SALIENCE OF QAWM, ETHNICITY, IN AFGHANISTAN: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

It has been assumed that qawm (a flexible term, referring to kin, clan, village, tribe, ethnic/vocational/confessional group, profession, and/or nation) used to be the primary identity in Afghanistan. However, after 1979, ethnicity and sect (confession) became the primary identities, as a consequence of war and funding by the West and neighboring/regional states. More than three decades of violence and instability in a multi-ethnic state, Afghanistan, not only destroyed political, social and economic infrastructure, but also inflamed ethnic, sectarian, and regional divisions. More than fifty ethnic groups reside Afghanistan including: four major groups; the Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and the Hazara; constituting 90% of Afghan population. The Pashtun, ruled the country throughout its history, barring two brief spans (1929 and 1992-94) when Tajiks ruled Afghanistan. The promulgation of 1964 Constitution in Afghanistan including: four major groups; the Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and the Hazara; constituting 90% of Afghan population. The Pashtun, ruled the country throughout its history, barring two brief spans (1929 and 1992-94) when Tajiks ruled Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion, in 1979, stimulated and further politicised ethnicity. Conversely, the Mujahideen (1992-96) and the Taliban (1996-2001), ethnicised politics that led to severe infighting between major ethnic groups and resulted into ethnic violence, cleansing and/or conflict. Ethnicity became salient further during the post-Taliban governments due to power sharing arrangements. Examining the salience of qawm, in Afghanistan, the article argues that ethnicity was politicized following the Soviet intervention, however, Western and neighbouring states’ support to particular ethnic groups, during Mujahideen and Taliban periods, ethnicized politics. In turn that led to ethnic cleansing and conflict resulting into further salience of qawm, ethnicity, in Afghanistan.

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Key Words: Qawm, Tribe, Ethnicity, Ethnic groups, Ethnic Cleansing, Sect, Constructivist, Soviet Invasion, Salience, Ascendency, Mujahideen, Taliban, Bonn Accord.

Introduction

Afghanistan lacks official, scientific Population Census, though contested and disputed surveys and estimations are available. In 1979, Afghan government (the Khalqis) tried to conduct the first ever official scientific Census but the task remained incomplete: only 56 percent of the population was enumerated due to mounting resistance in the countryside, and estimated the total Afghan population as 14.6 million. Organizations, such as, *Wak Foundation, Asia Foundation, CIA World Fact Book* and some broad casting companies have been conducting private surveys to determine ethnic composition in Afghanistan with varying results. Population figures by region, let alone by ethnic group, have been politically sensitive subject in Afghanistan; Census conductors have generally been forbidden to ask questions about group membership. The World Fact Book, in 2015, estimates size of ethnic groups in Afghanistan as; Pashtuns 42%, Tajiks 27%, Hazara 09%, Uzbeks 09%, Aimaq 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baluch 2% and others 4%. The first four constitute around 90% of the total population of Afghanistan.

Louis Dupree, an Afghanologist, estimated the population of Afghanistan, 13.82 million, in 1980, Goodson 22 million, in 2001 and Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 25.5 million (25,493500), in 2009-2010. The population of Afghanistan, in 2015, was around 26 million (26700277). Comparing ratio of residents and registered voters, in Iran and Turkey, and applying it to Afghanistan may be another way to determine the estimated population of Afghanistan. In 2015, the population and registered voters in Iran have been 77.45 million and 50.48 million, in Turkey 76.6 million and

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3 Ibid., pp 23-24.
7 *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook, 2009-2010.*
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52.89 million, respectively. The average registered voters in both countries have been 67% of the population. In 2015, registered voters in Afghanistan had been 17.16 million, applying formula devised in case of Turkey and Iran, of 67% on Afghanistan; total Afghan population may be estimated, 25.61 million, though there might be under registration of women votes in Afghanistan. Still, the estimated population of Afghanistan between 25-26 million seems more plausible. Though regarding total population, some guesstimates can be offered. However, qawm, ethnicity, is a fluid term, in Afghanistan, therefore, determining size of an ethnic group, in Afghanistan, becomes almost an impossible, gigantic task.

Qawm in Afghanistan

The term tribe may be used loosely for a localized group, having kinship as the dominant idiom of organization, whose members consider themselves distinct in terms of culture, customs, dialect and origin; tribes are usually politically unified, though not necessarily under a central leader. In Afghanistan, one of the outstanding social features of life is local tribal or ethnic divisions; peoples’ primary loyalty is, respectively, to their own kin, village, tribe, or ethnic group, generally glossed as qawm. Essentially the qawm is a community of interests, local and traditional, cemented by kinship, tribal or other ties, or it is a solidarity group encompassing family lineages, clans, tribes or sectarian, linguistic or ethnic group. The population of Afghanistan is divided into a myriad of groups at the local level; therefore, the term qawm is flexible, expandable and contextual. It, therefore, applies not only to these smallest units but by extension to the country’s major ethnic groups, and Afghan nation too.

Tribalism is a desire to retain group identity and more important, sets of rights and obligations within the group, or it is a system of identity and solidarity based on kinship and locality involving tribal institution, ideology, customs and common law. In Afghanistan, tribalism is a segmentary system organizing various levels of social groupings.

predominant only amongst Pashtun and some nomadic segments of non-Pashtun groups such as Turkmen, Uzbek, Baluch and the sedentary Nuristani. The Pashtun inhabit primarily east, south, and south-western parts of the country, though there exist colonies in parts of northern Afghanistan established during the last hundred years. For Nazif Shahrani, agnatic descent principles play a significant role in organizing socio-economic ties among the Tajik, Farsiban, Hazara, Uzbek, and Baluch and Turkmen sedentary; these groups are not tribally organized in the same way as the Pashtun. The existence of tribal ideology among the Pashai and Nuristani, and its role in the political processes is considerably different, even among the Pashtun, the role of tribe as a unit of military and political mobilization is often assumed than substantiated.17

**Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan**

“Ethnic groups”, for Fredrik Barth (1928-2016),18 “are most commonly defined as social groups that meet four criterions: they are biologically replicating, share fundamental cultural values, constitute a field of communication and interaction, and are defined through self-definition and definition by others”.19 Barth sought to signify ethnic boundaries rather than the cultural content of ethnic collectivities by arguing that “the focus must shift to ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.”20 To Eller, an American anthropologist, “ethnicity is the process or phenomenon that underlies or gives rise to ethnic groups; it relates to the process of attachment, identity, cohesion, solidarity, and belonging. Ethnicity represents a “consciousness of difference” and a ‘mobilization around difference.’”21 Beginning in the United States, the notion of ethnicity did not emerge into widespread anthropological use until the 1960s.22 Thomas Hylland also confirms that ethnicity has been a main preoccupation


18 Fredrik Barth, a Norwegian social anthropologist published several ethnographic works with a clear formalist view. He was well-known among anthropologists for his transactional analysis of political processes in the Swat Valley of northern Pakistan, and his study of micro-economic processes and entrepreneurship in the area of Darfur in Sudan. Barth edited Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (1969), and outlines an approach to the study of ethnicity that focuses on the ongoing negotiations of boundaries between groups of people. Such groups are not discontinuous cultural isolates, or logical a prioris to which people naturally belong, Barth viewed.


20 Ibid., p 15.


22 Ibid., p 18.
since late 1960s in the field of social and cultural anthropology. The terms such as, *ethnicity*, *ethnic*, and *ethnic group*, have steadily grown from the late 1960s until the 1990s, and have widely been used since then, for two main reasons; firstly, owing to the changes in the world, secondly, changes in the dominant way of thinking in anthropology. Therefore, *ethnicity* is a flexible aspect of relationship between the social groups, having cultural identification and categorization (Us and Them).

Ethnicity has been found Constructivist in Afghanistan. For Nazif Shahrani, an Afghan-American anthropologist, *ethnicity* is, “a means of adaptation for individuals and collectivities within the changing socio-ecological conditions of their environment, *ethnicity* is a dynamic phenomenon, subject to temporal redefinition and reorganization, with potential for defining structural integrity, distinctiveness and effectiveness for people so organized”. According to Thomas Barfield, *ethnic* groups in Afghanistan assert that *ethnicity* is primordial, however, in practice, it has been found flexible rather constructivist. Within a *tribal* group, a significant ancestor may be changed in an oral genealogy to reflect social distance. Groups in conflict cut back ties to make their lineages appear more distant and hence less worthy of cooperation. In order to justify cooperation, the *Pashtuns* incorporated a neighboring group by grafting their genealogy onto one’s own at a higher level.

