# RESISTING THE TALIBAN AND TALIBANISM IN AFGHANISTAN: LEGACIES OF A CENTURY OF INTERNAL COLONIALISM AND COLD WAR POLITICS IN A BUFFER STATE

M. NAZIF SHAHRANI

M. Nazif Shahrani is Professor of Anthropology at the Central Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Departments of Anthropology & Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA.

## FROM THE JIHAD VICTORY TO ETHNIC WARS AND TALIBANISM

The Afghanistan people's jihad victory over the Afghan Communist regimes and their Soviet Russian patrons, which lasted for a decade and a half (1978-1992), turned quickly into a bitterly disappointing inter-ethnic sectarian war of all against all, culminating in new foreign proxy wars and the rising menace of Talibanism, which is threatening peace and stability in Central and south-western Asia. Explanations of why the Afghan Mujahidin did not (could not?) translate their signal military triumph into a national political success have for the most part focused on the impact of external forces shaping events following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. For example, Zalmay Khalilzad and Daniel Byman assert: "As the United States departed [after the withdrawal of Soviet Red Army from Afghanistan in February 1989], a vicious civil war spread throughout the country. Once the Soviet-backed regime fell, war, anarchy and fragmentation followed. The conflict became increasingly one of ethnic and sectarian groups, particularly Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and the Shiah Hazaras. ... The war also became a proxy war between Iran and Pakistan, with each power backing different factions."1 The role of outside powers and foreign forces in the factional wars of the post-jihad period (1992 to the present), while undeniable, is also more fully documented.2

What is often left unexplored and is little understood is the internal dynamics of the conflict:3 why did Afghanistan's major ethnic communities turn their guns against each other? Does this unusually intense communal violence "stem from the Soviet occupation and the [peculiarities of] the US- and Pakistani-backed resistance"?4 Alternatively, could these inter-communal conflicts have deeper roots within the political culture and history of the Afghan state and society? What are they fighting for or about? Could it be just another, more violent case of struggle for the control of state powers? More significantly, why the rise of the Taliban and their insistence on a military victory against the non-Pashtun territories in western, central and northern Afghanistan? Why the non-Pashtun peoples' unprecedented and tenacious resistance against the Taliban? And, finally, what might be the alternative to Pashtun-dominated and Pakistan-backed Taliban military domination in non-Pashtun regions within Afghanistan?

## ROOTS OF THE PRESENT CONFLICT

In this brief essay, I argue that to understand the structural dynamics of the present conflict in Afghanistan, as well as considering the effects of the internationally supported total mobilisation of the peoples of Afghanistan during the anti-communist and anti-Soviet jihad, we must consider the impact of two additional and closely interrelated factors:

1. The implications of an important aspect of Afghan political culture - kin-based and person-centred Pashtun tribal politics;5

2. The long simmering internal cleavages within Afghan society that pre-existed the two-decade-long war and dislocation.

These societal tensions were the legacies of the creation and maintenance of Afghanistan as a buffer state by British India and Tsarist Russia at the height of the late-nineteenth century's so called Great Game in Central Asia and the century long policies and practices of internal colonialism pursued by the Pashtun-dominated Afghan state before the communist coup of April 1978. These communal tensions rose to the surface after the collapse of the autocratic monarchic state and were further aggravated because of the prolonged war and outside interference, leading to the creation of the Taliban and their regime's brutal policies of ethnic cleansing directed against the Hazara, Uzbek and Tajik populations in central and northern Afghanistan. That is, the inter-communal wars that have spiralled out of control since the Mujahidin military victory in April 1992 are in fact the virulent manifestations of person-centred politics and the sad outcome of the Pashtun-dominated governments' century-long policies of internal colonialism, to which the decades of Cold War politics in the region gave powerful assistance. I now wish to turn to the legacies of this troubled history of relations between the institution of the 'modern' Afghan buffer state and its diverse multiethnic society, in particular the Turkic- and Tajik-speaking peoples of northern Afghanistan (Afghan Turkestan).

**THE CONSEQUENCES OF PERSON-CENTERED POLITICS**

Person-centred politics, the cornerstone of the kin-based mode of Pashtun tribal social and political organisation,6 has been the defining attribute of Afghan politics since the creation of the Pashtun-dominated centralised polity in the mid-eighteenth century by a charismatic and able Abdali Pashtun chief, Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747-1773). According to Eric Wolf,7 the '"Achilles' heals' and 'the diagnostic points of stress' of kin-based politics is that a chief or leader 'draws following through judicious management of alliances and redistributive action, [but] he reaches a limit that can only be surpassed by breaking through the limitations of the kinship order [itself]" (emphasis added). To overcome the limitations of this person-centred kin-based politics, Wolf suggests that the leader "must gain independent access to reliable and renewable resources [material, monetary, and ideological] of his own".

