghanistan, irrespective of their race, religion, language, tribe, or geographic location. All residents of Afghanistan are Afghans. It's a fallacy and a narrow-minded Pashtun perception that some individuals only use the term "Afghan" to refer to one particular community. Every ethnic group that has resided in Afghanistan and still does is considered an Afghan. The people of this land, sometimes known as the inhabitants of Greater Ariana and at other times as the people of Khorasan, coexisted as historical and national brothers prior to Afghanistan becoming the official name of the country. The strongest link that has bound the people of this country together for generations is national unity (Khaledi, 2020).

Afghanistan, however, is a multiethnic nation. Its position at the outer boundaries of historical empires is the reason for this. Primarily, people are loyal to their family, community, tribe, and ethnic group, which is commonly referred to as Qawm. Three community identities—Qawm, Tribe, and ethnic group—must be distinguished in order to understand Afghanistan's fragmentation. First of all, the Arabic word meaning solidarity groups is Qawm. The term "Qawm" is not used precisely by Afghans; rather, it can be used to describe any identifying group, including tribes, extended families, and even ethnic groups. Secondly, one must be a member of a tribe in order to maintain group identification and, more importantly, group rights and benefits. Tribal traditions, beliefs, practices, and common law are all incorporated into a kinship and place-based system of identity and solidarity. To differentiate the particular social organization and political formation, anthropologists have mostly stopped using the term "tribe" or have only used it to refer to an element of the nation's social structure. It is commonly used by Western anthropologists to denote ancient masses of people who are against a centralized government. Thirdly, the ethnic groups thought they had a shared history, customs, and ancestry or genetic makeup (Sarwari & Ono, 2023.p.3).

Afghanistan's difficult geography, on the other hand, separated people from one another and had a significant impact on the development of many cultures. Current

nations and even sub-nations are a result of historical and geographic causes. Some individuals lost their language and culture throughout this process, while others interbred with other tribes and encountered minor ethnic splits. As an example, the language and culture of the Qizilbashs and Aymaks became Tajikized. People nonetheless make an effort to create their identities in spite of all these initial challenges (Kartal, 2020).

"One of the major dynamics of civil war in the country" is the result of Afghanistan's ethnic variety. Since they have coexisted in this area for over 5,000 years, the Afghan ethnic groups have united alongside against the British Empire on numerous occasions. The Soviet Union defeated them and maintained their independence. Afghanistan's geostrategic location has drawn numerous international powers throughout the years for their own vested interests; they have taken advantage of various ethnic groups by inciting conflicts against them. As a result, the nation's "multi-ethnicity" has impeded its advancement internationally. In contrast to the widely recognized ethnic diversity, additional significant differences such as "religious, ideological, economic, geographic, and linguistic" highlight the differences between "one ethnic group and another." Although the ethnic makeup of Afghanistan is diverse, the role of ethnicity in explaining the variances has changed significantly throughout time (Mazhar; Samee & Goraia.2012. p.98).

Only in the middle of the 20th century did the government and international scholars begin to systematically categorize Afghan society into ethnic groups based on linguistic, cultural, and sectarian distinctions. However, the researchers favored the phrase "ethnic group" over the more analytical word "ethnic category," presuming that people's actions are influenced by their ethnic identity. The French anthropologist used the term "group ethnique" for the first time (Dollot, 1975). In the middle of the 1950s, Dollot presented the ethnic taxonomy of the Afghan people to the Anglophone literary community. Ethnic groupings were thus defined as individuals who shared cultural and linguistic characteristics. Throughout the 20th century, new categories were developed or at least formed in accordance with cultural practices, motivated by the academic goal of eliminating the hybrid transition between previously established ethnic categories. Schurmann and other anthropologists created ethnic categories such as the Pashai, Tajiks, Mountain-Tajiks, and Farsiwans without considering the fact that some of these words had distinct meanings depending on the social setting. Probably

the most notable example of how these so-called ethnic groups were created is the Tajik ethnic group. An anti-ethnic idea was often suggested by the term "Tajik," which was typically used in social interactions primarily to disparagingly describe someone who did not belong to any group but just shared the belief in a common tradition. (Schetter, 2005.p.3)

Although Sunni and Shiite Muslims make up the majority of the population, they are divided into many groups according to complicated ethnic, regional, and sectarian criteria. Afghanistan is home to numerous ethnic groups, making it a very varied country. Afghanistan has existed for centuries as a bridge connecting the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and Central Asia (Khaledi, 2020.p.76-77). As a result, Afghanistan is a nation with an ethnically diverse population. Every ethnic group has a unique language, and it is easy to identify individuals of different ethnic groups by their language. Pashto and Dari are the two official languages, refer to (*Figure*) for a visual representation. According to Hyman despite having Pashtun ancestry, the majority of Afghanistan's ruling class had assimilated into the Persian-speaking court culture. As he states in actuality, Dari—rather than Pashto—has always been the national language (Hyman, 2002). However, numerous efforts were made to promote Pashto's development and dissemination, which is officially designated as the main spoken language for the government. However, the state-led effort was unable to effectively position Pashto as a rival to Persian.

Besides Pashto and Dari, languages like Uzbeki, Turkmeni and Baluchi are the recognized languages of Afghanistan in their own territories where they are spoken.

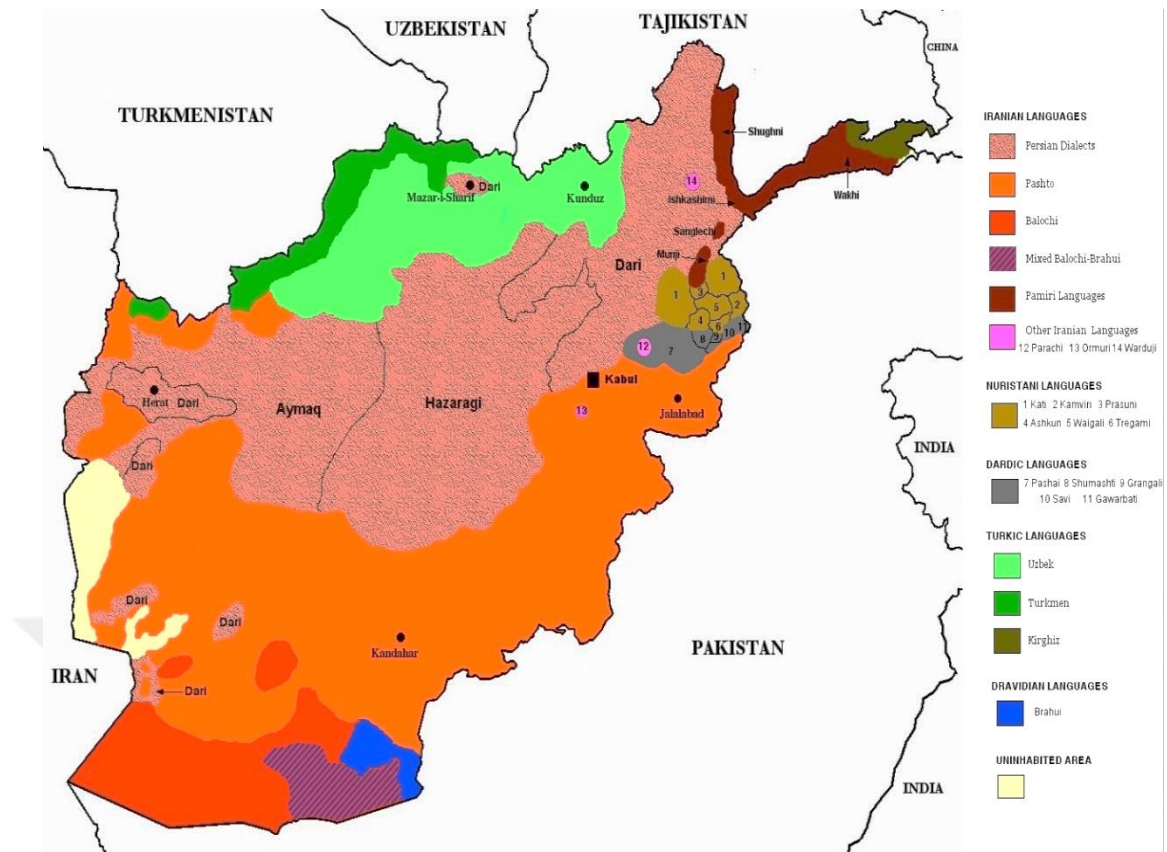


Figure 2. Linguistic Map of Afghanistan

Source: (Afghanistan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online, n.d.)

There was no conflict over religious identity in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is diverse not only in terms of ethnicity but also religion. Shia Islam makes up about 19% of Afghanistan's population, Sunni Islam makes up about 80%, while religious groups like the Jews and Hindus make up 1%. Afghanistan's Islam encompasses a diverse set of beliefs. The main ethnic groups are mostly Sunni, with the exception of the Shia Hazara. However, a sizable portion of Afghans adhere to the Sufi tradition, an Islamic practice that promotes nonviolent coexistence with different faiths and tolerance.

2.2. Fundamental Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

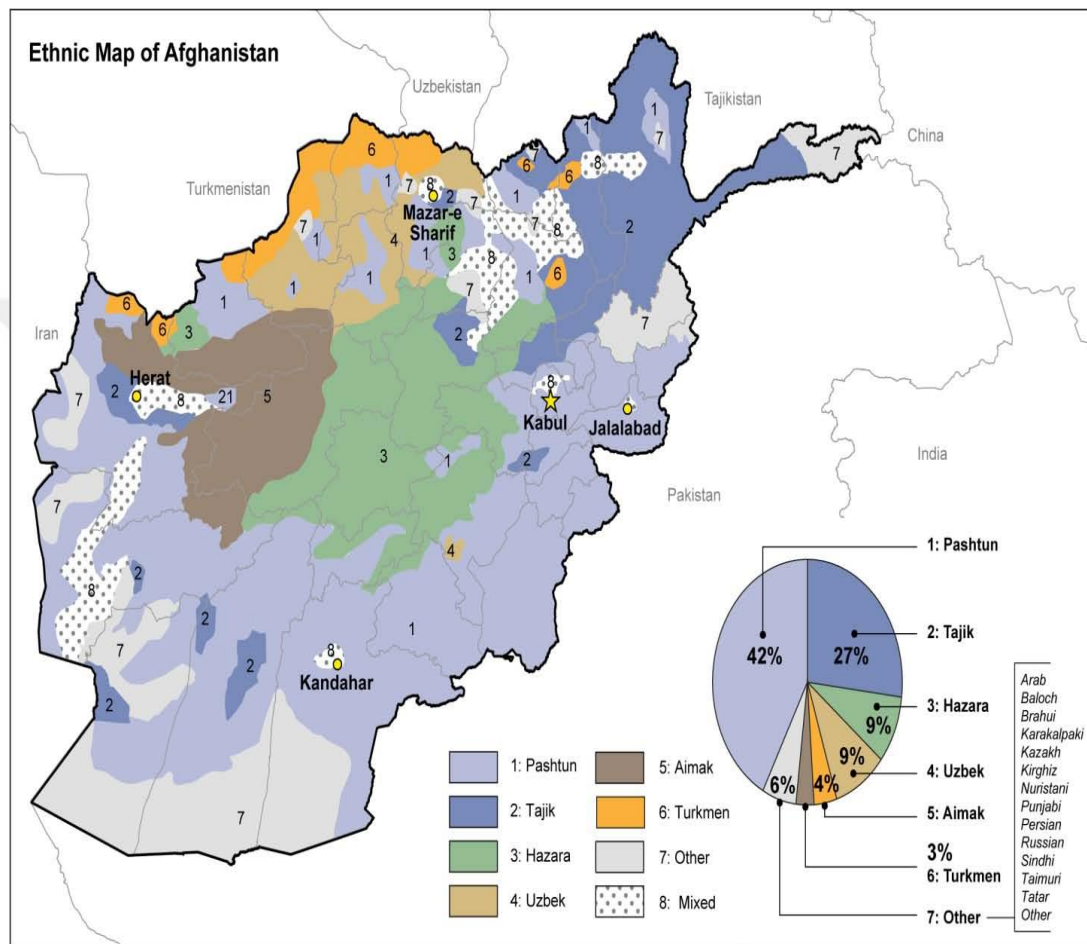
As far as the ethnic groups of the country are concerned, there are dozens of ethnic groups within the country. It is impossible to estimate the number and size of ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Additionally, different scholars' scientific methodologies lead to varied classifications of ethnic groups. There are roughly 54 ethnic groupings, according to a German survey, but 200, according to a Soviet study. Determining which ethnic groups and criteria should be taken into account in any political

agreement based on ethnic affiliation is therefore the key issue (Schetter, 2005). Because of their impact on Afghanistan's political, social, and economic institutions, I only address the main ethnic groups. There are about fifty-five ethnic groups in Afghanistan, although the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras make up the vast majority. Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, Pashaie, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash Gujur, and Brahawi are among the 14 distinct ethnic groups listed in Afghanistan's 2004 constitution as constituting the "nation of Afghanistan."

Every ethnic group in Afghanistan has its own history, culture, experiences, and perspectives on the country's circumstances (Khaledi, 2020.p.32). As shown in (Figure), These four major ethnic groups comprise 90% of Afghanistan's population (Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and, Hazara). In addition, there are still Turkman, Baloch, Nuristani, Pashai, and other ethnic groups. Estimating the size of an ethnic community is extremely difficult and practically impossible due to the fluidity of the idea of qawm, or ethnicity. Administratively, Afghanistan is separated into 374 districts and 34 provinces. The ethnic groups are dispersed throughout the nation. Uzbek and Turkmen ethnic groups are found in northern Afghanistan, whereas Pashtuns are mostly found in the southern regions, Tajiks in the northeastern and western provinces, and Hazaras in the central region. (Sarwari & Ono, 2023.p.4)

In fact, understanding the demography of some large ethnic groups is crucial to comprehending their shared preferences for politics and state building. Although the size of the various ethnic groups varies greatly, the nation is made up of smaller ethnic groups rather than a majority ethnic group. Although they do not make up a majority, the Pashtun ethnic group, which is the largest ethnicity, is thought to make about 32-42% of the population. With 27% of the population, the Tajiks are the next largest group. The Hazaras and Uzbeks make up about 9% of the total. The smaller communities receive the remaining 13%. (Qeyam, 2012). Afghanistan's population estimates vary greatly due to the country's governance and disputes regarding the size of its ethnic groups. Afghanistan cannot have a unified culture that embraces many traditions, nor can it overcome ethnic and tribal customs as a nation. These ethnic complexities made the creation of the Afghan country problematic. Since there were many ethnic groups in Afghanistan, they were unable to pass the nationalization process. Forced migrations, ethnic disputes, and dissatisfaction became the nation's

basic problems. Afghanistan's constitution states that all of the country's ethnic groups have a common national identity on a global scale. Everyone who holds Afghan citizenship is "Afghan," regardless of whether they are Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Turkmen, or someone else's ethnicity.



Source: GAO analysis of Central Intelligence Agency and National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency data; National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and Map Resources (maps).

Figure 3. Ethnic Majority Map of Afghanistan

Source: (United States Central Intelligence Agency)

Table 1. Population Statistics for the Major Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

Ethnic Group	Share (percentage %)	Primary Language	Islamic Sect
Pashtun	43.7	Pashto	Sunni
Tajiks	26.4	Dari dialects	Mostly Sunni
Hazara	12	Dari dialects	Shia
Uzbek	9	Uzbek dialects	Sunni
Turkmen	3	Turkic dialect	Sunni
Baluch	2.5	Balochi	Sunni
Others	3.4	depends	depends

Source: (Afghanistan: People, History, and Politics, Khaledi.2020)

While the population of the main ethnic groups of Afghanistan in 1979 has been as follow:

Table 2. Population figures of 1979 and Residence of Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

Ethnic Group	Population/ 1979	Residence
Pashtun	13809200	Concentrated in South and South-East but settled in most regions
Tajik	8342400	North, North-East and Kabul region
Hazara	3792000	the mountainous area in central Afghanistan called Hazarajat, and Kabul
Uzbek	2844000	Northern Cities
Turkmen	948000	Northern Cities
Baluch	790000	North-western Cities
Others	1074400	Depends

Source: (Afghanistan: People, History, and Politics, Khaledi.2020)

2.2.1. The Pashtuns

The Pashtuns, being one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan, also constitute a large number of tribes that share a common ancestry. The very argument that all Afghans are Pashtuns or the correct rephrasing that all Pashtuns are Afghans basically explains the historical evolution of Afghan politics, culture, and society. No doubt all Pashtuns are Afghans, but all Afghans are not Pashtuns. According to some studies, there are 55 small and large ethnic groups (Sultan, 2009). Tribal groups that strive for their own nation-state are combined to form ethnic groups, which are characterized by a shared history, culture, homeland, population, and heritage. Most significantly, ethnic groups shape a person's views, actions, and interactions as well as a nation's identity, as seen by the way Pashtun nationalism functions more broadly throughout the nation. Conversely, tribes are characterized as social groups based on loyalty and kinship, with changing customs and strong, organized ancestry. Tribal societies are non-state forms of politically organized social organization that are divided along the lines of lineage from a common ancestor. These tribal identities have become a topic of discussion in broader political agitations since they are the primary operational units in many regions of Afghanistan, such as the central, eastern, and southern hinterlands. Tribes that are Pashtun include the Mohmands and Orakzais (Abraham, 2013).