Discussing *ethnic* composition of Afghanistan, Erwin Orywal and collaborators list 55 *ethnic* groups, for Orywal, these groups and identities, as local categories, are relative, varied and dynamic. His *ethnic* groups include: *Arab* (Arabic speakers), *Arab* (Persian speakers), *Aimaq*, *Baluch*, *Baloch* (Jat Baluch), *Brahui*, *Eskhashimi*, *Farsiwan*, *Firuzkuhi*, *Gavarbati*, *Gharbat*, *Gujar*, *Hazara*, *Hazara*-Sunny, *Hindu*, *Jalali*, *Jamshedi*, *Jat*, *Jogi*, *Kirghiz*, *Kutana*, *Maliki*, *Mawri*, *Mishmast*, *Moghul*, *Mountain-Tajik*, *Munjani*, *Nuristani*, *Ormuri*, *Parachi*, *Pashai*, *Pashtun*, *Pikraj*, *Qarlig*, *Qazak*, *Qipchak*, *Qizilbash*, *Rushani*, *Sanglichi*, *Shadibaz*, *Sheghrani*, *SheykMuhammad*, *Sikh*, *Taheri*, *Tajik*, *Tatar*, *Taymani*, *Taymuri*, *Tirahi*, *Tutul*.  

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24 Ibid., pp 11-12.
27 Ibid., pp 21-22.
29 Ibid., pp 9-18.
Turkmen, Uzbek, Wakhi, Wangawala, Yahudi, and Zuri.\(^{30}\) It is evident that he has taken into account kin, clan, village, tribe, ethnic/vocational/confessional group, profession and nationality.

H. B. Bellow has mentioned six ethnic groups in his *Races of Afghanistan*, viz. the Afghans (Pashtun), Tajik, Hazara, Aimaq, Uzbek and Kafir.\(^{31}\) Louis Dupree cited 21 such groups, including: Pashtun, Tajik, Farsiwan, Qizilbash, Hazara, Aimaq, Moghol, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Pamiri, Baluch, Brahui, Nuristani, Kohistani, Gujar, Jat Guji (called Gujar in North), Arab, Hindu, Sikh and Jew.\(^{32}\) Abdul Ghani mentioned 11 ethnic groups and divided them into Afghans (Pashtun) and non-Afghans (Tajik, Turk, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Hindki, Arab, Qizilbash, Hindu and Jew.\(^{33}\) Thomas Barfield has described 17 groups including: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Aimaq, Nuristani, Pashai, Qizilbash, Baluch, Arab, Pamiris, Jugis, Jats, Kirghiz, Hindu, Sikh.\(^{34}\) The Constitution of Afghanistan, 2004 has recognised 14 ethnic groups including: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, Pashai, Nuristani, Aimaq, Arab, Kirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujar, and Brahui.\(^{35}\) The four major groups constitute 90% of the Afghan population,\(^{36}\) are considered to be prominent players in the social and political milieu of Afghanistan. It is evident from the above discussion that Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state.

All major ethnic groups of Afghanistan except the Hazara, have overlapping international borders into neighbouring countries. In the southeast, Pashtun overlap with Pashtun in Pakistan; specifically with Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa\(^{37}\) and Baluchistan\(^{38}\). The Baluch residing in the south and southeast of Afghanistan (Nimroz, Helmand, Kandahar), overlap with Baluchistan (Pakistan) and Iran (Siestan) in the southeast.\(^{39}\) In the north, Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen have their own co-ethnics residing in independent states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The Hazara, though Mongols, have Shia-confessional ties with Iran. In the west, Herat, mainly Pashtoon and Tajik dominated, have cultural ties with Iran. In the north-east, Wakhi overlap into Pakistan (Wakhan, Kalash) and Chinese Uighur (Sinkiang), while Brahui overlap into

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., pp 18-19.


\(^{34}\) Barfield, 2010, pp 24-31.


\(^{38}\) Goodson, 2001, p 14.

\(^{39}\) Dupree, 1980, p 5.
the south-east with Baluchistan, Pakistan. The neighbouring countries have in-built mechanism and incentives to meddle into the internal affairs of Afghanistan (see details below).\textsuperscript{40} Situation has been further complicated by meddling of regional (Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, China) and extra-regional (West, NATO) states by fueling or undermining \textit{ethnicity}.

**Forced Displacement and Ethnic Cleansing**

Amir Abdur Rehman, (r. 1880-1901) colonized the north of Afghanistan by forcibly displacing the \textit{Pashtun} population to settle in areas dominated by the non-\textit{Pashtun} \textit{ethnic} groups. For the Amir, these forced resettlements carried political and economic objectives; securing and defending the northern frontiers against possible Russian incursions, and promoting nation’s prosperity by ploughing unused but fertile land to procure crops and generate revenues for the state.\textsuperscript{41} Establishment of a settled trustworthy \textit{Pashtun} population to defend the border regions\textsuperscript{42} carried an \textit{ethnic} dimension since the Amir has been an \textit{ethnic Pashtun}. The colonization occurred in two directions: First the Ghilzais (related to Hotaki, Tokhi),\textsuperscript{43} mostly farmers, were deported in large numbers to settle and farm. Secondly, several thousand families of Durrani \textit{tribe} (Ishaqzai, Nurzai, Achakzai) from \textit{Kandahar} and the southwest (Farah, \textit{Herat}) were resettled in the northwest (Badghiz, Maimana, Sar-i Pul, Murghab) to guard the frontier. They were granted land rights at favoured spots and encouraged to settle and cultivate.\textsuperscript{44} In 1907, 11000 Durrani families of which 1100 Alizai were settled in Maimana, of 9900 Ishaqzai, 2000, settled in Badghiz, 900, in Maimana and 7000, in Sar-i Pul. Of another 9200 Ghilzai families, 3400 settled in Maimana and Andkhoy regions and 5800, in the vicinity of Sar-iPul and Shiberghan.

The first large-scale ethnic cleansing occurred in Afghanistan during 1891-93. The Hazara were forcibly conquered by the Pashtun-dominated government,\textsuperscript{45} consequently, fled and scattered in three different directions: Czarist Russia, Iran, and British Baluchistan (Quetta).\textsuperscript{46} After a century, Afghanistan faced ethnic cleansing during the 1990s. Control over the capital \textit{Kabul} between the four major ethnic groups during 1992-1996, became the principal military and political objective of the warring \textit{ethnic} factions.\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Hazara} evicted \textit{Pashtuns} from 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} districts of \textit{Kabul}, the \textit{Uzbek}

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\textsuperscript{40} Goodson, 2001, p 17.
\textsuperscript{41} Tapper, 1983, p 233.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p 240.
\textsuperscript{43} Tapper, 1983, p 233.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p 235.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p 137.
militia too looted homes in the predominantly Pashtun districts of Kabul. More than 500,000 people of the major ethnicities fled Kabul to the neighbouring countries, leaving 19000 wounded,\(^{48}\) and 25000 killed.\(^{49}\)

During the Taliban period (1996-2001), ethnic cleansing campaigns began in the north (Mazar Sharif, Hazarajat, Badghiz, Charikar) of Afghanistan.\(^{50}\) In 1996, in Badghiz, a population of 50,000 comprising both Pashtun and Uzbek ethnicities was displaced in the wake of war between the Taliban and Uzbek forces.\(^{51}\) The Taliban began an organized offensive in January 1997 against militias led by Masood (Tajik) and Dostam (Uzbek), captured Charikar, displacing some 50,000 people from Charikar to Kabul.\(^{52}\) On sectarian basis, ethnic cleansing occurred in Mazar Sharif, in 1997, and in the Hazarajat between 1998 and 2001.\(^{53}\) The New York Times, in 1997, reported that some 100,000 refugees in the north fled Afghanistan to the northern border entering Tajikistan.\(^{54}\) In 2002, some 20,000 refugees, mainly Pashtun, fled the north as a result of harassment by their non-Pashtun neighbours.\(^{55}\) Suffice to say that deportation, displacement and ethnic cleansing of major ethnic groups have occurred in Afghanistan.

### Ascendency of Ethnicity in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, in the early 1960s, four clandestine left-wing ‘study circles’ of committed intellectuals and activists emerged: one led by Noor Muhammad Taraki (a Ghilzai Pashtun); second led by Babrak Karmal (a Ghilzai Pashtun) and Mir Akbar Khyber included Tajik and Hazara members; third led by Karmal and Taher Badakhshi (Tajik) mostly comprised students from Badakhshan; fourth led by Ghulam Dastagir Panjsheri (Tajik) included Tajik and Uzbek recruits. It is evident, these small groups, divided along tribal and ethnic lines, remained inconsequential minority on the political scene of Afghanistan.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{51}\) Nojumi, 2002, p 159.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., p 157.


The Constitution of Afghanistan, 1964 provided the freedom of press, and formation of political parties, however, the special legislation, required by the Constitution to legitimize the founding of political parties, was never passed.57 Two multi-ethnic political parties, Marxist, Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Islamist, Jamiat-e-Islami (JI) appeared. Khalq (People) was organ of the former, PDPA that split in 1967 into two factions; the Khalq and the Parcham, due to more personal than ideological differences, reflecting different social origins and approaches to revolution.58 The rural Pashtun numbered the Khalq, while the educated urban Pashtun and the Persian speakers joined the Parcham.59 The latter began publishing an organ Parcham. Jamiat-e-Islami too split into two factions in 1976-77: Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan (JIA) and Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA). Burhanuddin Rabbani, leader of Jamiat-e Islami, a Tajik, and Gulbadin Hikmatyar, leader of Hizb-e Islami, was a Pashtun. The split occurred due to personal, not ideological reasons, too. Hikmatyar was radical advocated revolutionary changes in the government, while Rabbani was moderate and preferred evolutionary path. It is remarkable that in both cases, beneath the surface, lay ethnic connotations, as the major causes of the divisions.