Furthermore, Pashtuns are perhaps the only ethnic group in Afghanistan to have preserved a strong sense of tribal identity among all the other ethnic groups. Kinship ties result in a four-tier system. The Pashtun ethnic group is the first; they are a confederation that functions as a whole when necessary. For instance, this is seen during elections when they support their "Pashtun" candidate over a Tajik or a Hazara. The qawm (tribe), which occupies a certain area and has its own customs, laws, clothing norms, and political system, is the second layer. The Khel, or huge lineage or clan, is the next dividing factor; a tribe is made up of several clans. The Khol, or smaller family groups and lineages, make up the fourth tier.

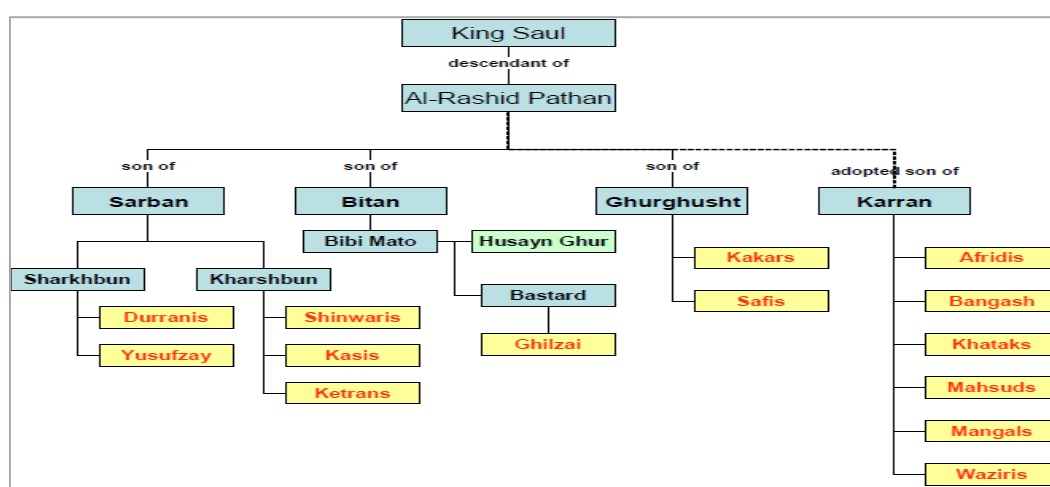
The latter is very significant to the Pashtun and explains why there are over 70 Pashto kinship concepts. Pashtun and describes the reason behind their over seventy Pashto kinship phrases. The Pashtun, according to the four-grouping layer, owes loyalty to their family, clan, tribe, and confederation in that order (Kfir, 2009,p.39).

The idea of equality among Pashtuns is based on the tribal system. According to this idea, social and economic inequality is a result of individual success rather than a natural state and is subject to alter at any time. All Pashtuns are equal at birth and descended from a single common ancestor. (Afsar & Samples, 2008).

According to Shukla (2015), there are two major groups of Pashtuns: the Nang (Highland Pashtuns) and the Qalang (Lowland Pashtuns). Whereas Qalang cultures are hierarchical, asymmetrical, and mostly predicated on patron-client relationships, Nang societies are segmentary, honor-bound, and acephalous. All Pashtuns are thought to have descended from Qais Abdur Rashid, an Arab who lived during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Because of the complex ties between their enigmatic lineages, mythological stories, historical alliances, and conflicts, it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between Pashtun tribes and subtribes.

Afsar and Sample (2008) state that it is widely believed that the Pashtun tribes of Pakistan and Afghanistan are divided into four main tribal divisions: the Durrani (also known as Abdali, who live in the south and southwest of Afghanistan as well as adjacent areas of Pakistan); the Ghilzai (who are mainly based in the east of Afghanistan); the Ghurghust (who live in the east and on the southwest edge of the core Pashtun region); and the Karlanri (who are situated along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border; most of them are based in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan). The Sarbani are another important group that some researchers add to the list of super-tribal confederacies.

Table 3. Pashtun Genealogy



Source: (Human Aspect in Afghanistan)

The Pashtuns are an ethnic group that originated in southern and eastern Afghanistan. They currently live on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, spanning from the Kunar province of Afghanistan to Herat, which borders Iran, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in Pakistan. In terms of population, the Pashtuns make up the most powerful and politically engaged members of Afghanistan's elite groups, and as such, they represent the country's overall national identity. Even though there isn't a comprehensive census on the Pashtun population, it's possible to assume that there are about 50 million of them, with 40–50% of them living in Afghanistan. The Durrani tribal federation, which is mostly composed of the Barakzai, Popalzai, and Alikozai tribes, has ruled over approximately 60 Pashtun tribes and 400 sub-tribes since the 18th century (Abraham, 2013). They make up over 29 million people in Pakistan, mostly in FATA and NWFP, and are referred to as Pathans or Pakhtuns (Abraham, 2013). The most powerful ethnic group in historical times has been the Pashtuns. They were given control of the Kingdom of Afghanistan by the British in the 18th century. The Durrani Empire was founded in Kandahar at this time by Abdul Khan Abdali. In the 1890s, there was an aggressive attempt to "Pashtunize" Afghanistan under Emir Abdur Rahmon. In the north, where there were many distinct cultures and ethnic groups, Pashtuns were sent and granted huge land grants. Furthermore, Abdur Rahman initiated an ethnic cleansing of the Mongololoid Hazaras. He massacred and sold into slavery the Hazaras who rebelled against his reign. It wasn't until 1919 that King Amanullah Khan removed the Hazaras' classification as slaves.(Ali, 2015.p.3).



Figure 4. Geographic Layout of Major Pashtun Tribal Group

Source: (Afghanistan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online, n.d.)

All Pashtuns follow the code of Pashtunwali, the traditional criteria by which members of the Pashtun tribes are supposed to behave is known as the Pashtunwali. "A Pashtun must uphold the code in order to preserve his honor and identity as a Pashtun." Anyone who disobeys this code of honor faces the Jirga's decision. The following are some of the code's more crucial elements (Abraham, 2013):

- *Nang* or honor, concerning the defense of female relatives and sexual morality.
- Badal or revenge, which guarantees tribesmen's defense gatherings against one another.
- *Taborwali* or cousin enmity, a secession process that creates new tribal organizations is often fueled by the constant presence of rising enmity inside a tribe. Therefore, there is a lot of mistrust and a lot of bloodshed amongst paternal cousins in most Pashtun clans, which turns into centuries-long family feuds.
- *Melmastia* or hospitality, it emphasizes how crucial it is to stay loyal to friends and allies and to offer safety to anyone who asks for it, even an enemy, while they are in a Pashtun's home.
- The tribal system, which views all Pashtuns as equals and views economic disparities as a component of personal ability, is the foundation of the Pashtun ideal of equality. Additionally, tribal order and social proximity delineate boundaries of cooperation and conflict.
- All Pashtun tribes, with the exception of the Ghilzai, who are dispersed throughout Afghanistan, are localized to varying degrees, including having clearly defined borders. Localized tribes have equal rights to use their shared, undivided land. Therefore, access to a tribe's land is granted to members of that tribe.
- *Perawano*, where a Pashtun descendent risks being expelled from Pashtun society if he does not follow Pashtun culture, family, and pedigree.

2.2.2. The Tajiks

The Tajiks are Afghanistan's second largest ethnic group and have historically been the Pashtuns' closest adversary in terms of prestige and influence. They refer to one another by the provinces or areas they are from, such as Kabuli, Panjsheri, Herati,

and Mazari, and do not group themselves according to tribes. The Tajiks have a less sense of nationality than the Pashtuns. As Oradea (2013) notes the Tajik tribal organization has all but vanished. Family and village ties, as well as a strong sense of communal loyalty, have taken its place. Tajiks lack a strong ethnic or tribal identity, even though Afghan Tajiks consider themselves to be an ethnic group and they do share a number of cultural and ethnic traits. They are grouped geographically rather than by tribe, and they typically identify with the valley or village where they reside.

Typically, they reside in the northern and northeastern Afghan regions as well as the capital city of Kabul. There are Tajik people in the south, such in Kandahar, and the southeast, like in Helmand provinces, in addition to the large number that extends into the central mountains.

The Tajik ethnic category was used in the foreign academics' ethnic taxonomy to refer to the remaining groups of all Sunnite Persian-speaking rural or city people who did not have a tribal heritage, that is, no common history or genealogical knowledge. The main barrier to political endeavors to build a genuine ethnic group of Tajiks and to instill a sense of belonging to the Tajik people has repeatedly been the absence of conviction in a shared past (Schetter, 2005). The Dari Persian language, the most widely spoken of all the ethnic groups in Afghanistan, is spoken by Tajiks. There were also brief periods of time when Tajiks controlled Afghanistan, including four years under Burhanuddin Rabbani (June 1992–September 1996) and nine months under Habibullah Kalakani (January 1929–October 1929) (Qeyam, 2012).

2.2.3. The Hazaras

Another influential ethnic group is the Hazaras, a Persian-speaking group. Shiite Muslims make up the majority of the Hazara population, however they are also found in various other ethnic groupings. There are numerous debates surrounding the Hazaras' history, and their beginnings have not been reconstructed. The majority of academics claim that Hazaras are descended from Mongolians due to their shared physical and cultural traits⁴. Some claim to be of Persian descent. The Hazaras live in what is known as Hazarajat, the center parts of Afghanistan. The northern region of Afghanistan is also home to a sizable Hazara population. They have a strong sense of

⁴ The Hazara people are thought to be descended from Genghis Khan, who left 1,000 of his men in Afghanistan. "Hazara" literally means "thousand."

Hazara identity and speak a dialect of Dari called Hazaragi, which has a little bit of Turkish and Mongolian influence.(Oradea, 2013).

As Oradea states the Hazaras are divided into tribes and clans, just like the rest of Afghanistan's population, and have long maintained their independence from the national government. Typically, a tribe's territory consists of one to three villages, but larger tribes may have up to five villages. There are eleven tribal groups among the Hazara, and each has a different number of subgroups. Ghazni Hazara, Jaghui, Polada, Uruzgani, Shaikh Ali, Walang, Kala Nau Hazara, Dai Kundi, Dai Zangi, Behsud, and Dai Mirdad are the eleven tribal groupings. With the exception of Pashtuns, the Hazaras in Afghanistan, on the other hand, have a stronger sense of ethnic identification. As a result, the Hazaras are more aware of their ethnic identity. However, local and tribal allegiances cannot be entirely undermined by ethnic consciousness.

Most Hazaras claim that the Hazara War of 1890–1893, which led to an extended period of systematic and intentional death, dispossession, and enslavement that can be considered genocide under modern international law, is the most important event in the history of the Hazaras and the establishment of the Afghan state (Ibrahimi, 2023). Massacres, slavery, and forced migration devastated the entire Hazara population in the provinces of Zabul and Uruzgan during this time, and Pashtuns received their lands back in exchange for their participation in the conflict. Throughout the history of contemporary Afghanistan, the Hazaras have been subjected to discrimination. Sunni leaders have condemned Hazaras as agents of Iranian imperialism in Afghanistan and as not being true Muslims because of their beliefs (Oradea, 2013).

2.2.4. The Uzbeks

With an estimated 2 to 2.5 million members, or 8% of the Afghan population, Uzbeks are the country's fourth largest ethnic community. Although they were traditionally nomadic, the majority of Uzbeks today live in northern cities and villages. A tiny percentage of Uzbeks still live semi-nomadic lives⁵. The majority of Uzbeks

⁵ One of the most influential leaders of the Golden Horde, Ghiyath ad-Din Muhammad Uzbek Khan, is credited with creating the ethnic term "Uzbek" (1312–1341). Tamerlane, who conquered modern-day Afghanistan in the 14th and 15th centuries, is also credited by Uzbeks with being their ancestor. In the sixteenth century, a large number of Golden Horde Uzbeks from the plains north of the Caspian Sea moved to Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. After that, these Golden Horde Uzbeks blended with those who had already established themselves in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

make a living through farming and herding. The social structure of Uzbek is patriarchal, and those with the titles Beg, Arbab, or Khan hold significant authority (Qeyam, 2012). Geographically, Uzbeks reside in the northern part of Afghanistan, which is the most ethnically varied area in the nation. Mazar-e-Sharif, a strategically located crossroads town, is the center of Uzbek culture and politics in Afghanistan. The Turkic language dialect known as Uzbek is spoken by Uzbeks. Additionally, a sizable portion of Uzbeks are completely literate in Dari (Oradea, 2013).

The Junbishi Mili-yi Islami (National Islamic Movement or National Islamic Front) is the political encompassing organization for the politically united Afghan Uzbeks. Uzbeks in Afghanistan receive assistance from Uzbekistan.

2.2.5. Some Other Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

2.2.5.1. The Aimaks

Another minority ethnic group of mixed Iranian and Mongolian ancestry, the Aimaks (Chahar Aimak) are mostly found in the provinces of Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Jowzjan, Ghor, Herat, and Sar-e Pol in northwest Afghanistan. They are primarily Sunni Muslims and speak a dialect of Dari. The Firozkohi, Jamshidi, Taimani, and Timuri are the principal Aimak tribes; each of these is further broken into about 250 smaller tribes.

2.2.5.2. The Baluchi

Another Iranian ethnic group that makes up 0.3% of Afghanistan's population is the Baluch, who number about 100,000. Although there are Baluch enclaves in north-western Faryab Province, the Sunni Baluch people's homeland in south-western Afghanistan is in the sparsely populated deserts and semi-deserts of Helmand Province. The primary Baluch regions are found in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province and Pakistan's Baluchistan province. Between 5 and 6 million Baluch reside in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

2.2.5.3. The Kirghiz

Speaking Kirghiz, a Turkic language written in Arabic script, the Kirghiz are a Sunni Mongoloid people. Geographically, the Kirghiz are cut off from the rest of Afghan society. The Kirghiz culture and way of life are significantly impacted by this remoteness. The Pamir Mountains, east of the Wakhan Corridor, were home to about

3,000 people. Only a handful are left. Following the occupation of the Wakhan by Soviet and Afghan forces in 1978, the majority relocated to Pakistan; they subsequently migrated in Turkey in 1983.



CHAPTER THREE

IMPACTS OF ETHNIC NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY

3.1. The Role of Ethnic Nationalism in the Afghan Conflict

Afghanistan's recent history has revealed that the country's civil conflicts have resulted from "ethnic discrimination," as various ethnic groups see themselves as contenders because they want to seize power and rule the nation. This has entailed both external and internal causes. By causing a frustrating sense of loss for certain communities, conflicts—especially protracted, catastrophic civil wars among small groups—create or strengthen preexisting ethnic identities while evoking a real or perceived sensation of empowerment, among other things. The traditional social and political forces in Afghanistan have seen a significant shift in power and influence as a result of the wars (Mazhar et al., 2012).

Any description of the history of the current conflict probably begins with the internal conflicts, which have proven to be a major barrier to efforts to create a "Afghan" nation. Afghanistan is distinguished by its diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion. Ethnic identification is a complicated matter. Because each of the major ethnic groupings is made up of numerous tribes and sub-tribes, none of them have a uniform internal makeup or social structure. Similar diversity may be seen in religious issues, despite the fact that 99 percent of the population is Muslim. There has always been tension between the Sunni and Shia sects.