First significant non-Pashtun political party, Sazman-e Azad-e Bakhshi-e Zehmat Kashan-e Afghanistan (SAZA), a splinter of the PDPA, was renamed Sitm-i-Milli (The Oppressed Nation), in 1968. It was organized and led by Taher Badakhshi (Tajik), a former member of the Central Committee of the PDPA and the brother-in-law of Sultani Ali Keshtmand (Keshtmand’s sister married to Badakhshi), the Prime Minister during Babrak Karmal and Najibullah regimes. Sitm-i-Milli, had been Maoist Communist Party, supported the Chinese Communist line. During the division of the PDPA, many considered Tahir Badakhshi an opponent of Pashtuns.60 Badakhshi’s anti-Pashtun party had rooted particularly in Qataghan and Badakhshan vilayats. The party propounded that Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Hazara oppressed nations and were deprived of national and civic rights by the dominant Pashtun.61 These views were also expressed by Abdul Majid Kalkani, nephew of Bacha Saqao, in Parwan. Stressing ethnic oppression, Sitm-i-Milli openly pointed towards ascendency of ethnicity in Afghanistan. In 1989, the SAZA had provincial committees at Faizabad, Mazar Sharif, Shiberghan, Maimana, Herat, and Pul-e Khumri. The agreement of alliance between the PDPA and SAZA in October 1987 confirmed its name, and announced three Tajik members of SAZA (Sitm-i-Milli) as ministers:

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57 Ibid., pp. 45-46.
58 Rasanayagam, 2005, p 49.
Mehboobullah Kashani was appointed Deputy Prime Minister; Muhammad Ishaq ‘Kawa’ Minister of Mines and Industries and Muhammad Bashir Baghlan, Minister of Justice.\textsuperscript{62}

*Shula-e Javid*, another Maoist Political Party, founded by Mehmudi Brothers, out of PDPA, in 1966, condemned the ‘social imperialism’ of the Soviet Union and their native allies. It had a populist strategy\textsuperscript{63} and enlisted support amongst university students, professionals, and Shia Muslims, particularly the Shia *Hazara*. The party had a following in industrial workers in Kabul, mostly the Shiite *Hazara*, looked down upon by the rest of the population, a kind of underclass, a lumpen proletariat. The Mehmudis organized them on *ethnic* and religious basis, and led most of the workers’ strikes in late sixties and early seventies of the previous century.\textsuperscript{64} The popularity of this party grew rapidly but was declared illegal by the government in 1969, since it criticized King Zahir Shah. Ahmad Shah Masood (*Tajik*) is believed to be the member of *Shula-e Javid*.\textsuperscript{65} The Centre of activities of this party had been Herat and Nimroz. Abdullah Rastakhez and Usman Landai acted as mobilisers and organizers of the communist forces, believing the combat would march from urban to rural areas. The party collaborated with *Sitm-i- Milli* and other *Mujahideen* groups against PDPA factions. More influencing groups even gained membership of *Jamiat-e Islami* led by Rabbani. Members of *Shula-e Javid* were considered reliable and remained loyal to Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masood.\textsuperscript{66} Splinter groups of *Sitm-i- Milli* and *Shula-e Javid*, merged into the PDPA in late 1980s.\textsuperscript{67} It has to be kept in mind that apart from Maoism and enmity towards pro Soviet PDPA, significant gluing factor between them has been their affiliation to other than *Pashtun ethnicity*. Following the Promulgation of Constitution, 1964, the 216 members of *Wolasi Jirga* (Lower House of Parliament), included the representative; anti-royalist, supporter of King, Pashtun nationalists of both right and left of political spectrum, entrepreneurs-industrialists, political liberals, a small leftist group, and conservative Muslim leaders. The first open criticism of non-*Pashtun* ethnicities was heard during the proceedings of the 12\textsuperscript{th} Term of Afghanistan Parliament.\textsuperscript{68} It is evident that non-*Pashtun ethnic* groups in 1960s carried

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\textsuperscript{62} Younas, 1997, pp 183–186.

\textsuperscript{63} Populism is a political position which holds that the virtuous citizens are being mistreated by a small circle of elites, who can be overthrown if the people recognize the danger and work together. The elites are depicted as trampling in illegitimate fashion upon the rights, values, and voice of the legitimate people. Populist movements are found in many democratic nations.

\textsuperscript{64} Rasanayagam, 2005, p 49.


\textsuperscript{66} Tanwir, 2013, p 188.

\textsuperscript{67} Younas, 1997, p 185-88.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p 183.
grievances against dominant Pashtun and separated from the Pashtun political parties in the early stages of political development in Afghanistan.

The Khalq and Parcham factions of the PDPA united in 1977 only to carry the so-called Saur Revolution out, in 1978, in Afghanistan, though, for Juma Khan Sufi, it has been a revolution of the Pashtuns from the beginning till the end. The Soviets might have had no role in preparing the Saur Revolution. It seemed an indigenous reaction of the Afghan people to the exploitation and deprivations by the ruling elites. As J. Blaut ably elaborates in *The National Question*, arguing, all national struggles are class struggles, not Eurocentric diffusions. Moreover, rivalry between the leaders of Khalq and the Parcham factions re-emerged soon after the establishment of Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), in 1978.

Prior to Najibullah’s government, the thrust of Soviet’s state building strategy was to transform Afghan society through *Sovietization* (export of Soviet institutions, political models, and ideology), however, when Najibullah became President, the Soviet realized to change its policy to increase the regime’s social base. Najibullah announced policy of National Reconciliation in 1987, to reduce military confrontation and negotiate a political compromise.

The Soviets used *ethnicity* to enlist support for its intervention offering concessions to smaller *ethnic* groups and *tribes* in return for their support or neutrality in the war. Rights to smaller nations, *ethnic* and racial groups including language and cultural rights were essential part of *Soviet* ideology too. Additionally, they encouraged formation of rural militias to protect their areas from the opposing Mujahideen fighters. They used Juwzjan militia led by Rashid Dostam (*Uzbek*) comprising *Uzbek* in non-*Uzbek* areas that brutally attacked other *ethnic* groups where needed. The strategy of using *ethnic* groups against each other, did not succeed in defeating the

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69 Juma Khan Sufi is the famous Afghanologist, and first-hand observer of Afghan political affairs from 1967 till 1992. He went to Kabul in 1970s as a political exile, and worked in the closed circles of Afghan government. He worked with the Afghan presidents such as, Noor Muhammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and Najibullah. Therefore, he saw the political events and changes in Afghanistan with his own eyes, and noted them in his diaries, which he published in 2015. He observed the important events such as the Saur Revolution, the affairs of the Parcham and Khalqis factions of PDPA, the presence of Soviets in Kabul and their involvement in Afghan’s affairs etc.


Mujahedin, however, it did encourage growth of *ethnic*-based, regional armed factions, further straining relations amongst *ethnic* groups.\(^ {73} \)

The PDPA government treated minority *ethnicities* judiciously, since the 1987 Constitution rejected all discriminations and classification on the basis of *tribe*, language and religion,\(^ {74} \) thus, stipulates:\(^ {75} \)

“All citizens of the Republic of Afghanistan, man and woman, regardless of nationality, race, language, tribe, religion, political ideology, education, occupation, ancestry, wealth, social status or place of residence, are viewed as equals, and entitled to equal legal rights according to the law.”

During the PDPA’s government, the multi-*ethnic*, multi-cultural character of Afghanistan was officially recognized that opened new avenues for cultural expression in the form of daily newspapers in vernacular, *ethnic* languages, the formation of folk songs, dance troupes, wider publicity of *ethnic* poets and their works.\(^ {76} \) The official recognition of the multi-*ethnic* character of the country was unprecedented in Afghanistan.

One of the most widely publicized aspects of the *Soviet* nationality policy has been the emphasis on cultural autonomy; this ‘autonomy’ consisted chiefly in the use of the national language in schools, government administration, and courts, and in the flood of books, magazines, pamphlets, and newspapers which began to flow from the printing houses.\(^ {77} \) The PDPA’s government promoted the nationality policy similar to the one in the *Soviet* Union, for example, Radio Afghanistan began airing programs in *Uzbeki* and some other minority languages.\(^ {78} \) Likewise, the Afghanistan’s minorities’ languages such as *Uzbeki, Turkmen, Baluchi*, and *Nuristani* were elevated to the status of national languages.\(^ {79} \)

Besides, during the PDPA’s government of *Parcham*, the situation of *Hazara* changed significantly for the better; Sultan Ali Keshtmand (*Hazara*) was appointed the Prime Minister, another *Hazara*, a Deputy Minister of Afghanistan. *Hazara* got minor government posts,\(^ {80} \) and engaged in lucrative transport business and the government in *Kabul* armed them against the *Mujahideen*.\(^ {81} \) Before 1987, the *Pashtun* alone were allowed to form a

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\(^{74}\) Rasanayagam, 2005, pp 176-177.


\(^{79}\) Rasanayagam, 2005, p 99.


\(^{81}\) Rasanayagum, 2005, p 132.
national jirga, but the Hazara became able to form the first ever Jirga-ye-Sarasari-e-Miliyat-e-Hazara (the Central Council of the Hazara People) too in Afghanistan.

**Impact of War (1979-89) on Ethnicity**

In the wake of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in 1979, massive influx of arms and cash penetrated Afghanistan fueling and mobilizing ethnic polarization and sectarianism. The United States, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia matched a dollar for a dollar and bullet for a bullet to counter any development sponsored by the USSR. In order to keep it covert, the American CIA through Pak ISI, initially, delivered weaponry, AK47, Klashinkov rifles, heavy machine guns (Dashaka), pistols (Makarov) manufactured in Warsaw Pact countries, to the Afghan Mujahideen. Later upon rising stakes, stinger missiles were also provided to the Mujahidden. By 1981-85 annual US military aid to the Mujahideen, channeled through ISI, allegedly grew from $30 million to $280 million, making it the biggest single CIA covert operation anywhere in the world. Further $470 million were pledged in 1986, which increased to $630 in 1987, $600 million in 1989, and $280 million in 1990. Besides, the Saudi Arabia funneled more than half a billion dollars to CIA accounts in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands; this was in addition to its direct contributions in cash and arms to its favorite Mujahedin parties. Kuwait and UAE also funded this war. The Soviets stationed around 85000 troops inside Afghanistan, comprising 60000 motorized force, 25000 made up of artillery, engineering, signals, borders and security units, and air force personnel. Thus, pumping of arms and cash in Afghanistan by the foreign states, sanctioned the rival feuding ethnic parties, to intensify further factional and fratricidal fighting.

Prior to 1979, qawm, remained the primary identity in Afghanistan, however, following Soviet invasion and ensuing war of attrition, ethnicity became the primary identity, flourishing in the 1990s. During the war in Afghanistan (1979-89), sect also appeared as prominent identity when the Sunni and Shia party alliances appeared with dominant political pressures. This shift in identity was unprecedented in Afghanistan. The internal strife among various factions, organized along tribal, ethnic, religious, and ideological lines, demonstrated one of the most destructive dimensions of war in Afghanistan. Oliver Roy argues that the ethnic awareness in Afghanistan is not as pristine as often claimed; it is a consequence, of war,

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82 Ibid., p 105.
83 Ibid., p 105.
84 Ibid., pp 136-137.
85 Ibid., p 136.
of strategic alignments, with foreign countries. The war made the various *ethnic* and social forces of Afghanistan more conscious of their separate identities. Shah M. Tarzi has argued that the politics of Afghan resistance, shaped by traditional ethno-linguistic and *tribal* cleavages internal to Afghan society, was added and abated further by differences in the *ethnic* composition of the resistance leadership.

**Sunni Resistance**

*Sect* and *ethnic* based alliances were established, in Pakistan and Iran, during the war in Afghanistan (1979-89). Seven Sunni parties Alliance emerged in Peshawar, Pakistan, while eight Shia party Alliance established in Iran, to counter the former alliance, from gaining political leverage in Afghanistan. Though sect and ethnicity are two different social facts, Hazara was a sect as well as ethnicity in Afghanistan. *Pashtun* and *Tajik* have sects too but ethnic ties are more important for them. Pakistan and Iran fueled *sect* and *ethnicity* in order to put a favourable client regime in Afghanistan. Besides, it is the salience of *ethnicity over sect* in the *Hazara: ethnicity* played active role in their unity, and emergence to political power.

The Seven Sunni parties’ Alliance, based in Peshawar, emerged in early 1980s. Earlier the *tribal* insurrections in south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan in summer 1979, with the *Kabul* government counter-attacks and repressions, and the *Soviet* invasion, brought influx of refugees into Pakistan, initially 400,000 in 1980. The Pakistani authorities asked the exiled Afghan leaders in Peshawar to manage the situation. These exiled Afghan leaders had set up headquarter in Peshawar after failed uprising against Daud, in 1974. The refugees in Pakistan needed to be recommended by one of the parties in order to be eligible for food ration; that enabled these small unrepresentative parties become mass organizations. Pakistan encouraged, armed and directed the spread of insurrections in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s ISI ensured that every commander in the field belongs to one of the Seven Party Alliance that included:

1. *The Jamiat-e-Islami*, headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani, an *ethnic* *Tajik* from Badakhshan.
2. *Hizbi-Islami Afghanistan* (*Hikmatyar*), headed by Gulbadin Hikmatyar, an *ethnic* *Pashtun* from Kunduz.

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90 Rasanayagam, 2005, p 104.
3. *Hizbi-Islami Afghanistan (Khalis)*, headed by Molana Younis Khalis, an *ethnic Pashtun* from Paktya.


5. *Harkat-e-Inqilab-i-Islami* headed by Molana Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi, an *ethnic Pashtun* from Logar.


Except *Jamiat-e Islami*, mainly comprising *Tajik* elements, the remainder of six major resistance parties, were *Pashtun* dominated.\(^92\) The rivalry between Rabbani and Hikmatyar was initially strategic, later turned to *ethnic*; Rabbani stressed flexibility in actions against Daud Khan after crackdown in 1974-75, while Himatyar stressed armed struggle, a shortcut to establishing an Islamic government in Afghanistan. Later, in the wake of split between JIA (Rabbani) and HIA (Hikmatyar), in 1976-7, political differences had wheeled more around *ethnic* factor. Most non-*Pashtun* joined Rabbani, and educated but religious *Pashtun* rallied around Hikmatyar that further strengthened the *ethnic* dimension in Afghan politics in early 1980s.\(^93\) Moreover, *ethnic* and *sectarian* rivalry existed even between the *Mujahideen* Commanders in Afghanistan;

“Different commanders from the same area would join different Parties, thus widening existing gaps between them. A commander considered himself king in his area, felt entitled to the support of the villages and to local taxes. He wanted the loot from attacking any nearby government post, and he wanted the heavy weapons to do it with, as they increased his chances of success and prestige, which in turn facilitated his recruiting a larger force. Such men often reacted violently to other commanders entering, passing through or ‘poaching’ on their territory. No party had a monopoly of power within specific areas or provinces in Afghanistan.”\(^94\)


\(^92\) Ibid., p 191.

\(^93\) Alam, 2005, p 189.

\(^94\) Ibid., p 111.
Shia Resistance

For, Syed Askar Mousavi, the Shia resistance movement, led by Hazara against the Soviet and the Kabul regime had two distinct phases: In phase-one (1978-83), barring the Centre of Bamiyan province, the entire Hazarajat were liberated and brought under organized control of Shura-ye Ittifaq, an organization led by Syed Ali Beheshti; Phase-two later in 1983-89 was marred by intense internal fighting in Hazarajat, since the Hazara groups backed by Iran emerged resulting into killing and migration of thousands of Hazara.

Some 50 Shia/Hazara minor/major groups backed by Iran were formed: such as the Sazman-e-Nasr, Sazman-e-Mujahideen-e Mostaz’affin. Eight Shia/non Pashtun groups, including Hazara, united in a coalition, in 1987, as a result of pressure from Iran, as they camped in Iran. The coalition, named, Shura-ye-I’telaf-e Islami-ye Afghanistan, professed that it is opposed to the destructive infighting between the different groups inside Hazarajat. The coalition included; Sazman-e Nasr, Pasdaran-e Jihad-e Islami, Nahzat-e Islami, Jabha-ye Mottahid-e Ingelab-e Islami, Harakat-e Islami, Hizb-e Da’war-e Islami, Hizbullah and Sazman-e Niroo-e Islami. Later, in 1989, the Hazara/Shia political and religious leaders in Hazarajat, officially formed Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami (an alliance of eight Shia/Hazara political parties), in Bamiyan, this time under the control of Hazara of Afghanistan. Hizb-e Wahdat stressed Hazara ethnic identity more than Islamic solidarity and its relations with Iran deteriorated after 1996. The Alliance gave voice to the rights and demands of the Hazara. The term Hazaristan also appeared in some publications of the party. Later, former Hazara nationalists also joined the party, who never supported the idea of an Islamic state. The ethnic polarization remained the main predicament of the Islamist parties.