Second, there are foreign components to the Afghan conflict. Historically, Afghanistan was on the invasion path into South Asia due to its strategic location at the intersection of three regions: Central Asia, South Asia, and South-West Asia. During the Cold War, Afghanistan was the prized trophy that the Soviet Union and the United States fought over, but more recently, neighboring nations looking to form strategic alliances keenly monitor domestic developments. The conflict's potential effects on regional instability, international criminality, and terrorism continue to pique the curiosity of observers from beyond the region (Goor & Leeuwen, 2000).

In 1989, Afghanistan was in a precarious position. There were six million departed citizens. Among the remaining 11.7 million, 700,000 were widows and orphans, and 535,000 were disabled veterans. Furthermore, about two million people were

internally displaced and had sought refuge in urban areas. Food output had drastically decreased due to the depopulation of the countryside. The infrastructure was severely devastated, and one-third of all communities were destroyed. Agriculture became a dangerous endeavor as a result of the landmines that were strewn around the nation, maiming thousands of peasants each year.

3.2. The Parties Involved and their Objectives

The conflict, as it unfolded following the Soviet withdrawal of soldiers in 1989, initially seemed to be anarchic and illogical. Upon closer examination, a number of players with distinct strategic goals emerge as components of a complex, interconnected, and unstable conflict system. Externally, the conflicting interests of neighboring countries have been greatly impacted by the subtle shifts in alliances, which have occasionally involved personal feuds and resulted in fluid and changeable coalitions amongst the warring groups. Afghanistan's ethno-religious differences may be exacerbated by neighboring nations like Pakistan and Iran, who have a tendency to give preference to some ethnic and religious minorities over others.

Iran prefers the Tajik and Hazara, while Pakistan is considered to have close relations to the Pashtun. Given its history of backing the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, India also has stronger relations with the Tajik (Nader et al., 2014).

This section reviews the various actors that were and became involved in the Afghan conflict related to ethnic issues, it deals with the different groups in Afghanistan, as well as with the conflict's international actors.

3.2.1. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) / Watan

Interethnic relations received primary attention when the communists came to power in 1978. There were divisions inside the PDPA, Afghanistan's communist party. The Khalq (also known as the "Banner") and the Parcham (also known as the "Masses") constituted its two main factions. The Khalq was a hardline revolutionary who had a large presence in the military. The leaders of this faction were primarily from Ghilzai Pashtun tribes, and it had some Pashtun tribal support and background. More accommodative was the Pashtun faction. The bureaucrats and intelligentsia of de-tribalized Kabul, who had been left out by the exclusive Durrani in-group that had ruled Afghanistan under the Daoud Republic and the monarchy, strongly supported it.

The communist authorities identified Uzbeki, Turkmani, Baluchi, and Nuristani as official languages during the Khalq faction (1978–79) of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), in addition to Pashto and Dari (Persian). The goal of the policy was to devalue Dari and finally advance Pashto as the interethnic language of communication, despite the Khalq faction's apparent attempt to undermine Pashtun dominance. Particularly from 1980 to 1986, when Babrak Karmal was in power, the Parcham group of the PDPA attempted to use ethnic strife to support its rule. The Parchamites recruited several ethnic minorities into the military and the government, and they recognized six languages as official. The Karmal dictatorship sought to improve connections with the minorities since it thought that the Pashtuns were the main group putting up a fight against the communist system. This policy ultimately led to the state's collapse following the withdrawal of Soviet soldiers, in addition to significantly diminishing Pashtun influence in official institutions (Ahady, 1995). When a violent struggle broke out and the state collapsed in April 1978 due to the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, ethnic politics became more complex (Ibrahimi, 2023).

In this period, the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan overthrew the feeble and fragmented government in 1978 as a result of the chaos that followed Zahir Shah's departure from Afghanistan. The Mujahideen, who headed Afghanistan's religious components, opposed the communists' radical reform program, which included mandatory education for women, new taxation, significant changes in land ownership, and the inclusion of women in non-traditional roles in society. In order to support their communist ally against Islamic militants and combat the prospect of radical Islamist rule along its soft underbelly of the Central Asian republics with a plurality of Muslims, the Soviet Union sent soldiers into Afghanistan in December 1979 (Afsar & Samples, 2008).

The Soviet intervention heightened calls for jihad and the growth of mujahideen resistance. In addition to waging a vicious counterinsurgency campaign, the Soviet troops completely destroyed the backward country's already weak socioeconomic structure. The Soviet Union and its communist Afghan allies are accused of killing 1.3 million Afghans during the nearly ten years of occupation, destroying all urban and rural infrastructure, and forcing about 5.5 million to flee into neighboring Iran and Pakistan, the majority of whom made their way to the tribal belt of Pakistan. Most of

the citizens killed under their governance were either Durrani Pashtuns or educated Tajiks. The Soviet Union withdrew all of its forces from Afghanistan in February 1989 after an intensive and expensive counterinsurgency mission, leaving Najibullah's communist regime to fight for itself. The PDPA abandoned its communist agenda and changed its name to the Watan Party following the Soviet Union's withdrawal of its forces. Political marginalization of the Watan has occurred since 1992, when the Islamic Interim Government of the Mujahideen came to power.

3.2.2. The Mujahideen and the Decline of the Pashtuns

In general, the term "Mujahideen" refers to all Afghans who believed they were fighting a Jihad against the Soviet Union and the PDPA, including those who were fighting inside Afghanistan and those who had escaped to Pakistan and Iran and invaded Afghanistan.

In response to the Soviet invasion and the Communist regime, the Mujahideen groups formed themselves according to local and ethnic factors. Under their own ethnic leaders, they instituted self-government, which sparked political division and a fierce power struggle. This dispute between the Pashtun and Uzbek and Tajik clans finally evolved into a regional and ethnic conflict. National unity was weakened by the lack of democratic institutions, which made it more difficult to establish stable coalitions and settle disputes mutually. Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal, the violence was further exacerbated by the divisions between Pashtun majority groups and minorities as well as the political divide between conventional and revolutionary Islam parties (Mazhar et al., 2012).

While some Mujahideen functioned irregularly at the village or community level, others were organized into parties or groups of people. At the end of 1980, the Pakistani government said that it would only acknowledge and assist seven groups located in Pakistan and their affiliates. By establishing offices in the camps or establishing their own camps, Pakistan encouraged them to exert control over the refugee population. The refugees were encouraged to join the party that was in power in their camp. The Jamiat and Hizb-e Islami were the two main Mujahideen parties with headquarters in Pakistan. Islami-yi Jamiat-i When Burhanuddin Rabbani created Afghanistan in 1973, President Daoud attempted to suppress the group, forcing its leaders to escape to Peshawar. It was the only non-Pashtun, non-Sunni party among

the Pakistani Mujahideen. It was mostly made up by Tajiks, although being purportedly supra-ethnic and embracing a variety of ideological inclinations. Jamiat has always been a party that mostly represents the northern minorities, and it was especially hard to gain support in Pashtun areas.

The "Hizb-i Islami," or Hizb-i Islami-Yi Afghanistan, separated away from the Jamiat in 1979. Particularly among those Pakistani forces that backed the Mujahideen, Hizb-i Islami was the biggest Mujahideen movement and a longtime protégé of Pakistan. The Ghilzai Pushtun and radical Sunni Islamist Gulbuddin Hikmatyar was the leader of Hizb-i Islami. He mostly recruited from Pakistani refugee camps and also had the help of young individuals with comparatively high levels of education.

There were several Shia parties that sought safety in Iranian refugee camps in addition to those Mujahideen parties in Pakistan. They were led by the Hizb-i Wahdat–i Islami-yi Afghanistan. According to reports, these organizations were more focused on opposing traditional Sunni organizations than the Soviet armies and Kabul during the Soviet occupation. Wahdat was primarily supported by Hazara ethnic groups, who wanted to share authority so that the Hazara groups would be in charge of their own territories.

Many factions have entered the Afghan conflict since 1989; some of these groups broke away from the Mujahideen parties, while others emerged on their own. Abdul Rashid Dostum was the founder and main leader of the Junbish-i Milli-yi Afghanistan (National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan), which played a key role. Former militia members made up the majority of the Junbish, an Uzbek party whose allegiance was "bought" by the communist government. Dostam wanted to install a government in Afghanistan that would use a system of power-sharing to ensure regional autonomy.

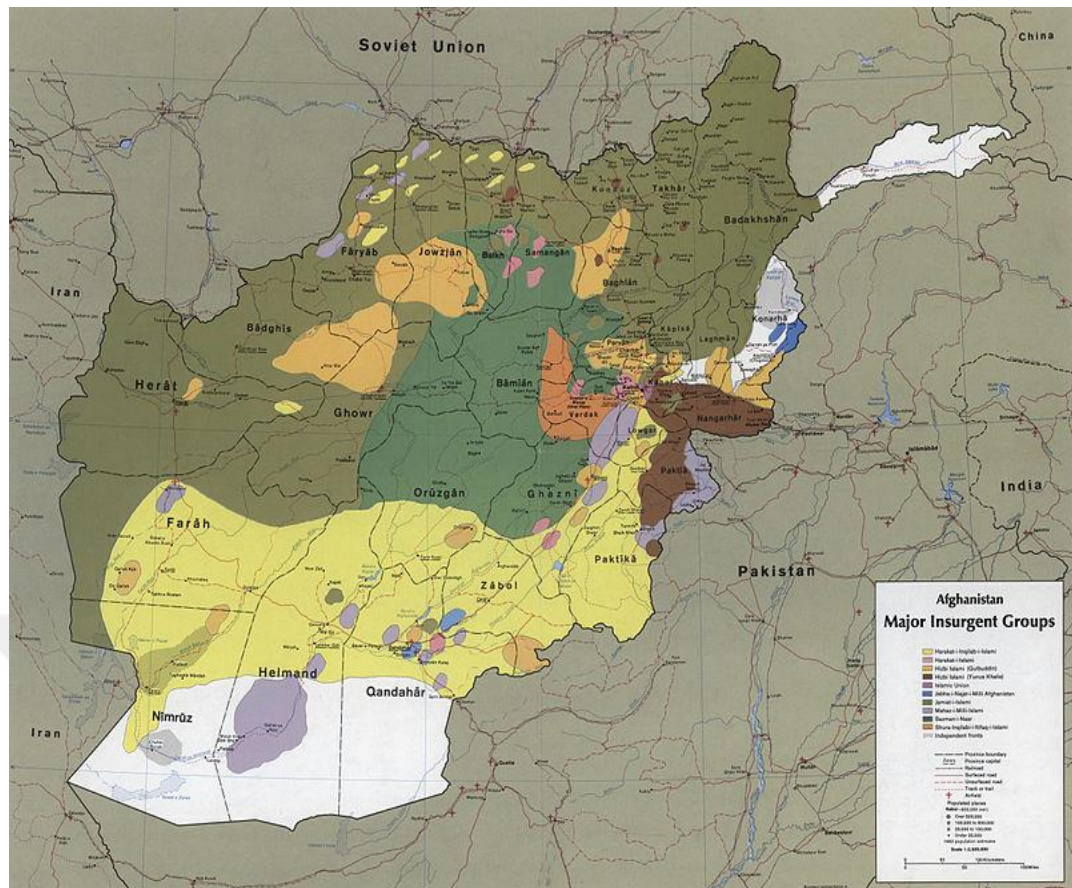


Figure 5. Afghanistan's Major Insurgent Groups

Source: (Afghanistan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online, n.d.)

The Pashtuns have suffered a clear decline since April 1992 when the Northern Alliance, a coalition of ethnic minorities overthrew the regime of President Najibullah. As Dubow states Abd al-Rashid Dostum's Uzbek forces, Massoud's Tajik forces, and Hezb-e Wahdat's Hazara forces all made their way into the capital in 1992. Although he was elected president of the new coalition administration, Rabbani had limited authority over the nation, especially in the south. He was unable to bring the diverse interests together, even in the capital. The following two years would be spent bloodying the city and one another by the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras who had invaded Kabul (Dubow, 2009). Probably the strongest evidence of the decline of the Pashtuns is their loss of territorial control; constituting about 50% of the population, they now control no more than two-fifths of the country.

In a particular area of the nation, each group had a warlord or leader who aspired to dominate. In terms of military and political control, Afghanistan is now divided into five areas: in the north, Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum has control over the

Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Baghlan and (partially) Kunduz provinces; in the northeast, Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Masud controls the Takhar, Badakhshan, Parwan, Kapisa, and parts of Kunduz provinces; in the center, the Hazara organizations, especially the Hizb-i Wahdat has control over the Bamiyan, parts of Ghor, Uruzgan, and Ghazni provinces; in the west, Tajik commander Ismail Khan controls the Badghis, Herat, and a large part of Ghor and Farah provinces; and ten of the remaining southeastern, southern, and southwestern Pashtun provinces (the largest area) are controlled by the Taliban, a group of Islamic studies who emerged on the Afghan political scene in October 1994, and a coalition of three Pashtun Islamic organizations that control the provinces of Laghman, Nangarhar, and Kunar in the east (Ahady, 1995).

According to Ahady's book, the Pashtuns' drastic decline can be attributed to five main elements. First, the conditions that resulted in the communist regime's downfall in April 1992 made it easier for ethnic minorities to gain traction. The PDPA's Karmal faction was crucial in turning the Afghan conflict from an ideological to an ethnic one. Smart strategist Karmal understood that the communist state would fall apart without Soviet assistance, therefore he tried to form a new alliance based on ethnic affinities after the Soviets left Afghanistan in order to maintain his own and his faction's significance in Afghan politics. Karmal and his colleagues aimed to bring non-Pashtun communist military officers and bureaucrats together with non-Pashtun resistance commanders. Therefore, since 1989, there has been a great deal of ethnic hostility within the PDPA, particularly among the leaders.

At first, the Pashtuns, an important ethnic community in Afghanistan, held a dominating position inside the PDPA, a communist party. But their power changed during the Soviet invasion. Other factions gained political power, but they still controlled the military. Their authority was further undermined by a failed coup attempt by a pro-Pashtun faction. Because non-Pashtun groups took advantage of the situation to seize power, ethnic tensions intensified. Alliances with non-Pashtun mujahideen commanders were established, and non-Pashtun military officers were elevated to important roles. In the end, this made Afghanistan's ethnic war worse.

The Pashtuns' personal rivalries and divisions were a second cause in their decline. This diversity of organizations during the war against the Soviets allowed the Pashtuns

to receive more than their fair share of foreign military and financial aid, but it also fostered rivalry, suspicion, and often violent clashes between them. As mentioned, Pashtuns dominated six of the seven resistance organizations based in Pakistan. The commanders of Pashtun-dominated groups were unable to coordinate their military operations and adopt a unified political stance during the chaotic fall of the communist administration because of this intra-Pashtun dispute.

Third, the ethnic group's standing was further undermined by the divide between the Pashtun people and the leaders of the resistance. The more prominent Pashtun resistance leaders and their foreign backers opposed the former king Zahir Shah, despite the fact that the vast majority of Pashtuns supported his rule. This led to a deadly breach between the people and the so-called leaders. For example, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is seen as the Pashtun leader since the fall of the communist administration, but while being the most powerful militarily, he is not well-liked by the general populace, which has harmed them in their fight for supremacy in Afghanistan.

Fourth, the group's standing has also been harmed by unfavorable Western, particularly American, perceptions of Hikmatyar and, by extension, the Pashtun. The most effective Afghan fundamentalist group with the closest ties to extremist worldwide Islamic organizations was the Pashtun-dominated Hizbi Islami, which was commanded by Hikmatyar. This had a detrimental effect on its relations with the U.S. and the West in general. Therefore, the United States attempted to undermine Hikmatyar and his group by subtly endorsing the Rabani-Masud campaign for power shortly after the Soviet Union withdrew its forces in 1989 in the hopes that they would seize leadership of the ethnic nation as soon as possible. Naturally, the Pashtun's position was undermined by the U.S. stance.