Revolution, invasion, ensuing war and intervention of foreign material resources in terms of weapons and currency transformed hitherto traditional immobile Hazara society in 1980s. New terms such as Hizb (party), rahbari-siyasi (political leadership), sazman (organization), goroh (group),

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95 Syed Askar Mousavi (born 1956) is an ethnic Hazara and the author of The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study published in 2009. He remained a prominent figure in the "cultural struggle" of the Afghan Mujahideen in Iran during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. He was the main writer and editor of a few publications, including Saaf, and Jawali.

96 Shura-ye Engelab-i Ettefaq-i Islami Afghanistan, often called simply Shura, was a Hazara political movement, led by Syed Ali Beheshti, appeared in Afghanistan in 1979, in opposition to the increasingly leftist Kabul government. The Shura had both political and militant arms, and removed many Kabul-backed authorities within the Hazarajat, replacing them with their own functionaries. By the end of 1983 the Shura controlled 60% of the population of the Hazarajat.


98 Ibid., pp 179-185.

tabaqah (class), milliyat (nationality), markaziyyat (centralism), jang-e mosallahanah (armed struggle) entered into Hazara lexicon gradually but steadily replacing traditional tribal terms and structure. The Hizb-e Wahdat: opened avenues for the development of Hazara in Afghanistan; participated in international gatherings, on Afghanistan; Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers, in Istanbul; Four partite Conference in Islamabad and Tehran; the Sixth Conference of the OIC in Senegal; the UN Annual Meetings and held official talks with the UN General Secretary in New York. It also took part in discussions alongside the seven group Mujahideen alliance backed in Peshawar. The increased political awareness, strength and role of Hazara, began to cause ethnic tensions with Pashtun and other ethnicities.

The anti-Soviet insurgents divided along sectarian lines: the Shiite political parties, supported by Hazara, relied on Iran for financial and political support; while the Sunni parties were supported, politically, militarily, financially by United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. The ISI distributed foreign aid exclusively to these Sunni Islamic parties. Instead of unity, differences and disunity, based on ethnic/sect/clan lines, had been the chief characteristics of the Afghan resistance against Soviet/Afghan forces. Effective links between the Shiite and Sunni groups lacked, rather, contest and hostility, could be witnessed.

Militarization of Ethnicity

Militancy also played a prominent role in ascendency of ethnicity in Afghanistan. Militias on ethnic and sectarian basis established in Afghanistan in 1980s: the Uzbek militias of Rashid Dostam (Juwzjani), the Tajik militia of Ahmad Shah Masood (Shura-e Nazar), and Pashtun-Tajik militia of Ismail Khan (Hamza Division) were ethnic based, while that of Syed Mansur Naderi’s Ismailia militia (Wakhis), was sect-based. The co-ethnics followed their own militia group. The Juwzjani and the Ismailia militias were pro-government, while that of Ismail Khan and Ahmad Shah Masood, anti-government. The Juwzjani militia, an effective and equipped force, numbered 40,000 men by 1991. Its task has been to replace the Soviet troops protecting the gas fields and the supply routes from the Soviet border and southward through Mazar Sharif. Units of this militia were dispatched to Kandahar and Jalalabad to fight the Mujahideen in 1989 and 1990.

100 Ibid., p 186, 193.
101 Katzman, 201, p 24.
104 Alam, 2005, p 189.
105 Rasanayagam, 2005, p 130.
respectively. The militia was also used against other ethnic groups in many parts of the country.

Naderi’s Ismailia militia was established to arm and defend his community when most of the Tajiks and Pashtuns in the north aligned themselves either with the Jamiat or with the Hizb-e Wahdat. Najibullah patronized Ismailis, Naderi was made a general, the governor of Baghlan province, and member of Revolutionary Council. This was a great social advance for a highly stigmatized group. Naderi’s forces, reaching 13,000 in 1989, acted as intermediary in distributing Soviet aid to Kabul. The obvious reason for patronizing Ismailis by the Afghan government, in the north, has been guarding Soviet supply line from the north to Kabul.

The anti-Soviet militias of Ismail Khan and Masood fought the communist government in Kabul. Ismail Khan, erected his power-base Herat, in 1988, a conventional type of military organization called Hamza Division, which sustained five regiments, each with six to nine battalions of about 200 men, made up of combat units of 25 men. He convened a Shura of commanders in Ghor from nine western provinces that led to improved military cooperation among resistance groups in the west of Afghanistan. Besides, in the north-east of the country, many Tajik and Uzbek Ulama and Commanders, nominally allied to the NIFA, switched their allegiance to the Jamiat and to its most effective commander, Ahmad Shah Masood, fighting the Soviet-Afghan forces from his autonomous Punjshir valley. His organization expanded into a regional cooperative of Jamiat commanders, called the Supervisory Council of the North (SCN). The unprecedented flourishing of militias based on ethnicity occurred in Afghanistan. These ethnic militias were fueled directly/indirectly by Afghan government of the time.

Efforts to Reconcile Ethnicization

After becoming president in April 1986, Najibullah announced on January 1, 1987, his program of national reconciliation, comprising three key elements; six month unilateral ceasefire, the formation of national unity,

106 Rasanayagam, 2005, p 130.
107 Nojumi, 2002, p 82.
108 Ibid., p 130.
109 Mahaz-e Milli-ye Afghanistan, or The National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA), was founded in 1979 in Peshawar as an armed resistance movement by Syed Ahmad Gillani. It is a liberal, nationalist, Islamic party and, according to its manifesto, advocated both the protection of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, and the establishment of an interim government that would draft a national and Islamic constitution with the separation of executive, legislature, and judicial powers. It demanded an elected government. It remained part of a loose coalition of traditional, or moderate, Mujahideen groups. NIFA participated in the presidential elections of Afghanistan in 2004 and 2009.
110 Rasanayagam, pp 132-33.
and the return of the over 5 million refugees from Pakistan and Iran.\textsuperscript{111} The ceasefire extended further for six months. Besides, peace jirgas were established at village, counties, districts, and provinces level, followed by convocation of a national peace ‘Jirga’. These jirgas asked for the cessation of war, and creation of an atmosphere of understanding among the people. Representatives of all ethnic groups, tribes, and nationalities took part in the Jirga.\textsuperscript{112} A Draft Constitution was published in July that year, with opposition invited to suggest changes. Najibullah appealed to the Peshawar based Seven Party Alliance, in October, to join a coalition government, declaring they would be allowed to open offices in Kabul, publish newspapers etc., if ended armed resistance.\textsuperscript{113} The New Constitution was formally adopted by Afghan Loya Jirga on December 1, 1987,\textsuperscript{114} establishing Islam as state religion, and converting Afghanistan in theory into a parliamentary democracy. Article 38 of the Constitution stipulated equal rights of the citizens of Afghanistan irrespective of ethnicity, race, tribal, and political affiliation.\textsuperscript{115} After election, as President, Najibullah delivered a presidential address at the Loya Jirga, forwarding his vision of Afghan multi ethnic/nation/culture state: called various ethnicities by name such as, the Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, Char-Aimaq, Baluchi, Nuristani, Kirghiz, Pashai, Arab, and Hindus, and resolved that he will “firmly and consistently consolidate friendship among all nationalities, tribes, and ethnic groups, decisively exterminate every manifestation of chauvinism and nationalist selfishness, tribal differences and distrust between one people and the other. We must preserve our multi-national garden from the hot winds of war and drought”.\textsuperscript{116} Najibullah or the PDPA’s government recognized ethnicity, while the Geneva Accords, the Mujahideen government and the Taliban regime did not. Besides, in the Bonn Accords, ethnicity was recognized with constitutional guarantees. The non-recognition of ethnicity by Afghan governments, paved the way for ethnic strife and warfare.

The Geneva Accords, saying nothing about ethnicity, was signed on April 14, 1988 by the foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States in Geneva, called for; the withdrawal of Soviet troops within nine months, non-interference in each other’s affairs by Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees. The United States and the Soviet Union pledged to guarantee the settlement in a separate document.\textsuperscript{117} The entire dimension of Geneva Accords was

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p 119.
\textsuperscript{113} Rasanayagam, 2005, pp 120-121.
\textsuperscript{117} Rasanayagam, 2005, p 121.
external: it did not address the internal Afghan situations; the Afghan resistance was not a party to the negotiations,\(^{118}\) which showed how *ethnicity* was not recognized in Afghanistan, and how it led to civil war in the 1990s.

### The Mujahideen and Ethnicity (1992-1994)

During the fratricidal war in *Mujahideen* government, *ethnicity* became more prominent in Afghanistan. The *qawm*, a flexible term, diffused and took *ethnic* connotation. Though the PDPA’s government in Afghanistan had recognized *ethnicity*, the *Mujahideen* government did not. The non-recognition of *ethnicity*, and the quest for political power, led the country into political chaos. The major *ethnic* groups fought each other for gaining the prize of *Buzkashi*. The non-*Pashtun* *ethnic* groups, who tasted a degree of autonomy, and self-rule during the Communist period (1979-89) enabled by *ethnic* militia, had refused to accept traditional *Pashtun* domination, enabling relations troubled between the *Pashtun* and non-*Pashtun*.\(^{119}\)

The suspension of *Soviet* aid to Afghan government, in late 1991, had forced Najibullah to limit payments to the pro-government forces and militias.\(^{120}\) In the north, the swelling ranks of non-*Pashtun* militias such as of the *Uzbek*, *Tajik*, and *Ismailia*, demanded extra payment from Najibullah’s government, in a time of financial crisis. Najibullah replaced the *Tajik* commander with the *Pashtun*, a flash point for which the warlords waited. This implied *ethnic* discrimination by *Pashtun* in politics. However, weeks before Najibullah’s stepping down in March 1992, an anti-*Pashtun* alliance had formed in *Mazar Sharif*. Two *Tajik*-dominated *Mujahideen* groups, *Jamiat-e Islami* and *Shura-e Nazar*, joined hands with the Communist *Uzbek* (Dostam) and *Ismaili* militia, the Shia’s *Hizb-e Wahdat*. Their political aims were *ethnic*-chauvinistic, overthrowing the communist government first, and then ending *Pashtun* domination.\(^{121}\) The establishment of anti-*Pashtun* alliance appeared as the second block of non-*Pashtun* ethnicities against the *Pashtun* in Afghanistan. Prior to it, the first block was appeared in 1960-70s when the novice political parties such as; *Sitm-e Milli, Shula-e Javid*, and *Jamiat-e Islami* had established unity of cooperative groups against the *Pashtun*. Subsequently, two further alliances of non-*Pashtun* groups established against the *Pashtun*-dominated regime of *Taliban* in 1996 and 1997. During these times, the shifting and drifting of alliances remained based on *ethnicity*.

*Sect* played its role too. After the fall of Najibullah, the Seven Sunni Parties based in Peshawar, were brought in a conference in Peshawar to form an interim government in Afghanistan. *Hizb-e Wahdat*, the Shia/Hazara

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\(^{118}\) Alam, 2005, p 287.

\(^{119}\) Rais, 2008, p 42.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., p163.

\(^{121}\) Misdaq, 2006, p 171.
Eight parties Alliance, were not invited to the conference owing to Shia Sect and Hazara ethnicity. The ministries, distributed exclusively amongst the Sunni parties. The avoidance of Hizb-e Wahdat in the interim government exposed ethnic and sectarian discrimination in Afghanistan. According to Amin Saikal, the Peshawar Agreement of 24 April, 1992, became inoperative due to the intransigence of Hikmatyar (Pashtun) who refused to sign it. Hikmatyar insisted that the position of Prime Minister reserved for his party, should not be subordinate to the President (Rabbani), and the position of Defense Minister (Masood), should be subordinate to Prime Minister (Hikmayar). He also objected Rashid Dostam’s (Uzbek) inclusion into the coalition government, who previously remained associated with the Communist government. Hikmatyar not allowing Rabbani’s government to succeed, launched a barrage of rockets against Kabul killing thousands civilians. The rejection of Rabbani’s rule in Afghanistan by Hikmatyar, had a particular motive behind it; Pashtun have not accepted rule of other ethnicity in Afghanistan. This substantiated further ethnic discrimination and polarization in Afghanistan.

Rabbani continued to consider his rule legitimate in Afghanistan, and the countries like Iran, Russia, and India recognized his government. For Carol Riphenburg, fundamentalist leaders like Hikmatyar, have played both pan-Islamic and ethnic cards, as needed, in Afghanistan. The effective practices, constituencies and strategies of Hizb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami, enhanced ethnic polarization and sheer political rivalries between their leaders, than with ideology.

The ethnic activists, joined their own ethnic Mujahideen and militia groups, after the fall of Afghan Communists in 1992; some Khalqi (such as, Shahnawaz Tanai) ended up in Hizb-e Islami, Hikmatyar, the Parchami joined Jamiat-e Islami, Rabbani and Shura-e Nazar, Ahmad Shah Masood,
while the Hazara and Uzbek defected to their own warlords in Hizb-e Wahdat and Jumbish Milli respectively. These groupings on ethnic lines set the scene for the most vicious ethnic conflict in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{129} Hundreds of Hazara were massacred by forces of Tajik-dominated government in February 1993. This brought together Hizb-e Wahdat (Hazara) and Hizb-e Islami (Pashtun) against the ruling Tajiks. Dostam (Uzbek), Mujaddadi (Pashtun), Hikmatyar (Pashtun), and Khalili (Hazara) made an alliance against Tajik, known to be Shura-ye Ali-ye Hamahangi, which remained effective till mid-1996.\textsuperscript{130} Besides, Sayyaf’s Ittihad-e Islami (Pashtun) fought the Hizb-e Wahdat (Hazara), Tajik forces attacked Uzbek forces of Dostam, and Hizb-e Islami (Pashtun) rocketed the Kabul city to oust Tajik government from Kabul.\textsuperscript{131} Rabbani (Tajik) used power against Hizb-e Wahdat (Hazara) and Jumbesh-I Milli (Uzbek) in order to oust them from Kabul.\textsuperscript{132} The ethnic infightings between various major ethnic groups in Kabul were for the political power. The metaphor of Afghan Buzkashi,\textsuperscript{133} may be used, for the ethnic groups, pursuing ethnic warfare for political power, in Afghanistan, during 1992-94. Whitney Azoy, an American expert on Afghan culture and politics, has used the metaphor of Buzkashi for Afghan leaders; as the players in the game seize control of the goat by fair or foul, so did the political leaders to fight off their rivals.\textsuperscript{134}

\section*{Neighbouring States and Ethnicity in Afghanistan}

Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, the neighbouring states, Saudi Arabia and India as regional powers, Russia and USA, the super powers, of the times, had/have in-built incentives in meddling into the affairs of Afghanistan. Policies of these states are affected not only by developments in Afghanistan, but also by one another’s actions in Afghanistan or against each other. The Taliban’s takeover of Kabul

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., p 203.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Mousavi, 1998, pp. 198-199.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Rais, 2008, p 43.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p 183.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Buzkashi, literally goat dragging in Persian, is the national sport and a passion in Afghanistan, in which horse-mounted players attempt to place a goat or calf carcass in a goal. It is often played on Fridays and matches draw thousands of fans. Buzkashi may have begun with the nomadic Turkic-Mongol peoples who have come from farther north and east spreading westward from China and Mongolia between the 10th and 15th centuries in a centuries-long series of migrations that ended only in the 1930s. From Scythian times until recent decades, Buzkashi remains as a legacy of that bygone era. Whitney Azoy, (involved with Afghanistan since 1971 in different capacities) an American expert of Afghan culture and politics, notes in his book Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan: “... (that) leaders are men who can seize control by means foul and fair and then fight off their rivals. The Buzkashi rider does the same”.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
increased competition between these states.\textsuperscript{135} The role of these states, in ascendency of \textit{ethnicity} in Afghanistan cannot be overlooked; they fueled the \textit{ethnic} groups in Afghanistan. During the war (1979-89) in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, important neighbouring states, deeply plunged into the affairs of Afghanistan. Both turned into headquarters of the political leaders of Afghan Mujahideen groups, Sunni and Shia, respectively as well as the host to Afghan refugees.\textsuperscript{136}

In Afghanistan, Pakistan has aspired to gain a strategic depth against India, not only to subdue aspirations of its own \textit{Pashtun} and \textit{Baluch} ethnic populations but also sought to gain access to the Central Asian republics.\textsuperscript{137} Pakistan became active in Afghanistan in early 1980s, when it trained the Afghan \textit{Mujahideen}, and supported militarily, financially, and logistically the Seven Sunni parties, based in Peshawar. The influx of Afghan refugees in Pakistan reached 3.272 million in 1990. After disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Pakistan changed its Afghan policy from armed struggle to its market-oriented needs; focusing upon the economic market of Central Asia. For that purpose, a friendly and trustworthy government in Afghanistan became the most crucial task for Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan supported and invested enormously in \textit{Hizb-e Islami} of Hikmatyar (\textit{Pashtun}) in order to have a greater role for him in the newly established Afghan government.\textsuperscript{138} Pakistan kept shifting its support from one \textit{Pashtun} group to another in order to put pressure on Rabbani to honour the Peshawar Accord and to stop his transitional government from tilting towards India and other regional powers. The Rabbani government, unhappy from Pakistan, used the lever of Iran-Russia-India to contest Pakistan’s influence in Afghan politics.\textsuperscript{139}

Iran became active in Afghanistan after the \textit{Soviet} invasion, and a home for around 2.94 million \textsuperscript{140} (the 1990 figures) Afghan refugees and a support base for the Afghan \textit{Mujahideen}, particularly the Shia groups. It provided the Shia-\textit{Hazara} groups with limited military and financial aid. While the penetration of western and Middle Eastern aid, did not follow into the Shia \textit{Mujahideen} due to the hostile relations between Iran and the USA, and Saudi \textit{Arabia}.\textsuperscript{141} Though Iran became active in Afghan affairs in late 1980sin the affairs of Shia-\textit{Hazara} \textit{Mujahideen}, the Iranian government agencies such as, \textit{The Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Etelaat, Bunyad, and Wazarat-e Keshwar} (Ministry of Interior), had become active in attempting to push their agenda in Afghanistan. After \textit{Soviet} withdrawal, Iran united the \textit{Hazara} factions into \textit{Hizb-e Wahdat}, and tried to normalize relations with