Lastly, the Pashtun have also suffered as a result of the regional countries' competition for influence in Afghanistan. As rivalry for influence among regional nations grew, American and Soviet interest in Afghanistan decreased after the Cold War ended and Soviet forces left the country. In 1992, each regional power sponsored a certain ethnic group in Afghanistan: Saudi Arabia and Pakistan favored the Pashtuns, Uzbekistan and Turkey backed the Uzbeks, and Iran sponsored the Hazaras and, for a while, the Tajiks. The fundamentalist stance of the Hizbi Islami and Saudi hostility to the spread of Iranian influence in Afghanistan were the main reasons for Saudi support for the Pashtuns in general and Hekmatyar in particular.

Afsar and Sample state that, The Taliban's extreme ideologies were able to quickly gain traction in Afghanistan as a result of the conflict between the warlords and a weary society. According to Taliban mythology, they were founded in response to the violation committed during the mujahedin era of Afghan politics. One can claim that One of the main reasons of the Taliban's rise is considered to have been an ongoing conflict between these commanders and the impact of their fighting on the local populace.

3.2.3. The Taliban

Taliban is a Sunni Islamist nationalist and pro-Pashtun movement founded in the early 1990s that ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until October 2001. The first foundation of the movement—the word "Taliban" means "students" in Pashto—was made up of men and peasant farmers who were enrolled in Islamic schools in Pakistani and Afghan madrasas. In southern Afghanistan, the Taliban established a base and increased their power. In fact, the Taliban and al-Qaida, two of the mujahideen's offshoots, were created as a result of collaboration between Pakistan, the United States, the mujahideen, and a number of majority-Muslim nations, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These groups started to take shape in the early 1990s (Armajani, 2021).

From 1992, when the Soviet-backed Afghan government was overthrown, the Taliban advanced through the southern region, capturing several districts from armed factions fighting civil war. By September 1996, Kabul had fallen to the Taliban, who had killed the president and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The first step taken by the Taliban was to establish a strict interpretation of Qur'anic teaching and jurisprudence. As a matter of fact, this meant often severe legislation concerning the treatment of women, religious minorities, and political opponents of all kinds. (*National Counterterrorism Center | Groups*, n.d.).

Afghanistan became the foundation for a transnational movement that the Taliban and its allies intended to spread orthodox Islamic government across the globe. As a result, starting in 1994, the Taliban's membership included not just Afghans but also over 30,000 citizens of Pakistan and 3,000 additional terrorists from various Islamic nations (Clayton, 2021).

According to Goor and Leeuwen, the Taliban are not essentially a new force. They are the products of twenty years of war in Afghanistan. The Taliban's popularity grew quickly, and they continued to be successful in establishing their dominance. Originally, Islamic scholars, or ulema, were in charge of organizing and leading the militia. In opposition to the un-Islamic, atheist administration, the ulema advocated for Jihad during the Soviet invasion. They returned to the madrassas (Islamic religious schools) following the Soviet retreat and the fall of the communist state in 1992, despite their active participation in the Mujahideen resistance. Disappointed with the Mujahideen's success in reconstructing the nation and enforcing Islamic law, the more conservative ulema began devoting their time and efforts to forming a new group of Islamic theological scholars known as the Taliban.

Although the Taliban claimed to be establishing a society based on the teachings of the Quran, their understanding of Islam was greatly influenced by pre-Islamic customs, tribal conventions, and an authoritarian puritanical worldview. Armajani (2021) claims that The Taliban saw themselves as belonging to the real Muslim generation, who would bring peace and justice back to Afghanistan by applying the full power of Islamic law over the entire nation. Many of their members had been born in refugee camps in Pakistan near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. In addition to learning about Islam from the Pashtun madrasahs, these Taliban militants had acquired their fighting skills from the mujahideen, many of whom had received CIA training or direct instruction from the agency. Also, Afsar and Sample (2008) believe that, based on madrassas established during the Soviet-Afghan war, the Taliban have changed the conventional understanding of Islam to an ultraconservative one. Supported by Saudi Arabia, these madrassas implemented a rigorous, equitable framework that forbade dissidents and imposed stringent regulations.

About the Taliban's victories, Armajani in his book states that The Taliban achieved two significant military victories in October 1994 in the southern Afghan town of Spin Boldak, which is on the Pakistani border and was a crucial town on the highway between Quetta, Pakistan, and Ashgabat (the capital of Turkmenistan). In November 1994, the Taliban also won in Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city and a crucial location on the Quetta-Ashgabat highway. This occurred while members of the Pakistani government discussed the best course of action to try to accomplish their objectives. The Taliban dominated the whole western region of Afghanistan,

which is predominantly Tajik and Persian-speaking, by the time they took over Herat on September 5, 1995, with some 20,000 of their soldiers. For the first time, the primarily Pashtun Taliban were in charge of a territory where ethnic Pashtuns were not the majority. At this point, the Taliban controlled the western border region of Afghanistan with Iran, where Persian is the official language. The Hazara forces at Mazar-i Sharif, about 150 miles north of Bamiyan, were taken over by the Taliban on August 8, 1998. After that, the Taliban entered Mazar-i Sharif and massacred thousands of Hazaras there over two days.

As the group enforced strict adherence to its version of Islam in areas under its control and used harsh punishments such as public executions, to carry out its decrees, which included prohibitions on dancing, Western music, and television, the Taliban rapidly lost favor both domestically and internationally. It forbade women from working outside the home or going to school, and it put women who were accused of adultery to death in public. Massive Buddha statues from the sixth century that were carved into hills above the city of Bamiyan were destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001, drawing international criticism since they were seen as blasphemous and against Islamic law (Clayton, 2021).

According to Clayton the Taliban, under their former rule, had one of the worst human rights records globally. Two key issues are the rights of Afghan women and girls and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. The Hazaras, who comprise approximately 10-15% of Afghanistan's population and are primarily Shia Muslims, are one of the country's largest ethnoreligious minorities. They are primarily found in the Hazarajat, their ancient homeland in central Afghanistan, and other areas in western Kabul. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Afghan rulers harassed them. Hazara citizens were repeatedly massacred by Taliban militants between 1996 and 2001. Because of this past, a lot of Hazaras expressed concern about the Taliban's potential comeback in the years running up to 2021. Perhaps the biggest threat to Hazaras in recent years was ISKP, which frequently targeted Hazara mosques, schools, and other locations in Kabul on the grounds of anti-Shia sectarian sentiment.

A number of other religious minorities, including Sikhs and Hindus, have also called Afghanistan home. Tens of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs used to live in Afghanistan, but after the country was overrun by violence and instability in the 1970s,

their numbers sharply declined. Perhaps the most well-known of the Taliban's repressive acts against religious minorities was their 2001 decree that non-Muslim minorities must wear distinguishing markings on their garments (Clayton, 2021).

In closing, the Taliban's worldview does not place much emphasis on Afghan nationalism as such. However, the majority of support for the Taliban is still Pashtun, and one logical reason why the movement so quickly gained traction in Kandahar and other Pashtun heartlands is that it was fostered by a Pashtun backlash and a profound dissatisfaction of Pashtun power being overpowered by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras in the Afghan war starting in 1992 (Hyman, 2002).

3.2.4. Pakistan

Ever since the creation of Pakistan, except for brief periods, its relations with Afghanistan at the government level have been problematic for historical and geopolitical reasons. Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighboring states in South Asia. The Taliban is primarily centered in the border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan, affecting the politics of both countries. As Armajani (2021) states the lengthy and complex history between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which dates back to 1947 when Pakistan gained its independence, Pakistan's policies toward and within Afghanistan during and after the Soviet Union's invasion of that country in 1979 are important when examining Islamism in general and the mujahideen, the Taliban, and Afghanistan in particular.

Pakistan is the country blamed for harboring the Afghan Soviet war (1979-1989). After the collapse of Soviet Afghanistan, that country became more fragmented and divided internally. After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, it became a violent civil war, fueled by regional, ethnic, clan, and religious differences. Afghan militias, attached to warlord fiefdoms, engaged in battles, alliance changes, and repeated battles, seeking advantage over immediate enemies and potential allies. (Armajani, 2021). According to Afsar and Sample (2008), Pakistan is the most important regional actor for Afghanistan's future. Additionally, it is one of the areas most impacted by the Taliban. Due to the ongoing violence and bloodshed associated with the conflict, Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union, which had been supported by the US and Saudi Arabia, caused a complicated legacy that still plagues the country today. Due to the strong cultural and economic ties, Pakistan has a genuine

interest in the stability and advancement of Afghanistan. Pakistan would have greater access to the resource-rich Central Asian region and greater economic prospects if Afghanistan remained secure.

By 1996, the Taliban had become a powerful military and political force. Pakistan provided them with material and political support, and they were home to Osama bin Laden, a participant in the 9/11 attacks. Officially, Pakistan went to war against the Taliban when it chose to back the US war on terrorism. Three crucial aspects must be looked at in order to comprehend Pakistan's relationship with this neighbor:

The first and most significant factor is that the Afghan warrior factions involved in the civil war relied on outside economic trading partners and alliances with different powers that had diverse geopolitical objectives for the area. These long-standing factional ties have not been replaced by fresh backing from the Hamid Karzai-led post-Taliban Afghan government. The several Afghan groups and their international backers are therefore combining their political and strategic interests to exert pressure on the feeble Afghan government into allowing them to function independently of Kabul.

Second, regional religious extremist, ideological, and ethnic organizations have joined Afghan factions in creating their own networks of support. The traditional order and stability of the nation-state are in danger due to the impact of non-state actors, which Afghanistan and its neighbors are finding difficult to counter. Third, Pakistan and Afghanistan's neighbors have adopted predatory tactics against Afghanistan and taken advantage of many of its weaknesses as a weak state. Internal rivalries that attempted to destabilize Afghanistan were previously stoked by their ambitions and anxieties. Afghanistan's major powers' engagement has had a significant effect on Afghan factions. (Akhtar, 2008).

Regarding Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan Armajani (2021) states Pakistan's attempts to employ Islamist organizations as substitutions for its alleged advantage are not new, even though Zia and subsequent Pakistani presidents' support of Islamist organizations like the Taliban, Lashkar-i Taiba, and the mujahideen has, at best, had mixed outcomes for Pakistan. For instance, Pakistan provided protection to Afghan Islamists who used violent resistance against the predominantly secularist

Afghan regime in 1973, five years before Zia-ul-Haq was elected president after a coup d'etat reinstated the Afghan Prince Daud (Khaledi, 2020).

In Pakistan and in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is populated by Pashtuns, a network of Islamically oriented opponents of Afghanistan's secularist regimes came into being. Following the independence of Pakistan in 1947, some of the traditional ulema declined to complete their Islamic studies in India. Many Afghan students studied in Pakistan's independent madrasahs, and many Pashtuns, who make up 42% of Afghanistan's population and 15% of Pakistan's, also went there for their education.(Armajani, 2021). Students who attended Pakistani schools returned to Afghanistan and established Islamist madrasahs, forming a network in the majority of Pashtun areas near the Afghan-Pakistan border. These networks, which operated outside government control, became stronger during Soviet occupation due to the ineffectiveness of Afghan madrasahs. Teachers trained outside Pakistan trained students to resist the Soviets.

3.2.4.1. The Durand Line and the Pashtunistan Question

Due to the fact that it passes through the ancestral heartland of an ethnic group whose members were formerly known as Afghans but are now more widely recognized as Pashtuns in British India, the border has subsequently become contentious in the area. According to the Afghan constitution and modern usage, the term "Afghan" generally refers to all Afghan citizens, regardless of their ethnic background. Among Indians and many non-Pashtun Pakistanis, the popular term for Pashtun is still Pathan. Depending on the speaker, Pashtun can be spelled Pakhtun, Pakhtoon, Pashtoon, Pukhtoon, or, less frequently, Pukhtun. Today, the Pashtun people are divided between Afghanistan and Pakistan by the Durand Line, as the boundary between the two nations is widely known. However, the majority of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is unprotected, so it does little to hinder migration. Since Pakistan's creation in 1947, the border has continued to be a source of contention and mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad, having never been legally recognized by multiple Afghan administrations. (Lamb & Tarzi, 2011). Regarding the ideologies of both sides Abraham (2013) states, historically, the political views of the Pashtuns on both sides of the border—primarily the Durrani tribes of Afghanistan and the Pakhtuns of British India—were clearly different, despite their shared ethnic heritage.

Table 4. Pashtun Tribes and Ethnic Categories along the Durand Line

Border Provinces		Pashtun tribes and ethnic categories in the border region		
British India / Pakistan	Afghanistan	Pashtun Tribes	British India/ Pakistan	Afghanistan
Chitral	Badakhshan		Chitrali	Kyrgyzes
Chitral	Kunar			Nuristani
Bajaur	Kunar		Salarzai	Salarzai
Bajaur	Kunar		Mamund	Mamund
Bajaur	Kunar		Mushwani	Mushwani
Bajaur	Kunar		Charmang	Charmang
Mohmand	Kunar		Mohmand	Mohmand
Khyber	Nangarhar		Shinwari	Shinwari
Kurram	Paktia		Turi	Zazai/ Sakkani
Waziristan	Paktia		Waziri	Waziri
Chaman	Kandahar		Achekzai	Achekzai
Chaman	Kandahar		Nurzai	Nurzai
Chaman	Kandahar		Kakar	Kakar
Marri Bugti	Nimruz/ Hilmand		Baloch	Baloch

Source: (C. Schetter, based partly on work by S. Z. Khan (1990: 146); A. H. Khan, 2000)

This agreement had a major influence on Afghanistan's history. The Durand Agreement gave Britain control over the crucial border passes in addition to giving British India an important section of Afghanistan. Because the Afghan economy would be severely harmed by the prospect of border closure, Britain gained significant coercive leverage over Afghan affairs by gaining control of the eastern passes. Numerous conflicts with the indigenous Afghan population resulted from increased British involvement along the eastern frontier, which also increased tribal mistrust of the British and bolstered Afghan xenophobia. According to Gregorian (1969), the Durand Line also strengthened the border tribes' authority and reputation because of the significance they added to Afghan security (Lyon, 2006).

3.2.4.2. *Pashtunistan – the demarcation of the nation-state border*

In the decades prior to the Soviet occupation, non-Pashtuns made up at least 35%—possibly as much as 45%—of Afghanistan's population, and their proportion has increased since the Pashtun refugee flow to Pakistan became so widespread. The Pashtuns in Afghanistan have periodically tried to establish some kind of political union with the Pashtuns in Pakistan in order to restore uncontested Pashtun control in Kabul, but this has been impossible as the ethnic balance has shifted. Similarly, considering that the British were responsible for the Pashtuns' division, it is not surprising that anti-British sentiment in the 1920s and 1930s led to the rise of a Pashtun nationalist movement on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line, Ghaffar Khan's "Red Shirts"⁶, which made a clear call for an independent Pashtunistan on the eve of partition. (Harrison, 2008). The NWFP's referendum included only the option of joining India or Pakistan, not independence. A section of Pashtuns boycotted the referendum, led by nationalists like Abdul Gaffar Khan⁷. However, in 1947, the NWFP Pashtuns caught between religion and ethnicity, decided to vote for Pakistan through a loya jirga (Abraham, 2013).

As Schetter (2013) claims the rise of Pashtun nationalism must be considered in relation to the Durand Line debate. Pashtuns in Pakistan and Afghanistan began to form a national Pashtun ideology after being impacted by modernization processes and beginning to transcend tribal norms.

Since 1947, the National Awami Party has reframed the Pashtunistan claim as a call for provincial autonomy within Pakistan; yet, Islamabad has remained skeptical of its Pakistani loyalty. In addition to suspicions of coordination with Afghanistan, this mistrust stems from Ghaffar Khan's open opposition to the concept of Pakistan and his active identification with the Indian National Congress in its fight against the British. In an attempt to weaken the resolve of Pashtun and Baluchi separatism at one level, the Punjabi-dominated government in Islamabad has been attempting to relocate as many Afghan refugees and other Pashtuns as possible to Baluchistan. This move is

⁶ The Red Shirts movement was close to the ideas of Ghandi and was associated with the Congress party. In contrast to the stereotype of Pashtun violence, the Red Shirts favoured non-violent resistance (Schetter, 2013).

⁷ Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as Bacha Khan (1890 – 1988), was a Pashtun independence activist against British colonial rule in India. He led the non-violent Pashtun resistance movement, Khudai Khidmatgar, which literally translates as 'servants of God'

motivated by its fear of Pashtun demands for provincial autonomy or, worse, for Pashtunistan.