\textsuperscript{135} Khalilzad, 1997, p 48.
\textsuperscript{136} Nojumi, 2002, pp 98-99.
\textsuperscript{137} Khalilzad, 1997, pp 37-56.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p 184.
\textsuperscript{139} Rais, 2008, p 185.
\textsuperscript{140} Rasanayagam, 2005, p 111.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p 186.
Najibullah. The reason behind policy shift was Iran’s desire to protest the US and Saudi’s influence in the upcoming Mujahideen government. Iran supported the Rabbani (Tajik) government, and its support intensified after Taliban captured Herat in 1995.142

Iran cultivated relations with the non-Pashtun parties such as Jamiat (Tajik), the Wahdat (Hazara), Jumbish (Uzbeks) and Ismail Khan (Tajik) to counter the Peshawar-based Pashtun parties. It established five training camps near Mashad for 5000 fighters led by Ismail Khan.143 The non-Pashtun government in Afghanistan represented a major diplomatic triumph for Iran. Iran provided substantial material support to the Kabul coalition to counter Pakistani and Saudi support for Hikmatyar (Pashtun). After the coalition fragmented in 1993-94, Iran began supporting Shiite-Wahdat to counter Saudi financial support to the Rabbani-Masood regime.144 Iran poured arms, cash, fuel, and logistical support to the Northern Alliance; the Iranian air craft flew military supporters of the Northern Alliance based in Iran to Mazar Sharif. It even cooperated with Russia to provide joint support for the anti-Taliban forces, discouraging international recognition of the Taliban government, to gain diplomatic support for the Northern Alliance.145 Thus Iran has been supporting the non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

The two important states in the north, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, entertained two apprehensions about Afghanistan; first the creation of Islamic state in Afghanistan may destabilize their societies, inciting similar elements across their border, second, they echoed the concerns of their ethnic cousins in Afghanistan against Pashtun domination. Since the ousting of Tajik government in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan increased their political and material support to the forces of Northern Alliance; Tajikistan offered sanctuaries to the anti-Taliban forces, allowed their aircraft from Afghanistan to its own airfields and operations from there.146 Turkmenistan has ethnic ties with Turkmens in Afghanistan, however, on one hand it has pursued neutral policy towards its neighbours, and on the other, it wanted its oil and gas to be exported.

Russia aspired to secure its borders from extremism and terrorism. It did not support religious elements in Afghanistan, rather discouraged them. Taliban takeover threatened Russia. In cooperation with Iran, Russia provided arms to the Northern Alliance. Saudi Arabia had a greater influence on developments in Afghanistan in the 1980s; however, this influence dwindled later. They have supported Taliban with limited financial assistance. Besides, the Indian policy in Afghanistan is Pakistan-centered.

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142 Ibid., p 187.
143 Rasanayagam, 2005, p 169.
144 Ibid, p 169.
India wants to limit Pakistan’s influence in Afghanistan; therefore, it supported the *Northern Alliance* against the *Taliban*.\(^{147}\) Thus various *ethnic* groups in Afghanistan have been fueled/supported by various neighbouring/regional/extra-regional states in 1980s and 1990s.

**The *Taliban* and Ethnicity (1996-2001)**

The *Taliban* rose to the political scene in Afghanistan as a military force in the summer of 1994.\(^{148}\) They captured *Kabul* in September 1996,\(^{149}\) Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, the only states in the world, recognized the *Taliban* government.\(^{150}\) Iran, India, Russia, Turkey and four of the five Central Asia republics such as, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan backed the anti-*Taliban Northern Alliance* with arms and cash to try and halt the *Taliban*’s advance.\(^{151}\) Particularly Iran and the CARs shared a deep suspicion of Afghan-*Pashtun* fundamentalism due to support of Pakistan and Saudi *Arabia*.\(^{152}\)

Apparently, the central tenet of the *Taliban* creed was to free Afghanistan from the control of Mujahideen parties, to establish an Islamic state based on *Sharia* law,\(^{153}\) however, the endorsement of the system of *jirga* by the *Taliban*,\(^{154}\) implied the embodiment of *Pashtun* culture and *ethnicity*. In other words, the *Taliban* movement embodied resurgence of *Pashtun* under a religious and charismatic leadership,\(^{155}\) and despite a religious movement, driven by Islamic fundamentalism; the *ethnic Pashtun* undertone of the *Taliban* movement cannot be dismissed.\(^{156}\) *Ethnicity* and *sect* played an active part during the *Taliban* regime. Some Afghan, and foreign observers described the *Taliban* as *Pashtun* nationalists, willing to revive a centralized *Pashtun*-dominated state in Afghanistan.\(^{157}\) For non-*Pashtun*, *Taliban* characterized as a symbol of Islamic conservatism and *Pashtun* chauvinism, aimed at recapturing political power and reasserting its dominance.\(^{158}\) *Taliban* suffered too, like the Islamists, from *ethnic* bias, polarization, however, they discarded any *ethnic* claim, pretended to

\(^{147}\) Khalilzad, 1997, p 52.  
\(^{148}\) Saikal, 2001, p 43.  
\(^{149}\) Rashid, 2001, p 48.  
\(^{150}\) Rasanayagam, 2005, p 151.  
\(^{151}\) Rashid, 2001, p 5.  
\(^{152}\) Roy, 2001, p 200.  
\(^{154}\) Ibid., p 66.  
\(^{158}\) Ibid., p 3.
represent the Afghan Muslim millat (nation). The non-Pashtun criticized the Taliban’s social decrees, such as;

“in the areas under the Taliban government, every kind of wickedness and immorality, cruelty, murder, robbery, songs, and music, TV, VCR, satellite dish, immodesty (be purdagi), travelling (women) without a mehram (immediate blood related person), shaving of or trimming the beard, pictures and photographs, have all been totally banned.”

Ethnic politics and violence pursued in the Taliban regime. The Taliban did not share alliances with the non-Pashtun factions in power sharing arrangements; they mis-treated the Shiite in Kabul, in the Hazarajat, and in Mazar Sharif. In Mazar Sharif, in May 1997, the Hazara and Uzbek forces collectively massacred some 600 Taliban in the north; hundreds of Taliban were shot dead, buried in mass graves by Masood’s forces. The Taliban, in revenge, in 1998, treated the Hazara in Mazar Sharif most viciously; the Hazara men, women, children were massacred; even goats and donkeys were killed. The Taliban were ordered to kill for two hours, but they killed for two days. Taliban’s mullah, proclaiming from mosques, put three choices to Shia-Hazara: convert to Sunni Islam, leave for Iran, or face death. Taliban’s policies accentuated the process of polarization of Afghanistan, already nascent along ethnic-linguistic lines.

Taliban replaced all senior Hazara, Tajik and Uzbek bureaucrats with inexperienced Pashtun. Governor, mayors, and police chiefs in Kabul, Herat and Mazar Sharif were appointed as Pashtun, who only spoke Pashto, not Dari, the lingua franca of the country. After a month of capturing Kabul by Taliban in October 1996, the non-Pashtun, such as Masood (Tajik), Dostam (Uzbek), Karim Khalili (Hazara) had formed a Supreme Council for the Defense of the Motherland, declaring Mazar Sharif as capital. Within a month, Masood recaptured key positions along Salang Highway (Jabul Seraj, Bagram, and Chrikar), bringing fight within 20 kilometers of Kabul, forcing 50000 people to seek safety in Kabul. While tens of thousands of Kabulis, mostly Tajik and Hazara, fled for Mazar Sharif or Pakistan to escape Taliban’s arrests and reprisals, leading to large scale ethnic cleansing. After defeating Taliban in Mazar Sharif, again the leaders of three major non-Pashtun ethnic groups such as, Masood (Tajik), Khalili (Hazara), and Maalik (Uzbek), formed a new alliance on June 13, 1997 called the

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159 Roy, 2001, p 208.
161 Rasanayagam, 2005, p 152.
164 Ibid., p 191.
165 Ibid., p 152.
United National and Islamic Front for the Salvation of the Homeland. Rabbani was reelected as President, with Masood as Defense Minister, declaring Mazar Sharif (North of Afghanistan) as capital.\(^{166}\) Iran declared to support anti-Taliban Alliance and appealed to Russia, India and the Central Asia states to help them too. Taliban blamed Iran and Russia for support of the opposition.\(^{167}\) Afghanistan remained divided between the Taliban (Pashtun) and the Northern Alliance (Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara) during the Taliban period. Severe ethnic and sectarian violence and conflicts occurred. The non-Pashtun alliances (1996, 1997) in the north were necessarily against the Pashtun-dominated Taliban.