According to Abraham (2013) Even after Pakistan was established, the Pashtunistan movement continued, with Afghan Pashtuns advocating for the self-determination of Pakistani Pashtuns. The Soviets supported Pashtunistan's policies throughout the Cold War in order to win over many supporters. Islam was used by Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns, notably American-sponsored Pashtun Mujahideen forces, to expel the Soviets following the Communist revolution in 1978. As Lyon (2006) notes Pakistan rejected demands for Pashtun autonomy because it was afraid of losing land and the danger an independence movement posed to its internal unity. Relationships between the two nations were strained by the Pashtunistan issue, which led to the Pakistani government closing some of its borders.

Pakistan supported Mujahideen groups and promoted extreme Islam in an attempt to suppress Pashtun claims. The disparity between Pashtun and non-Pashtun supremacy was made worse by the Afghan War of the 1980s, in which the former was instrumental in forcing the Soviets to leave.

3.2.5. Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran's policies in Afghanistan have largely been defined by historical and cultural factors, including close ties to Tajik and Hazara groups opposed to the Taliban (Nader & Laha, 2011). Historically, Afghanistan shares its 936 kilometers of western borders—including Herat, the country's second-largest city today—as an essential component of its territory, Farah and Nimruz with Iran. The Afghan-Iran border crosses through rivers and deserts (Junaid et al., 2021)

After losing the Anglo-Persian War to British soldiers, Iran was compelled to give up a direct claim to Herat (1856–1857) (Nelson, 1976).

Farsi, the official language of Iran, is also commonly spoken in Afghanistan under the name Dari. Dari is regarded by many Afghans as the language of academia and high culture. Ethnic Tajiks and Hazaras speak Dari/Farsi, which is the predominant language in western, northern, and central Afghanistan, respectively (Nader & Laha, 2011).

Iran shares the same religion with many of its neighbors in Afghanistan. With a population of 10–20%, the Hazaras are primarily Shi'a and have strong ties to the Iranian religious establishment. Most Afghans, including Tajiks and Pashtuns, are Sunni Muslims, while 90% of Iranians practice Shi'a Islam. Although the two nations have the same history, culture, and language, their religious differences—Iran is primarily Shia, while Afghanistan is Sunni—have affected their interactions (Junaid et al., 2021). In Iran, the perception of the persecution of Afghan Shias (mainly the Hazara population) by the Sunni majority was very strong (Goor & Leeuwen, 2000).

An American-supporting regime led by King Raza Shah Pehlevi ruled Iran before 1979. King's administration's principal priority was to prevent communism from spreading over the area. But Iran's main regional goals were put in endangered when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and imposed a communist regime there. The Soviet invasion was viewed as a danger to Iran's stability by Ayatollah Khomeini's government following the Iranian revolution. However, Iran was unable to assist the Afghan Mujahedeen during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88). Mujahedeen was aided by America, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan in their fight against the Soviet Union (Dr. Ghulam Mustafa et al., 2020). As Goor and Leeuwen (2000), state Iran's primary objective in Afghanistan is to increase Shia party representation, causing tensions with Pakistan and the Mujahideen groups. In 1988, Iran united most Afghan Shia parties into the Wahdat, aiming to gain access to Central Asia's Persian-speaking populations and counter Saudi Arabia's regional power. However, Iran's involvement in the Afghan conflict remained low until the end of its war with Iraq and the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989. As Mustafa and Junaid (2020) note Iran viewed the Taliban's government as a threat to its stability and influence in the South and Central Asian region. Despite sharing borders with Turkmenistan and cultural ties with other Central Asian states, Iran struggled to reach out to these states due to the Taliban's control in Afghanistan, aided by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. This situation posed a significant concern for Iran.

Iran first supported the Najibullah government in Afghanistan following the Soviet exit in 1989 in order to prevent a Sunni takeover. However, Iran turned its attention to aiding Shia groups in order to defeat the Taliban following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and their ascent. Iran started giving more organizations, including the Northern Alliance, financial and military support. Iran was the main provider of

weapons to organizations battling the Taliban by 1995, and it still does. Many Taliban officials consider the Iranian administration and Afghan Shia to be outlaws of Islam, and Iran's animosity for the Taliban is intense and complementary.

One of the main causes of bilateral difficulties during the Taliban's rule was these religious divides. The Taliban adhere to a more radical and intolerant branch of the Deobandi school of Islam, which originated in India, whereas the Tajiks practice a more moderate type of Sunni Islam. Iran's cultural and religious ties to the Afghan people have significantly influenced its political and military support for Afghan organizations. Despite not explicitly addressing the Afghan resistance, Iran provided significant support to Tajik and Afghan mujahideen commanders during their conflict with the Soviet Union. Additionally, Iran supported the Tajik-led Northern Alliance in their conflict with the Taliban. However, Iran's backing of the Taliban demonstrates that cultural, religious, and ideological factors also influence its actions in Afghanistan.

3.2.6. Saudi Arabia

Afghanistan has been included in the list of nations that have had positive relations with Saudi Arabia since its establishment, even though these relations have occasionally altered due to political changes. This happened after Saudi Arabia emerged as a powerful nation on the global and regional political and economic scene. Given Afghanistan's geographic location in the middle of Asia, its status as a global transit hub, and its proximity to both security threats and opportunities, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy toward Afghanistan positions it as one of the most effective and cooperative countries in Central Asia (Yousufi, 2020).

Saudi Arabia, a US partner, attempted to advance its interpretation of Sunni Wahabi Islam during the Soviet-Mujahideen conflict in addition to opposing communism. Saudi Arabia also made an effort to stop Iran, a Shia opponent, from moving forward. Saudi Arabia thus supported the Pakistani strategy and permitted the ISI to direct its aid towards the Mujahideen, largely ignoring Pakistan's goals in the conflict (Goor & Leeuwen, 2000).

Rabush (2021) points out two main reasons for intervening in the Afghan conflict, he believes that already in the 1970s Saudi Arabia in the region of the Middle East played the role of leader in the protection and spread of Islam, and one of the primary

motives for Saudi Arabia's intervention in the Afghan conflict was its Islamic beliefs. There were additionally, geopolitical reasons to be interested in the issues in Afghanistan. For instance, at the same time, Saudi Arabia actively participated in the Yemeni crisis and closely monitored the Arab-Israeli conflict. Saudi Arabia was concerned about a possible "turning point" in the Middle East region and changes in power balance, possibly facilitated by Afghanistan after the 1978 Revolution. This geopolitical shift did not suit Saudi Arabia, and it was the second reason for the Saudi monarchy's engagement in the Afghan armed conflict since the late 1970s, after religious reasons.

Only three nations recognized the Taliban government, including Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's primary motivation for backing the Taliban is geopolitical, aside from a slight kinship with its conception of Islam. This sponsorship exemplifies Saudi Arabia's strategy of keeping Iran from expanding its influence while also fostering long-term collaboration with Pakistan. Additionally, there are a number of pipeline ideas in the region that would transport oil via Afghanistan, and some Saudi individuals and corporations are interested in them (Goor & Leeuwen, 2000).

3.2.7. The Soviet Union, Russia, and the Central Asian Republics

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. After Amin was killed by Soviet Special Forces, Babrak Karmal, the leader of Parcham, was appointed as the new Afghan leader. At first, the Soviet Union intended to provide military backing for three years so that the "moderate" Karmal government could fortify the Afghan national army, win over local support, and put an end to the conflict. But rather than using moderate governance to bring the nation to peace, the Soviet invasion increased the size and breadth of the struggle both within and outside, bringing forth a new dimension to the Afghan insurgency (Lyon, 2006).

Afghanistan, a buffer state in Asia, gained its role in the second half of the last century after British colonial power discovered Russian imperial interests in the mountainous region. Afghanistan was a neutral zone with an inclination towards British authorities in India. After the British Empire's demise, the USA partially stepped in, and the USSR emerged as a multinational, ideological state and military superpower. The Soviet Union's geographical proximity and ideological influence led to a shift in Afghanistan's traditional orientation to the south-east (Oliphant, n.d.).

The goal of the Soviet Union's (and later Russia's) policy in Afghanistan after its withdrawal was to stabilize the nation under a non-Islamist regime. Protecting political stability in its Central Asian republics was the goal of this program. Moscow thought that by providing Najibullah with more aid, the Mujahideen would grow weary and allow for discussions. Russia was essential in providing supplies to the northern parties, particularly Masoud's forces, following the fall of the Soviet Union and the Taliban's rise to power. Russia attempted to stop Pakistan from assuming control in the area because it still saw the now-independent former Soviet republics as part of its sphere of influence. Furthermore, Moscow's Afghanistan strategy continued to be motivated by concerns about Muslim extremism in Central Asia (Goor & Leeuwen, 2000).

According to Lyon The Afghan conflict was made international by the Soviet invasion. Afghanistan turned become a Cold War battlefield between the US and the USSR, giving rise to a new "Great Game." The US had serious concerns about Soviet consolidation of land close to the Persian Gulf and its crucial oil supplies, and it denounced the Afghan invasion as Soviet expansionism.

3.2.8. The United States of America

Over the course of the 19th-century rivalry between the Russian Tsarist and British Empire, as well as the Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union, Afghanistan's strategic location has made it a regional area. Since the US became aware of Afghanistan on September 11, this specific geographic location has also been regarded as the only great power in the globe throughout the current century (Khurami, 2023) . The US-Afghan relationship can be divided into six distinct time periods, which are as follows:

- Prior to the conflict, the United States had no interest in Afghanistan.
- Normal relations during the Cold War.
- The Red Army's military conquest of Afghanistan.US assistance to Mujahidin.
- The Taliban's emergence and a string of wars: the US's political and psychological withdrawal from the Afghanistan dilemma.
- The fight against terrorism: an effort to establish strategic partnerships following the events of September 11, 2001

The Middle East was important to America because of its Islamic ideology and the spread of Islamic communities there, which gave the country the background it needed to focus all of its efforts on identifying potential enemies and defending the views of the American and Western public. Given its geopolitical location and proximity to the Middle East, Afghanistan was considered a tool to accomplish this objective. Usama bin Laden founded the ALQAEDA between 1981 and 1988 with the help of 60 billion dollars in American assistance for Afghan soldiers (Khurami, 2023). On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States. ALQADE, which was backed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, was charged of having ties to the US. Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, led the terrorist organization from Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan, in the late 1980s, to Sudan in 1991, and back to Afghanistan in the mid-1990s. The UN action comes after al-Qaeda's period of dominance. Al-Qaeda uses the Taliban, who emerged from the ashes of the post-Soviet Afghan civil war, as their sanctuary for their activities (*Timeline*, n.d.). In addition to changing global policy, this incident had a considerable impact on Afghanistan's future.

America declared on October 1, 2001, that it will assist Afghanistan in this political stage and its employment program, which is curated by the United States. Following the September 11 attacks, the Bush Administration chose to use force to topple the Taliban after it refused to extradite Bin Laden as requested by the United States. President Bush declared that a friendly regime in Kabul was necessary to allow American forces to conduct a search for Al Qaeda members there and outlined a policy that likened those who nurture terrorists to terrorists themselves (Katzman & Thomas, 2017).

During the Cold War, the United States realized it had to back the Mujahideen in its fight against a communist regime, particularly after it "lost" Iran as a regional ally. Washington provided funding for about half of the Mujahideen's armaments supply, totaling about \$2 billion throughout the course of the 1980s (Weinbaum, 1991). The Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate (ISI) of Pakistan and the CIA collaborated to give the mujahedin with U.S. weapons (Katzman & Thomas, 2017.p.2).

Following the Taliban and its allies' expulsion, the US-led coalition stayed in Afghanistan and established the United Nations-approved International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with the intention of establishing a new democratic

government that would keep the Taliban from regaining power (“War in Afghanistan (2001–2021),” 2024).

NATO commanders started preparing an exit strategy from Afghanistan after Osama bin Laden was killed in May 2011 as a result of a US covert operation in neighboring Pakistan.[81][82] NATO formally halted ISAF combat operations in Afghanistan on December 28, 2014, and gave the Afghan government full security authority. Coalition forces (and separately, the Ashraf Ghani-led Afghan government) used diplomacy to end the war after failing to defeat the Taliban militarily. The United States and Taliban reached an agreement in February 2020 as a result of these efforts, which called for the removal of all US forces from Afghanistan by 2021.

3.3. Ethnic Group’s Influence on Afghan Politics

The Afghan state has historically been based on tribal and ethnic groups, with the capital being Kandahar, where only Pashtuns were present. These tribal confederations were divided into numerous tribes, which were further divided into sub-tribes. Despite this, some Pashtun tribes still engage in political competition, such as the Barakzai and Palalzai tribes. Each district, province, and region maintains its own tribal politics (Amiri, 2016).

According to Amiri (2016) When the capital of the Afghan state moved to Kabul, politics came to be influenced by ethnic considerations as groups from all over Afghanistan were present in Kabul and strove to shape governance. Ethnicity eventually emerged as one of the fundamental factors of Afghan politics.

The 1978 coup further increased the prevalence of ethnic politics. During the ensuing ten years of conflict, national cohesiveness eroded. When the mujahideen took control in 1992, this grew much more. Afghan nationalism evolved into ethnic nationalism over the next two years. The commanders of the mujahideen frequently used the defense of their own ethnic group or local populations as justification for their operations. At the time, a local citizen claimed that.

From Bonn to the present, the principal participating groups that were regarded as representatives of the main ethnic, political, and regional groups shared the important positions of government in the Interim and Transitional Administrations. In certain ways, the trend was repeated in the governments that followed. Karzai won the

2004 elections with 55.4% of the vote, while the Pashtun regions provided the majority of his support (Ibrahimi, 2023). The next most popular candidate, Panjshir-based Tajik politician Yonus Qanuni, received 16.3% of the vote, with the majority of his supporters being from Tajik-dominated regions. Similarly, Dostum (10.0%) and Mohammad Mohaqiq (11.7%) ranked third and fourth, respectively, after receiving the majority of the votes from the Uzbek and Hazara groups. In the presidential elections of 2009, 2014, and 2019, the trend somewhat recurred, with significant deception, poor management, and growing insecurity again overshadowing voting.

3.3.1. Ethnic Group's Influence on Afghan Politics in The Period of Mujahideen (1992-1996)

There are two major groups of Mujaheds who fought the Soviet invasion. These groupings include Iranian Afghan Mujaheds who belong to the Shiite sect (eight parties) and Afghan Mujaheds who are Sunni (seven parties) in Pakistan. These groups came together following the Soviet invasion and fought against the communist government and Soviet rule. With Pakistan's assistance and support, Mujaheds created the first Afghan state on Pakistani territory following the fall of the communist administration in 1988.

To establish a new administration, Pakistan's Tajik and Pashtun communities established a Grand Council. The president of Afghanistan took charge of this council. The Grand Council has decided that Mujaheds will form the Afghan government (Kartal, 2020). There was no representation of other ethnic groups, including Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Turks, in either this cabinet or the second one that the Mujaheds formed. Uzbeks were fighting for the recognition of the Uzbek language as an official language during this time, while Hazaras were fighting for some political and religious rights.

As a result, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras fought on four different fronts in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The nation entered the civil war as a result of this circumstance. As Mujaheds fought one another, the Taliban, a new political organization, took control.

3.3.2. Ethnic Group's Influence on Afghan Politics in The Period of Taliban (1996-2001)

The Taliban, who came to power with the intention of creating a Pashtun state in Afghanistan, quickly took over the whole country and began fighting other Mujahed organizations. The Taliban used force, threats, and intimidation to keep non-Pashtun political parties and ethnic groups out of politics and administration. The Taliban's growth in the area was accelerated since Rabbani's government was unable to rely on Pashtun support. The Taliban declared Hazaras to be unbelievers and launched a war against them, namely those who adhered to the Shia faith. The majority of Hazaras were either slain or exiled during this time. But After four years in power, the Taliban were overthrown in 2001 with the help of NATO.

3.3.3. Ethnic Group's Influence on Afghan Politics in The Period of Interim Government (2001-2004)

As far as the role of ethnicity in the post-Taliban era is concerned, ethnicity plays a significant role in political institutions, policy making, and exclusively in elections. Post-Taliban governance and politics are organized by ethnicity (Qeyam, 2012).

The 9/11 terror attacks and U.S. military action against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban prompted a search for a government to replace them. A conference in Bonn in December 2001 established post-Taliban Afghanistan, aiming to establish political processes and governance based on Islam, democracy, pluralism, and social justice (Jahnson, 2006). The four major Afghan factions of government assembled at the Bonn conference in 2001 reached a "grand bargain" that led to the creation of the post-2001 Afghan state.

The eight Shia and seven Sunni political-military jihadi factions (often referred to as tanzims) that first emerged in the 1980s were represented by these organizations (Sharan & Bose, 2016). The Bonn Agreement established the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) in December 2001, a six-month interim government based on gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic, and representative government. Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun from Kandahar province, was elected as its chairman, following UN-sponsored talks in Bonn (Jahnson, 2006). Due to Tajik's support for Hamid Karzai's election at the Bonn conference, Tajiks gained certain political rights during this time, and they were elected vice president for the first time (Kartal, 2020).

Karzai was chosen as the temporary administration's president due to a number of positive aspects that the US saw in his appointment. He belonged to the Pashtun ethnic group, which always maintained dominion. Second, he had no close connections to either the influential mujahedin factions or any of the political exile factions. He therefore had the ability to bring people together amid Afghanistan's infamously polarizing political environment. He was also supposedly cooperative and greatly dependent on his outside patrons as a result of this circumstance. Third, he had easy cross-cultural connection with Washington because he had lived in the US for a long time (Suhrke, 2009).

Ethnicity became a crucial component of politics and communal involvement in the post-Bonn era when elites utilized it to organize their social and political environments or map their social areas (Sahar & Sahar, 2021).

Despite past discrimination against certain ethnic groups being abandoned in the Karzai government, the centralized system failed to balance power sharing and deliver governance at the sub-national level, and ethnic divisions persist post-conflict. The cabinet of the Afghan government consisted of thirty members, including 11 Pashtuns, eight Tajiks, five Shi'a Hazara, and three Uzbeks. The cabinet was elected by over 1,500 delegates to the emergency loya jirga, a deliberative meeting of tribal notables, in June 2002. Karzai was chosen as transitional president until the national elections in June 2004 (Qeyam, 2012). Pashtuns were unhappy with the decision to give up three key ministries to non-Pashtun groups (Yunus Qanooni was selected as Interior Minister, General Mohammad Fahim received the Defense Ministry, and Dr Abdullah Abdullah was selected as Foreign Secretary), expecting this imbalance to be corrected in the Emergency Loya Jirga. Their grievances were exacerbated by the growing influence of non-Pashtun armed factions during the interim administration. Pashtun membership increased from the eleven members in the Interim Administration to sixteen members while the remaining ethnic groups stayed constant relative to their total representation in the Transition Administration (Jahnson, 2006). This cabinet's bias in favor of Pashtuns deepened the barrier between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns.

Regarding the elections and Electoral system in Afghanistan, which is a majoritarian voting system as mentioned in Article sixty-one of Afghan constitution⁸, many scholars claim that this system does not solve the ethnic problem of Afghanistan. For instance, a Pashtun candidate may use ethnic identity manipulation to win elections in a multiethnic nation like Afghanistan (Qeyam, 2012). There were more challenges in the way of non-Pashtun candidates under the presidential electoral system. Because their ethnic groups were limited in number and they had to reach out to other ethnic groups, it was difficult for non-Pashtun candidates to win the election. But, since a Pashtun candidate would only need to appeal to one other ethnic group for support in order to win, a Pashtun candidate had a higher chance of winning than a non-Pashtun candidate, who would need to appeal to multiple ethnic groups. Pashtun Karzai reached out to other groups by designating two vice presidents for Tajik and Hazara as his running candidates. Afghanistan's parliamentary electoral system is a Single Non-Transferrable Vote (SNTV) system. The majority of academics believe that in a nation as deeply divided as Afghanistan, this system is inappropriate (Jahnson, 2006). Individual candidates, not political parties, are chosen by voters. Ethnic groupings have been recognized as political parties by both candidates and voters as a result of the highly politicized elections. Since there are many different ethnic groups in the nation, the primary cause of the ethnicization of elections is that they result in losers.

Despite this Muslim or non-Muslim societies from different ethnic groups in Afghanistan in this period gained a recognizance in politics according to their population.

3.3.4. Ethnic Group's Influence on Afghan Politics in The Period of Hamid Karzai (2004-2014)

The challenges of running such a nation are enormous. Following centuries of dormant ethnic tension and nearly two decades of ethnic conflict, the capacity to establish a unified government is stifled. However, democracy was supposed to be the solution, according to the new government. Logic dictated that in a nation without an

⁸ "The President is elected by receiving more than 50% of the votes. If none of the candidates succeeds to receive more than 50% of the votes in the first round, a run-off election shall be held within two weeks" (Government of Afghanistan, The Constitution of Afghanistan 2004).

ethnic majority, a majority would need to be won by votes from all ethnic groups (Dubow, 2009). According to Noorzad, There were customs within the political structure that provided ethnicity a prominent part throughout Hamid Karzai's reign because of the decentralized system and the focus on minimizing the significance of ethnicity in power relations. People have a natural tendency to start and join ethnic organizations, movements, and parties after witnessing the government and realizing that they are being treated more as members of an ethnic group than as individuals. The public's perception during Mr. Karzai's administration was that a person must be successful in reaching out to ethnic groups. There is no question that people's attraction for ethnic organizations will eventually influence their propensity for ethnicity.

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Table 5 examines the statistics of police and national army personnel and soldiers in Afghanistan, broken down by the ethnic groups of Tajiks and Pashtuns. This clearly demonstrates the ethnic dominance of these two groups within these forces. In fact, Table 5 illustrates the complexity of Afghanistan's ethnic and demographic composition, as well as the challenge of forging a unified national identity within one of the most important pillars of a nation-state: the military.

3.3.5. Ethnic Group's Influence on Afghan Politics in The Period of Ashraf Ghani (2014-2020)

After the 2014 elections and the announcement of the presidential results by the Independent Election Commission, disagreements arose among the presidential candidates, leading to a potential ethnic conflict and the formation of a parallel government. To prevent this, the US Secretary of State intervened and proposed the formation of a National Unity Government.

In the leadership of the Afghan National Unity Government formed after the tense 2014 elections, seven individuals representing various ethnic groups were placed at the top of the political structure:

- Mohammad Ashraf Ghani (President) - Afghan ethnicity
- Abdul Rashid Dostum (First Vice President) - Uzbek ethnicity
- Mohammad Sarwar Danish (Second Vice President) - Hazara ethnicity
- Abdullah Abdullah (Chief Executive Officer) - Tajik ethnicity
- Mohammad Khan (First Deputy) - Pashtun ethnicity
- Mohammad Mohaqeq (Second Deputy) - Hazara ethnicity
- Ahmad Zia Massoud (Representative of the President for Reforms and Governance) - Tajik ethnicity

Additionally, the two political groups in the government divided power at lower levels (cabinet, provinces, embassies) with American mediation to reflect the country's ethnic realities and ensure adequate representation of Afghanistan's ethnic composition in the political structure. > Let me know if you would like any further clarification or have other questions

Table 5. Statistics of the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army based on Ethnicity, early 2011.

Forces	Pashtun		Tajik		Hazara		Uzbek		Other Ethnicities	
Force type	National Police %	Army Personnel %	National Police %	Army Personnel %	National Police %	Army Personnel %	National Police %	Army Personnel %	National Police %	Army Personnel %
Administrative Cadre	41	42	47	41	4	8	4	3	3	5
Non-Commissioned Officers	31	51	56	36	6	8	3	4	4	
Soldiers	47	43	36	29	4	12	9	9	7	7
Total Force	43	45	42	32	5	10	7	7	6	5
Average	40	45	45	34	5	10	6	6	5	5

Source: (Journal of the Faculty of Law and Political Science of Kabul University)

CHAPTER FOUR

INFLUENCE OF ETHNIC GROUPS ON NATION BUILDING

4.1. State-Building Process in Contemporary Afghanistan

Afghanistan's current state-building process is complex and multifaceted, shaped by internal sociopolitical dynamics, foreign involvement, and decades of conflict. Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, efforts have been made to restore institutions, address governance issues, and establish a sustainable political system. However, significant challenges remain, including ongoing violence, corruption, and a lack of a unified national identity. The trajectory of state-building in Afghanistan has been heavily influenced by its tumultuous political history. Local governance has traditionally been dominated by tribal affiliations, and the country has experienced shifts between centralized and decentralized systems. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 laid the groundwork for a democratic state in Afghanistan and served as a roadmap following the Taliban's regime. This led to the convening of a constitutional Loya Jirga, the establishment of an interim government, and the drafting of the 2004 constitution, which emphasized a strong centralized presidential system (Barfield, 2012).

While these foundational initiatives aimed to create a cohesive administrative framework, they often clashed with Afghanistan's deeply rooted tribal and ethnic divisions. The concentration of power in Kabul marginalized many rural areas, undermining the government's legitimacy and inclusivity. Scholars argue that these conflicts highlight the limitations of externally driven state-building efforts that prioritize Western governance models over locally relevant approaches.

The complexities of foreign engagement with fragile governments are highlighted by the successes and failures of global interventions in Afghanistan's state-building efforts. While military support and foreign aid undeniably contributed to several key developments, the overall situation is more nuanced (SIGAR, 2021). The influx of foreign assistance, exceeding \$145 billion from 2002 to 2020, significantly impacted the country's developmental landscape. Major infrastructure projects, such as schools, hospitals, and roads, were completed, enhancing access to healthcare, education, and connectivity (SIGAR, 2021). Notably, girls' enrollment in elementary schools saw a

remarkable increase during this period, marking progress in gender inclusion in education.

Moreover, civil society flourished in ways that were unimaginable during the Taliban's rule in the 1990s. The rise of NGOs, media outlets, and advocacy groups fostered grassroots activism and public discourse (Gopal, 2014). These organizations played a crucial role in amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, promoting women's rights, and supporting democratic governance. However, despite these achievements, Afghanistan's long-term sustainability was threatened by the unintended dependency created by its reliance on international aid. With many projects led by international organizations and contractors, a significant portion of the aid bypassed the Afghan government. This approach resulted in the emergence of a "shadow state," where foreign entities wielded excessive influence, often justified by concerns over corruption within Afghan institutions (Goodhand & Sedra, 2013). This dynamic not only marginalized Afghan institutions but also hindered their ability to develop the necessary mechanisms and skills for effective governance.

To create a self-sufficient defense system, billions of dollars were poured into Afghanistan's security sector, specifically the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). However, these institutions were plagued by widespread corruption, which significantly undermined their effectiveness (Rubins, 2013). Issues like "ghost soldiers" on the payroll—nonexistent employees whose salaries were siphoned off by officials—along with mismanagement of resources and embezzlement, exemplified the corruption. These issues not only drained essential funds but also harmed the morale and trust of legitimate personnel. Despite extensive training, professionalism and discipline were not adequately instilled. Many recruits entered the military with minimal technological skills or education, rendering them ill-equipped to manage complex systems or execute modern combat strategies.

This skills gap further hindered their ability to operate independently, increasing their dependence on external support. The situation was exacerbated by an overreliance on outside assistance for critical airpower, logistics, and intelligence, which became unsustainable as NATO and American forces began to withdraw (Rubins, 2013). The vulnerabilities of Afghanistan's security apparatus were laid bare in the absence of this essential support.

The ANA's rapid collapse in 2021, during the Taliban's swift advance, starkly illustrated these flaws. Many soldiers abandoned their posts or surrendered with little resistance, disheartened by ineffective leadership and a lack of resources, allowing the Taliban to seize power with alarming speed. This breakdown highlighted the fragile foundation of a security sector built externally, lacking the robust internal processes, sustainable infrastructure, and local governance necessary for resilience. It underscored the failure of international efforts to prioritize long-term capacity building over immediate operational goals.

4.2. Methods of Nation-Building in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's multifaceted socio-political circumstances, heritage, and the impact of both internal and foreign players have influenced the country's nation-building strategies. A variety of nation-building strategies have been used throughout the years, from foreign interventions and cultural integration to institutional development and governance changes. Any method and attempts to balance the nation's various ethnic and linguistic makeup while tackling the issues of political fragmentation and conflict, reflecting the interaction of regional customs and international tactics.

4.2.1. Institutional Development and Governance Reforms

The establishment and reform of political institutions aimed at creating a centralized and functional state have been crucial to Afghanistan's nation-building efforts. The Bonn Agreement laid the groundwork for rebuilding the Afghan state following the fall of the Taliban government in 2001. By setting up an interim authority and later institutionalizing the 2004 Constitution, this agreement sought to establish a democratic government. The Constitution emphasized a unitary presidential system, granting significant power to the central government in Kabul (Rubin, 2013). Despite facing numerous challenges, this approach aimed to unify the nation under a single administrative framework. However, efforts to centralize power often conflicted with Afghanistan's historical preference for decentralized tribal governance. The central authority's legitimacy was undermined by its failure to effectively represent or address the needs of rural and remote populations. Furthermore, the push for a strong state capable of fostering national unity was hindered by corruption and a lack of institutional capacity, which diminished the effectiveness of governance reforms (Barfield, 2012). The aim of developing and

reforming the country's political institutions post-2001 was to create a framework for a modern, centralized government that could promote stability and national unity. These efforts were driven by the belief that Afghanistan's persistent issues of ethnic division, fragmentation, and disjointed governance could be effectively addressed by a robust central government. Nevertheless, significant challenges to institutional development and governance reforms shaped the trajectory and outcomes of these initiatives.

A significant turning point in Afghanistan's state-building journey was the signing of the Bonn Agreement in December 2001 (Chesterman, 2004). Various Afghan factions, excluding the Taliban, convened under the United Nations' guidance to discuss the establishment of a new political framework. The aim was to ensure a transition from years of conflict to a representative and stable governance system. Besides laying out a roadmap for democratic governance that included national elections, the drafting of a new constitution, and the restoration of state functions, the agreement also established an interim government led by Hamid Karzai.

Key transitional organizations, such as the Afghan Transitional Authority, were formed under the Bonn Agreement to oversee the interim government. While the agreement was commended for initiating a planned transition, it faced criticism for excluding significant groups, including the Taliban and various tribal leaders from rural areas. This exclusion left many factions feeling disconnected from the new political framework, sowing the seeds for future unrest and rebellion (Rubin, 2013).

Meanwhile, another crucial aspect of Afghanistan's governance transformation was the ratification of the 2004 Constitution. Drafted with international assistance and approved by a Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly), the constitution established Afghanistan as an Islamic republic with a strong presidential system (Chesterman, 2004). Among the president's numerous powers was the authority to appoint ministers, provincial governors, and other key officials. This centralized governance model aimed to create a cohesive state capable of effectively managing domestic challenges. However, the concentration of power yielded mixed outcomes. While it provided a seemingly unified governmental structure, it often alienated Afghanistan's traditionally diverse and dispersed population. In particular, provincial leaders felt sidelined by a system that centralized decision-making in Kabul, especially in ethnically diverse regions.

This disconnect undermined the state's legitimacy and heightened tensions between the national government and local communities (Barfield, 2012).

The key challenge was addressing the consequences of tribal and ethnic conflicts, which stood as one of the most urgent issues in Afghanistan's government reform. For a long time, warlords, informal groups, and local tribal leaders have dominated Afghanistan's fragmented government institutions. Deeply rooted local customs often conflicted with efforts to replace them with centralized organizations. This governmental void was further widened and worsened by the fact that the appointed district and provincial governors in the capital typically lacked the trust and backing of the general population. Meanwhile, many people were expressing frustration over long-standing corruption, which posed a significant barrier to government reform. The frequent mismanagement or misallocation of resources by politicians allowed the influx of foreign aid to become a breeding ground for rent-seeking behavior. During this period, Afghanistan was frequently cited as one of the most corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International. This widespread corruption not only eroded public trust but also diminished the effectiveness of government institutions, hampering their ability to deliver essential services (SIGAR, 2021).

Another critical element of the governance changes post-2001 was the reconstruction of the legislative and judicial branches. After years of conflict, efforts were made to rebuild the court system with the goal of promoting justice and the rule of law. The Supreme Court played a key role in guiding the reconstruction of courts and the appointment of judges. However, the legal system faced several challenges, including a shortage of skilled personnel, insufficient funding, and interference from powerful domestic actors.