For Conrad Schetter,\(^{168}\) ethnicity remained a dominant argument in the war in Afghanistan, therefore the peace process initiated, after the fall of the Taliban regime, at the Bonn peace conference in 2001, was based on an ethnic representative government.\(^{169}\)

**Post 9/11 Afghan Ethnicities**

After the event of 9/11, the United States began to seek out allies in the region to destroy al-Qaeda, and crushing the Taliban. The Bush administration, choosing the Northern Alliance against bin Laden and the Taliban\(^ {170}\) attacked Afghanistan. Within a brief time span of two months, the Taliban regime was toppled. They fled Kabul and the major cities, the vacuum created, were filled by the forces of the Northern Alliance. After capturing Kabul, the Northern Alliance, dominated by Tajik, reincarnated the pre-Taliban bureaucracy dominated by Shura-e Nazar Tajik. The monopolization of power precluded the emergence of an ethnically balanced post-Taliban government. The dominance of military considerations within the U.S.-led coalition affected political developments, after the demise of the Taliban. The negotiations, on the structure of the new government, between the four major ethnic groups, at the UN sponsored conference in Bonn, were strongly influenced by the military situation on the ground. At Bonn, the

\(^{166}\) Ibid., p 155.

\(^{167}\) Rashid, 2001, p 61.

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\(^{169}\) Schetter, C., Ethnicity and the Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan. Centre for Development Studies (ZEF), University of Bonn, Germany, accessed from eprints.lse.ac.uk/28376/1/Schetter_LSERO_version.pdf.

hallmark of developments in Afghanistan was to restore *ethnic* balance to
the government through a political process. This was to establish a framework for the political reconstruction of Afghanistan. These were anti-Taliban delegates, or simply the Northern Alliance, occupying most of the space in the deliberations. Ethnicity became the dominant theme in the Bonn conference due to the violent episodes of *ethnic* cleansing and ethnocide, in the 1990s: *ethnic* violence in Kabul during 1992-94; in the Shomali plains to its north during 1996-2001; in the Hazarajat during 1998-2001; and in Mazar Sharif during 1997-1998. Patterns of political affiliation by family, clan, *tribe*, village, *ethnicity*, and region often superseded relationships based on ideology or religion/sect. These patterns have been evident in every Afghan election since the fall of the Taliban regime.

The prominent members of Northern Alliance in the Bonn Accords, most notably, the Punjsheri Tajik occupied key positions in the interim government in 2001: Younis Qanuni was selected as Interior Minister, General Fahim as Defense Minister, while Dr. Abdullah Abdullah as Foreign Minister. However, Hamid Karzai (*Pashtun*), though politically weak, was selected as the President of Afghanistan. The Cabinet included 11 *Pashtun*, 8 Tajiks, 5 Hazaras, and 3 Uzbeks, the remaining 3 were drawn from other minority *ethnic* groups. This political change was unprecedented. The *Pashtun* political power was weakened again by the Tajik in Afghanistan. The Tajik have been the only *ethnic* group in Afghanistan who have defied *Pashtun* thrice (1929, 1992-94, 2001) in politics of the country. *Pashtuns* were unhappy with this *ethnic* imbalance in the government, hence, Hamid Karzai, later included 5 more *Pashtun* ministers.

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177 Schetter, C., *Ethnicity and the Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan*. Centre for Development Studies (ZEF), University of Bonn, Germany. Retrieved from eprints.lse.ac.uk/28376/1/Schetter_LSERO_version.pdf.

178 Rais, 2008, p 129.
The political power of non-Pashtun increased, while that of the Pashtun decreased after the fall of Taliban. Ethnicity emerged as a salient force due to ethnic violence perpetuated by the major ethnic groups in the 1990s. The post-Taliban government needed broad-based ethnically balanced parliament, to save the country from descending into ethnic war and chaos again. Thus, the Constitution of 2004 of Afghanistan recognized ethnicity as a dominant theme in the politics of Afghanistan. The rights of ethnic groups were recognized: articles 16, 35, and 135 of the Constitution (2004), guaranteed peace amongst the ethnic groups, safeguarding their relations. Recognizing the status of non-Pashtun ethnic languages, article 16 stipulates, thus,

“In amongst Pashto, Dari, Uzbeki, Turkmani, Baluchi, Pashai, Nuristani, Pamiri and other current languages in the country, Pashto and Dari shall be the official languages of the state. In areas where the majority of the people speak in any one of Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pashai, Nuristani, Baluchi or Pamiri languages, any of the aforementioned language, in addition to Pashto and Dari, shall be the third official language, the usage of which shall be regulated bylaw. The state shall design and apply effective programs to foster and develop all languages of Afghanistan. Usage of all current languages in the country shall be free in press publications and mass media. Academic and national administrative terminology and usage in the country shall be preserved.”

In cultivating democratic culture among the various ethnic groups, article 35 of the Constitution 2004, provides for the formation of political parties;

“To attain moral and material goals, the citizens of Afghanistan shall have the right to form associations in accordance with provisions of the law. The people of Afghanistan shall have the right, in accordance with provisions of the law, to form political parties, provided that:
1. Their manifesto and charter shall not contravene the Holy religion of Islam and principles and values enshrined in this constitution;
2. Their organizations and financial resources shall be transparent;
3. They shall not have military or quasi-military aims and organizations; and
4. They shall not be affiliated with foreign political parties or other sources. Formation and operation of a party on the basis of tribalism, parochialism, language, as well as religious sectarianism shall not be permitted.

A party or association formed according to provisions of the law shall not be dissolved without legal causes and the order of an authoritative court.\(^1\)\(^8\)

Article 135 provides for assigning of translator in mother tongue in court’s cases to the various ethnic groups when they need it.

“If a party in lawsuit does not know the language, the right to know the materials and documents of the case as well as conversation in the court, shall be provided in the party’s mother tongue through a translator appointed by the court.”\(^1\)\(^8\)

Thus, the Constitution (2004) of Afghanistan recognized ethnicity constitutionally and officially and proclaims equity.

**Conclusion**

Due to changes in the state and society in Afghanistan; the Constitution of 1964, the Soviet invasion, the ensuing war, and the foreign states’ involvement, ethnicity, not only emerged, but became more salient in that specific socio-political Afghan milieu. The stirrings of politicization of ethnicity, initiated by Khalq and Parcham factions of PDPA in 1960s; aggravated further on ethnic and sectarian lines by the Afghan Resistance alliances, buttressed by foreign powers, Pakistan and Iran, in 1980s. The politicization and militarization of politicized ethnicities, during the 1980s, and the sudden flight of the Soviet Union and the United States from Afghanistan, in 1989, left the risen major ethnicities: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek; to fight each other. This, not only, led to the most vicious ethnic war ever seen in Afghan history in 1990s, but led to ethnicisation of politics too. The fueling of ethnicity and sect by neighbouring-regional states, such as Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia, India and Saudi Arabia further aggravated ethnic issues. The Mujahiddeen and Taliban were ostensibly religious regimes, professing not to recognize ethnicity, directed, ferocious fratricidal infightings, ethnic, cleansing and killings. The ethnic politics subdued, in the name of religion, qawm and sect, nevertheless an inherent ethnic undertone existed. Various ethnic based alliances, mainly non-Pashtun, to gain political power, in the 1990s emerged: such as, Shura-ye Ali-ye Hamahangi (1993), Northern Alliance (1996), and United National and Islamic Front for the Salvation of the Homeland (1997). These ethnic groups tried to weaken rivals to strengthen their own political power. However, the Communist regime under Najibullah (1987) and the Karzai government (2004), both made ethnicity constitutionally documented. The Constitution (1987) rejected all classifications on the basis of language, tribe, religion, race, and political ideology, and entitled every citizen to equal

\(^{180}\) Ibid., Article 35.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., Article 135.
legal rights according to the law. The minorities’ languages such as Uzbeki, Turkmen, Baluchi, and Nuristani were elevated to the status of national languages (Dari, Pashto), and the character of Afghanistan as the multi-ethnic state was recognized, these moves were unprecedented. Najibullah began even reconciliation efforts to bring ethnic groups at peace, and recognizing their role for national development. In the wake of two decades of ethnic warfare, the Constitution of Afghanistan (2004), recognized ethnicity, and the rights of various ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The present Constitution (2004) of Afghanistan, recognizes 14 ethnic groups such as; Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, Pashai, Nuristani, Aimaq, Arab, Kirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujar, and Brahui. Though ethnicity has become salient, recognized, officially and constitutionally, but still unresolved. Presently, the major ethnic groups are struggling hard to attain political power and influence in the state and society. Although, a National Unity Government of President Ashraf Ghani (Pashtun) and Chief Executive, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah* along with leaders of other ethnicities as vice Presidents, etc., have been formed, however, contest based on ethnic politics continues, if not mounting.

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