At the same time, a bicameral National Assembly was established to ensure political representation and provide oversight of the executive branch. The Meshrano Jirga (Upper House) and Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) served as venues for legislative debate, although they frequently faced political deadlock and inefficiency. Rather than being a space for fostering national consensus, the assembly was criticized for being dominated by various tribal factions (Goodhand, 2004). The changes in Afghanistan's governance and institutional development yielded mixed results. On the positive side, the reforms laid the groundwork for a democratic government that included official

institutions, elections, and a constitution. These efforts allowed Afghanistan to reconnect with the global community, bringing a degree of political stability and international recognition. However, the reforms did not lead to sustainable governance. Many local populations felt marginalized due to the concentration of power, and government institutions were plagued by corruption and ineptitude. The lack of inclusivity in the political process facilitated the resurgence of insurgent groups like the Taliban, further eroding the government's legitimacy. The rapid collapse of the Afghan government in 2021 highlighted these governance failures, revealing the limitations of state-building initiatives imposed from outside.

4.2.2. Security Sector Reforms and Military Development

One of the key components of Afghanistan's nation-building efforts after 2001 was the reform of the security sector, led by the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). A strong and professional security framework was seen as essential for establishing stability, enabling the Afghan state to exert control over its territory, enforce the rule of law, and combat ongoing insurgencies. This was the rationale behind these reforms. However, the outcomes of these initiatives revealed persistent issues that ultimately undermined their effectiveness, despite significant financial and logistical support from international partners. The Afghan National Army (ANA) was created as the cornerstone of the country's national defense to address internal uprisings and safeguard against external threats. By 2020, the ANA had over 180,000 personnel, bolstered by extensive foreign funding and training programs. Between 2002 and 2021, NATO and the US invested more than \$88 billion in Afghanistan's security forces, playing a crucial role in the ANA's development (SIGAR, 2021). The aim of these training initiatives was to cultivate a force capable of protecting critical infrastructure, conducting counterinsurgency operations, and maintaining territorial integrity.

Despite the substantial investments, the ANA faced numerous challenges. Corruption plagued military leadership and the Ministry of Defense. The issue of "ghost soldiers" was particularly problematic, allowing corrupt officials to embezzle funds meant for resources and salaries by including fictitious personnel on payrolls. This not only squandered vital resources but also harmed the ANA's operational effectiveness and morale. Additionally, ethnic divisions complicated the ANA's

growth. The presence of various ethnic groups in Afghanistan necessitated a careful approach to recruitment and promotion to ensure fair representation for Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, among others.

However, factionalism and favoritism often skewed the organization of units, leading to mistrust and inefficiency within the force. For example, the army's ability to function as a cohesive national institution was weakened because some units led by specific ethnic groups were less willing to carry out effective operations in areas governed by other communities (Gopal, 2014). Another major issue was the ANA's heavy dependence on external support. Despite significant investments in advanced weapons, transportation, and communication systems, the ANA struggled with the technical expertise and logistical capabilities needed to operate and maintain these resources independently. The ANA was ill-equipped to operate on its own due to its reliance on NATO and the United States for air support, intelligence, and tactical planning; this vulnerability became evident with the U.S. withdrawal in 2021.

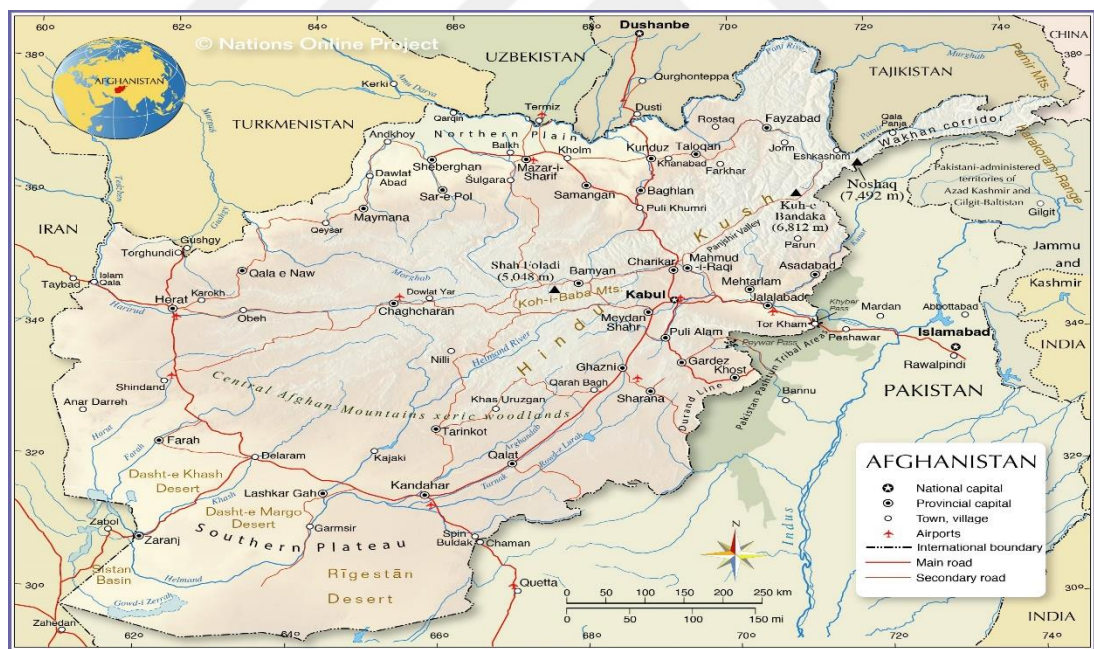


Figure 6. Political Map of Afghanistan

Source: (Afghanistan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online)

Afghanistan's international boundaries, rivers, lakes, top mountains, significant border crossings, administrative capitals, key cities, vital roadways, and major airports are all depicted on the map, along with Afghanistan and the neighboring nations.

4.2.3. Afghan National Police (ANP): A Struggle with Identity & Duties

The Afghan National Police (ANP) was established as a civilian enforcement agency to maintain the rule of law, combat crime, and support counterterrorism efforts. The ANP faced a unique challenge in balancing its role as a paramilitary force in conflict zones with that of a traditional police service. By 2020, with assistance from various international workshops and mentorship initiatives like the NATO Training Mission and the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, the ANP grew to nearly 120,000 members (SIGAR, 2021). However, inadequate training remained a significant issue. Many new recruits joined the force with little to no literacy or formal education, making it difficult for them to grasp modern policing techniques and handle advanced equipment. To meet recruitment targets, training programs were often rushed, prioritizing numbers over the quality of training. As a result, the ANP struggled to establish itself as a competent and professional organization. International partners, particularly the United States and NATO, played a crucial role in developing the country's security forces, investing substantial resources in facilities, equipment, and training for both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the ANP. Initiatives like NATO's Resolute Support Mission aimed to enhance the organizational capacity of Afghanistan's security sector, focusing on training senior military and law enforcement leaders in operational management and strategic analysis (SIGAR, 2021).

These initiatives often faced challenges due to tight deadlines and a lack of understanding of the local context. Foreign commanders frequently prioritized Western military strategies that did not align with Afghanistan's unique operational environment and sociopolitical conditions. Additionally, local leaders and communities were often excluded from the top-down efforts to build security institutions, leading to a disconnect between the security forces and the very people they were meant to safeguard (Rubin, 2013).

The deficiencies of the country's military forces became glaringly apparent during the Taliban's rapid advance in 2021. The withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops exposed the fundamental weaknesses of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), particularly their heavy reliance on external support. Afghan soldiers struggled to stop the Taliban's momentum without American air power and logistical backing. Years of corruption and mismanagement had already

demoralized police and military personnel, leading many to abandon their posts or surrender without resistance, which further diminished morale. The Taliban's strategy of exploiting ethnic and tribal divisions, along with negotiating local surrenders, intensified the breakdown of Afghan security forces. By August 2021, Kabul fell to the Taliban, marking the collapse of the Afghan government and the failure of two decades of efforts.

4.2.4. Economic Reconstruction and Development

To stabilize the nation, foster growth, and lay the foundation for sustainable governance, economic rebuilding has been a vital aspect of nation-building in Afghanistan. Following the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, a significant amount of foreign aid was directed towards infrastructure development, the reconstruction of Afghanistan's war-torn economy, and the revitalization of key sectors such as healthcare, education, and agriculture. However, despite these efforts, economic recovery faced considerable challenges that ultimately hindered its long-term sustainability. The country's infrastructure had been devastated by years of conflict, making international assistance crucial for its rebuilding. Projects focused on constructing roads, healthcare facilities, and irrigation systems were essential for restoring basic services and promoting economic growth. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) backed the Afghanistan Infrastructure and Rehabilitation Program, which aimed to restore vital transportation links connecting rural and urban areas. By 2019, approximately 17,000 kilometers of roads had been built or repaired to facilitate trade and travel (SIGAR, 2019). Similarly, school enrollments surged due to educational initiatives. In 2001, fewer than 1 million children were enrolled in schools; by 2020, that number had risen to nearly 9.5 million. Additionally, healthcare services expanded, and during the first decade of reconstruction, maternal and child mortality rates saw significant improvements (World Bank, 2020). These achievements highlighted how targeted foreign assistance can effectively address critical development gaps.

Despite these advances, progress was inconsistent and often unsustainable. Many infrastructure projects suffered from inadequate implementation and maintenance, leading to significant failures. Development initiatives were plagued by corruption and mismanagement, with funds frequently misused or wasted. For example, inspections

of USAID-supported projects revealed that while clinics and schools were built, they often failed to serve their purpose due to a lack of necessary materials, teachers, or healthcare staff (SIGAR, 2021).

4.2.4.1. Community-Based Development

The National Solidarity Program (NSP) was a significant initiative aimed at empowering local communities and fostering regional development. Launched in 2003 with support from the World Bank and other financial backers, the NSP provided block grants to development organizations in villages and remote areas, enabling them to implement projects chosen by the community. These projects addressed local needs and promoted participatory governance, focusing on building infrastructure such as roads, schools, and wells. With nearly 35,000 villages impacted and millions of individuals benefiting, many regarded the NSP as one of Afghanistan's most successful development efforts (Beath, Christia & Enikolopov, 2013). It demonstrated that community-led approaches could enhance a sense of ownership and accountability while minimizing fraud and bureaucratic delays. However, the program's sustainability relied heavily on continuous donor funding, and its ability to expand was limited. Following the abrupt cessation of international financial support in 2021, many of these initiatives faced funding shortages, jeopardizing their long-term impact.



Figure 7. Afghanistan's Administrative Division

Source: (Afghanistan Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection - UT Library Online, n.d.)

4.2.4.2. The Informal Economy

The shadow economy has significantly hindered Afghanistan's economic recovery. Many Afghans relied on informal job markets, small-scale trading, and subsistence farming for their livelihoods. While these activities provided essential income for millions, they fell outside the official tax system, limiting the government's ability to generate domestic revenue. By 2020, domestic taxes contributed to less than 10% of Afghanistan's GDP, making the country heavily dependent on international aid (Pain & Goodhand, 2002). This reliance on foreign funding created an unfavorable dynamic, as government income was tied to external capital rather than domestic economic growth. Consequently, officials became more accountable to foreign donors than to the Afghan populace, leading to a decline in public accountability and weakening the social contract between the state and its citizens. This gap in legitimacy was particularly pronounced in rural areas, where residents felt excluded from the benefits of recovery efforts (Rubin, 2013). Tragically, the opium trade has further obstructed the country's economic recovery, undermining legitimate growth while fueling corruption and violence. By the mid-2000s, Afghanistan produced over ninety percent (90%) of the world's opium, a lucrative crop that supported criminal networks and armed groups while providing income for millions of farmers (Goodhand, 2004). Efforts to eradicate opium crops and promote alternative livelihoods often failed and were frequently undone, isolating rural communities in the process.

Local farmers who depended on opium cultivation for their livelihoods faced severe hardships due to eradication efforts, while larger manufacturers with political clout often escaped consequences. The opium economy, which constituted a significant portion of Afghanistan's GDP, was further entrenched by the lack of viable alternatives. The government's inability to address this issue highlighted the limitations of state authority and the challenges of enforcing law and order in rural areas (UNODC, 2019).

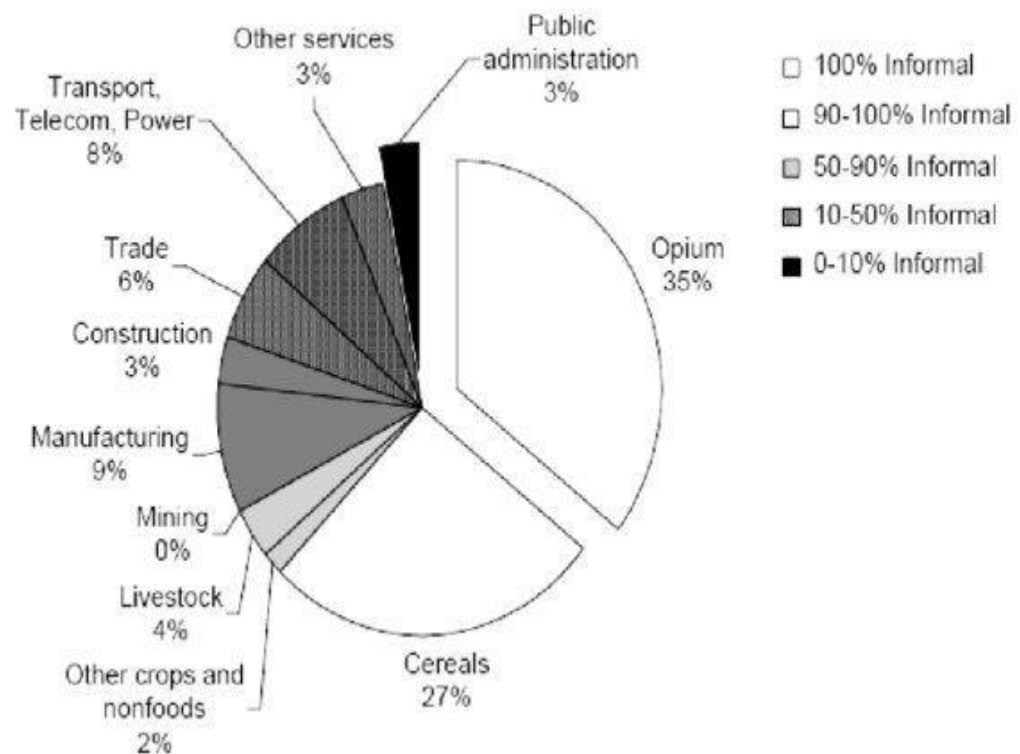


Figure 1: Afghanistan's Economy by Sector, Focusing on the Level of Informity

Source: (Sultan Barkat, 2015,)

The graph above illustrates Afghanistan's economy by sector, focusing on the level of informality present in each. It highlights the dominance of the opium trade, which accounts for 35% of all economic activity and operates entirely within the informal sector. The grains industry follows as the second largest contributor at 27%, also exhibiting a high level of informality. Although mining appears to have no informal activity, other sectors show varying degrees of informality, including manufacturing (9%), transportation, telecom, and electricity (8%), and trade (6%). Contributions from public administration and other services are minimal, mostly falling within the formalized range of 0–10% informal.

Consequently, the country's attempts to rebuild its economy yield mixed results. On one hand, significant progress in healthcare, education, and infrastructure has been achieved through international aid and development programs, laying the groundwork for modernization. On the other hand, persistent issues such as corruption, dependency on aid, and the resilience of the black and informal economy have undermined these successes.

4.2.5. Religion and Nation-Building in Afghanistan

As previously mentioned, religion has played a crucial and complex role in shaping the political, social, and cultural landscape of the country. The predominant faith in Afghanistan is Sunni Islam, mainly of the Hanafi school, alongside a significant Shia Muslim minority that includes both Twelver Shia and Ismailis. Afghan culture is deeply intertwined with religion, influencing identity formation, social norms, legal systems, and governance. While religion has been integral to nation-building, it has also been a source of both unity and conflict, reflecting the interplay of political power, ethnic diversity, and religious authority. Despite the country's varied ethnic groups, Islam has consistently acted as a unifying force, providing a shared cultural and theological foundation. In many instances, Afghans' dedication to Islamic values has reinforced their collective identity, transcending ethnic and tribal divisions. Religious institutions like mosques and madrasas (Islamic schools) have historically served as centers for education and community bonding, reinforcing the values and social structure of Afghan society (Barfield, 2012).

The Afghan constitution adopted in 2004 clearly acknowledges the vital role of Islam in shaping the country's identity and governance. This is evident in Article 3, which states that no laws can contradict Islamic principles and teachings (Rubin, 2013). The intention behind incorporating Islam into government institutions was to lend the administration a sense of legitimacy and stability by aligning it with societal values. Throughout Afghanistan's history, religion has often been a tool for gaining political legitimacy. Monarchs, tribal leaders, and modern political figures have invoked Islamic teachings to strengthen their authority and justify their rule. For instance, King Zahir Shah (r. 1933–1973) implemented reforms that introduced secular changes while also positioning himself as a protector of Islam. Similarly, during the Soviet invasion (1979–1989), the mujahideen insurgency rallied Afghans by framing their struggle as a jihad to defend their beliefs against foreign oppression (Gopal, 2014).

In the post-2001 nation-building efforts, Islam again played a crucial role in legitimizing the Afghan government. To appeal to conservative populations and counter the Taliban's narrative—which portrayed the Afghan government as anti-Islamic due to its ties with international powers—leaders emphasized the Islamic

nature of the state. However, this approach faced challenges as the Taliban continued to assert their claim to authentic Islamic governance, using their interpretation of Sharia law to gain support in rural areas (Suhrke,

2011). Striking a balance between religious authority and the principles of modern democratic governance has been a significant challenge in integrating religion into Afghanistan's nation-building process.

The 2004 constitution incorporated democratic processes, including elections and protections for minority rights, while also maintaining Islamic values. This dual approach led to tensions, as some conservative groups resisted reforms they felt were incompatible with Islamic principles. For example, fundamentalist religious leaders often opposed the push for gender equality, including voting rights and access to education. Some Afghans argued that these initiatives represented Western ideals, undermining Afghanistan's Islamic identity, while a majority supported them, viewing them as aligned with Islamic teachings. These debates highlighted the difficulties of navigating cultural and religious sensitivities during the nation-building process (UNAMA, 2020). The Shia Muslim minority and other religious groups in Afghanistan presented both opportunities and challenges for the country's development. Although Sunni and Shia Muslims share core Islamic beliefs, sectarian tensions have sometimes led to conflict.

The tensions in Afghanistan were exacerbated by the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s, as their extreme Sunni ideology led to the oppression of Shia communities, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara tribe. Following the events of 2001, efforts were made to foster inclusion and national unity by integrating religious minorities into the new political framework. Although Islam was declared the national religion, the 2004 constitution upheld religious freedom and equal rights for all citizens. In practice, however, religious minorities often faced violence and persecution, which undermined the broader goals of nation-building. Addressing these issues required navigating complex social and political dynamics to ensure the protection and respect of Afghanistan's rich diversity (Minority Rights Group, 2021). The Taliban's interpretation of Islam has significantly influenced Afghanistan's nation-building journey. During their first rule from 1996 to 2001, they imposed a strict version of Sharia law that severely restricted women's rights, freedom of expression, and

religious practices. This period was marked by widespread human rights abuses and international isolation, which severely hindered the country's socioeconomic and political development (Rashid, 2010). Since their return in 2021, the Taliban's governing style has reignited debates about the role of Islam in Afghanistan's future. Their harsh methods and exclusionary policies raise concerns about the sustainability and inclusiveness of their regime, despite their assertions that their form of Islamic governance provides stability. Striking a balance between religious beliefs and the pluralistic, democratic aspirations of a diverse population remains a significant challenge for Afghanistan (International Crisis Group, 2021).

4.2.6. Ethnic Culture

Afghanistan's rich ethnic culture serves both as a unifying element and a challenge to forming a cohesive state. The country is home to various ethnic groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Baloch, each contributing their languages, customs, and historical narratives to the national identity. However, the coexistence of these diverse communities has often been fraught with challenges, as ethnic identities can sometimes conflict with national loyalties. The cultural heritage of Afghanistan is deeply rooted in longstanding traditions tied to regional and tribal identities. For instance, the ancient Pashtun code of conduct, known as Pashtunwali, emphasizes values such as honor, hospitality, and revenge, influencing both individual and collective behaviors (Barfield, 2012).

Similarly, the Tajiks and Hazaras have significantly enriched Afghanistan's literary and cultural landscape through their Persian-speaking heritage. While these cultural distinctions enhance the nation's collective identity, they also complicate the quest for a unified national identity (Barfield, 2012). Nation-building efforts have aimed to weave ethnic cultures into the broader national narrative. The 2004 Constitution recognized Dari and Pashto as official languages to reflect Afghanistan's linguistic diversity. However, perceptions of ethnic favoritism, particularly regarding the Pashtuns' dominance in military and governmental roles, have heightened tensions among other groups. To address these issues, a more inclusive approach to integrating ethnic cultures into government policies and governance is essential (Rubin, 2013).

4.2.7. Centralization

Afghanistan's government has been marked by a strong centralization, particularly following the nation-building efforts that began in 2001. The 2004 Constitution established a highly centralized administration, granting the president significant powers, such as the authority to appoint judges, district officials, and provincial governors. This centralization aimed to create a unified state capable of addressing the country's challenges and curbing insurgencies. However, it often clashed with Afghanistan's historical reliance on decentralized local and tribal governance structures (Goodhand, 2004). The concentration of power in Kabul has faced criticism for marginalizing regional and remote areas, where traditional governance systems like village assemblies (shuras) and tribal councils (jirgas) hold more legitimacy. The central government's appointments of provincial and district leaders were often perceived as outsiders lacking an understanding of local dynamics. This disconnect weakened the government's ability to deliver services, enforce the law, and gain the trust of local communities (SIGAR, 2021).

There have been limited efforts to find a balance between decentralized governance and centralization. Initiatives like the National Solidarity Program (NSP) aimed to empower local communities, but these efforts were not fully integrated into the broader governance framework. A more federated approach that acknowledges Afghanistan's diverse cultural and regional identities may help address the challenges of centralization in the nation-building process in the future (Rubin, 2013). The concept of centralization in Afghanistan is not a recent development; it traces back to the late 19th century under Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, often referred to as the "Iron Amir." He exerted control over the periphery and centralized power in Kabul by suppressing tribal revolts through military means. While this approach created a sense of national unity, it also heightened resentment among regional tribes and ethnic groups, who felt their autonomy and traditions were under threat (Barfield, 2012). Throughout the 20th century, the struggle between local self-governance and central authority persisted. From the reign of Zahir Shah to the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, successive governments have grappled with the challenge of balancing centralization with the country's tribal and ethnic diversity. Each attempt at centralization faced resistance, often exacerbating divisions rather than fostering unity.

A centralized system of government was created under the 2004 Constitution, which was ratified during the nation-building phase after the Taliban. The president received extensive powers, including the authority to appoint judges, district officials, and governors across the country. This approach aimed to consolidate power in Kabul and prevent the fragmentation of authority that had characterized Afghanistan's history. Centralization was also seen as a means to address insurgencies, positioning the state as the sole legal entity capable of managing administration and security (Rubin, 2013). However, the weaknesses of the centralized system quickly became apparent. Kabul often appointed provincial and district officials who lacked local knowledge and authority over the regions they were meant to govern. This exclusion of local residents from decision-making processes created a divide between them and the national administration. Additionally, trust in the government was further eroded by the belief that these appointed officials were often corrupt or aligned with specific political or ethnic factions (SIGAR, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the thesis "Ethnic Nationalism in Afghanistan: Examining the Impact of Ethnicity on Conflict and Nation-Building Process" highlights the crucial role that ethnic identity plays in forming Afghanistan's sociopolitical environment by summarizing the key findings and insights from the study. Ethnic nationalism presents serious obstacles to national unity and administration, the thesis emphasizes, even while it gives marginalized communities a sense of identity and belonging.

South and Central Asian nations' colonial pasts may be employed to analyze their contemporary histories. Colonial powers including the Portuguese, Dutch, French, British, and Russians used the regions mainly as a buffer zone in their attempts to unite their fortunes on the subcontinent. To freely access their colonized territory, they discovered areas that functioned as pathways.

As a result of the colonial powers' focus on their own strategic objectives, the region's development suffered; nation-building was postponed; and states were arbitrary and divided without consideration for ethnic divisions.

The British strategy in Afghanistan alternated between "masterly inactivity" and "forward policy," as Tsarist Russia and British India attempted to outmaneuver one another to seize control. An additional issue was caused by the sudden demarcation of the Afghan border and the division of ethnic groups on either side of the international border. Both politically and economically, Afghanistan suffered as a result of the conflict between the opposing parties. The Afghans attempted to uphold their own institutions, which were founded on indigenous customs and culture, to resist British encroachment. The goal of the Kings was to establish political unity, which Ahmad Shah Abdali's rule first aimed to accomplish. Abdul Rahman made several attempts at consolidation in the 1890s. However, the rulers' appropriation of the western concept of nation-building, which was utterly inappropriate for a traditional and diverse Afghan community, made nation-building a difficult undertaking. It is evident from a cursory examination of the history of nation-building from Abdul Rahman's reign to the present that the Afghan rulers have not undertaken any significant efforts to construct the country. Instead, they have been searching for the manifestation of ethnic nationalism rather than creating a nation. The nation-building effort has reached a

standstill as a result of the rulers' unbalanced actions, which have shattered Afghanistan's unity and empathy and caused profound contrasts in descent.

One of the key findings of the study is that Afghanistan's colonial history significantly shaped its contemporary ethnic landscape. The arbitrary border demarcations and strategic manipulations by colonial powers, particularly the British and Russians, contributed to ethnic divisions and tensions. These divisions were further deepened by Afghanistan's internal political struggles, where ruling elites often leveraged ethnic identity as a tool for maintaining power and control. This pattern of governance has perpetuated distrust among ethnic groups and created a cycle of exclusion and marginalization. Because of Afghanistan's strategic location, Soviet interests in the area increased in the years following World War II. Afghan unity was shattered as a result of the cold war endgame being fought on Afghan soil. To oppose the Soviets, many groups formed; however, these groups were never unified because of regional, tribal, and ethnic allegiances. By design, the different political elites made things even more convoluted. However, outside forces encouraged and supported the Mujahideens' ethnic split. The politicization of the nation's primordialities, which ultimately proved to be one of the main roadblocks in the process of nation-building, was made possible in large part by this meddling.

Moreover, the research underscores that Afghanistan's centralized governance system has failed to accommodate its diverse ethnic makeup. The dominance of certain ethnic groups in political and economic spheres has led to grievances and demands for greater representation from other communities. The lack of a precise population census has further fueled ethnic-based political disputes, as different groups claim varying degrees of demographic strength to justify their political influence. Without an inclusive and transparent governance framework, ethnic nationalism will continue to pose a serious threat to national unity.

Another critical aspect examined in the study is the impact of external influences on Afghanistan's ethnic conflicts. Foreign interventions, both historical and contemporary, have played a substantial role in exacerbating ethnic divisions. During the Cold War, Soviet and Western-backed forces strategically supported different ethnic factions, deepening rifts among communities. More recently, regional powers such as Pakistan, Iran, and India have continued to shape Afghanistan's ethnic politics

by providing support to specific groups that align with their strategic interests. This foreign interference has made the resolution of ethnic conflicts more complex and prolonged. Of course, nationalist forces and people-oriented governments have been responsible for the problems and challenges that have vanished in other societies. However, in Afghanistan, not only has nothing been done to lessen these difficulties, but they further exacerbated them by fostering linguistic, religious, and ethnic divisions. Nevertheless, it can be said that Afghanistan's attempts to achieve nation-building have been biased and founded on religious, linguistic, and ethnic ideologies. There have been numerous challenges and this imposition strategy in Afghanistan has not yet been implemented.

The study emphasizes how ethnic variety in Afghanistan can be a source of strength as well as a potential cause of violence. Ethnic ties have played a significant role in political dynamics throughout history, frequently resulting in power battles and social disintegration. Understanding and addressing the complexity of ethnic identities is crucial as the nation continues on its journey toward stability and nation-building. The emergence of the Taliban can be explained in light of this background. They can only fail if they are unable to include the different other ethnic groups. Ethnic assertion is not out of date, but when a particular ethnic group favors a "exclusivist policy" for its limited benefits, it harms national unity and hinders the development of a new nation. Nation-building is a multifaceted process that includes socioeconomic growth, intergroup solidarity, cultural integration and divergence, and citizen participation in decision-making. Women's lack of involvement in post-Taliban Afghanistan's varied plans has additionally hindered the development of an effective Afghan nationalism. Once more, the United States and Pakistan have backed the Taliban for their own financial gain. Using Afghanistan to access the natural resources of the Central Asian Republics has been their top priority.

In the end, it is determined that because ethnic identities divide the populace, ethnicity in Afghanistan has emerged as the main issue facing this nation. Members of various ethnic groups have such strong links to their own groupings that they prevent any member from deviating from their cultural bonds. The formation of ethnicity in Afghanistan is influenced by both internal and external forces, with the second being more important than the former.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Before I present my recommendations, I would like to share my findings on addressing the current ethnic crisis in Afghanistan:

We have seen or are seeing the consequences of tribalism of any kind and under any name, including "solving the national problem," in Iraq and other places. It has been destructive and ultimately leads to the turmoil of Afghanistan's disintegration. Especially in the current situation where our enemies have identified the division of our homeland as the easiest way to overcome us for their expansionist and colonial goals. Therefore, the solution to the national problem in Afghanistan is not through tribalism but only through democracy and people's friendship. We have no other way but to accept each other. Our geography (although imposed and colonial) dictates that we cannot create "Greater Pashtunistan," "Greater Tajikistan or Uzbekistan," "Greater Hazaristan," or "Greater Khorasan" from this land. At least our intellectuals must truly come to this conclusion and not think of ethnic and tribal superiority or unquestioned leadership. Whether we like it or not, as long as this country exists and its name is Afghanistan, all its inhabitants will be "Afghans" according to the constitution. Anyone who thinks they can change the name of Afghanistan and the nationality of its people should go and familiarize themselves with the geography, composition of the people, the geographical distribution of the population of this country, and the beginning of the process of the country's modern history. Therefore, it is our duty to seek ways to strengthen the national process and nation-building. The claim of the existence of "national oppression" at the top of Afghanistan's calamities is a weapon that tribal groups belonging to some national minorities have taken a position behind to justify their situation. Such claims have turned into an intellectual bed of hatred against the Pashtun nation to continue gaining and creating the ground for ethnic hegemony, federalism, Khorasanism, and separatism since 1992 and especially after the fall of the Taliban government in 2001.

My first recommendation for Afghanistan's long-term stability is to execute an accurate population census. Both the population of Afghanistan and the size of each ethnic group are estimated because precise demographic data is unavailable, and these estimates are typically thought to be extremely low. Performing a census is a contentious matter in and of itself. A primary cause of ethnicization in politics is the

absence of a precise population count for any ethnic group. Based on the size of the group, all ethnic groups will have equal access to political, socioeconomic, and educational opportunities if the government conducts a census.

My second suggestion is to solve the nation's national identity dilemma. One of the most contentious and complex topics in ethnic politics is the challenge of national identity formation. The national identity of the nation is "Afghan," thus the people of Afghanistan are called "Afghan." The term "Afghan" has historically been used interchangeably with Pashtun. Most people who are not Pashtun would rather call themselves "Afghanistani" than "Afghan." As I mentioned in chapter three, the term "Afghan" designates a Pashtun, but the term "Afghanistani" designates an Afghani citizen or resident. I believe that beyond its tumultuous history, it is internationally recognized that contemporary Afghanistan is a direct descendant of Ahmad Shah Abdali's empire. Over time, the name "Afghanistan," initially specific to Pashtun-dominated areas, was generalized to encompass the entire nation. It's a common practice for countries to be named after their most populous ethnic group, particularly if that group holds political power. Nations such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and countless others exemplify this trend. Afghanistan, in this context, is not an anomaly.

My third recommendation is changing the current governance system, the strong centralized unitary system. I believe that a civilized Islamic Republic system should be founded upon the principles of:

- Democratic elections for the leadership of the government and state
- An elected parliamentary system
- A civil legal system
- A legal guarantee of social justice
- The guaranteed rights and freedoms of all citizens, including the equal rights of women in political, social, and economic life.

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