Addressing this serious limitation of person-centred, kin-based political economy in Afghanistan has been possible, however briefly, by two major means. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was through the fruits of waging jihad, initially against non-Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, and then internally against the non-Pashtun communities to impose a form of internal colonialism. And, during the latter parts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was through the solicitation or offer of foreign subsidies, mostly from real or potential enemies of the nation. The effectiveness of both of these strategies, however, has proved to be episodic and transient.8

The costs of failure to resolve this serious problem of political economy have been very heavy. The primary reason for the failure has been the unwillingness or inability of the leadership to shift from a tribal political culture anchored in person-centred politics to a broader, more inclusive, participatory national politics based on the development of modern national institutions and ideologies. As a result, during its 250-year history of statehood, Afghanistan has suffered at least one hundred years of fratricidal wars of succession or pacification (often called jihad by the contestants) with devastating consequences and painful legacies. These bloody internal conflicts, which have facilitated (invited) foreign aggressive interventions (British, Russian and now Pakistani, Iranian and others), even when dressed with ideological justifications (Islamic or otherwise), were not fought for or against any ideological or institutional cause or causes. Instead, they were fought for or against specific individuals, families or clans out of personal, but often rapidly shifting, commoditised loyalties (primordial or acquired/purchased).

**STATE BUILDING, TURKESTANIS AND THE DEMISE OF AFGHAN TURKESTAN**

Modern state building efforts in Afghanistan began in 1880 with unprecedented brutality against large segments of society, especially violence directed against non-Durrani (primarily Ghilzai) Pashtun and non-Pashtun groups (particularly Shiah Hazaras, Uzbek, Turkmen and Tajik). The history of the Afghan state's hostile relations with the Shiah Hazara communities has only recently been documented and analysed.9 Unfortunately, for reasons to be disclosed later in this paper, the policies and practices of Afghan governments towards the Turkic- and Tajik-speaking peoples of

Afghan Turkestan have, with minor exceptions,10 not yet received the systematic attention they deserve, especially from the perspective of the peoples of Afghan Turkestan themselves.

To help illustrate the troubled nature of Afghan Turkestanis relationship with the Afghan state, I would like to present, however briefly, some aspects of the experiences of the exiled Amir of Bukhara, Amir Sayyid 'Alim Khan, and the half a million Uzbek and Tajik muhajirin who took refuge among their own ethno-linguistic communities in Afghan Turkestan following the fall of Bukhara to the Russian Bolsheviks.

When, on the eve of 27 August 1920, the city of Bukhara came under attack Red Army attack, Amir 'Alim Khan's poorly trained and equipped forces put up stiff resistance until 31 August in defence of the Noble City, Bukhara-i Sharif. In the face of superior military technology, the Amir retreated to the eastern mountainous parts of his domain and continued fighting the Bolsheviks. In his futile effort to fight back and liberate Bukhara, the Amir counted, rather naively, on military and financial help from his royal 'brothers' King George V of Britain and Amir Amanullah of Afghanistan. His written request for assistance from Britain, dispatched on 21 October 1920 from his new headquarters in Dushanbe, apparently fell on deaf ears. He asked for £100,000 in cash as a 'state loan', 20,000 rifles, 30 heavy guns and ten aeroplanes, and the necessary ammunition. His emissaries to the British Consul-General in Kashghar (Eastern or Chinese Turkestan) delivered his request and it was communicated to Delhi and London. Similarly, the Amir of Bukhara's urgent request for military assistance through his gift bearing representatives to King Amanullah of Afghanistan produced no arms. Instead, Amir Amanullah extended Sayyid 'Alim Khan an invitation to come to Kabul for urgent consultation and a joint decision as to how best to address the tragedy of Bukhara, the Noble. Suspicious of the true intentions of the Afghan king who offered to talk in Kabul, but offered no arms to help in the fighting, and faced with the threat of the Red Army's approach on Dushanbe, Amir 'Alim Khan of Bukhara was forced reluctantly to cross the Oxus river into Afghanistan on 4 March 1921. He then proceeded to Kabul with his large entourage, where king Amanullah's regime gave him polite hospitality and kept him under constant surveillance. The Amir of Bukhara's clandestine attempts to purchase arms from British India for his guerrilla forces fighting in eastern Bukhara, which continued until at least 1931, were intercepted by the Afghan government and stopped as soon as they had began. Later, during World War II, when some of his close associates attempted to contact German agents to organise an anti-Soviet Turkestani resistance unit, the Afghan authorities again aborted it, fearing Soviet retaliation against them.11 The story of Amir of Bukhara and the half a million of his subjects who voted with their feet against Soviet occupation of Bukhara and chose to follow the model of the Prophet of Islam into hijrat (exile or separation from one's homeland to avoid religious persecution) has for the most part remained untold.

Indeed, as alluded to earlier, until the recent demise of central government and the rise of the anti-communist jihad in Afghanistan, for reasons primarily political, their tragic stories could not be told and hence remained unexplored. Some of the critical issues that need to be addressed are: what were the consequences (social, economic, cultural and political) of becoming a muhajir in Afghanistan for those who were forced to chose exile? How did they make sense of the events that led to the fall of Bukhara to Russian Bolsheviks and their local collaborators? How did the exiles respond to the calamity that befell them? What did they try to do, or were not allowed to do, in response to both Bolshevik aggression and the events that confronted them in their host country, Afghanistan? What did they say or write, or decided not to say or write or were unable to say or write, about their experiences of exile and the meaning of all the suffering they endured and for what?12

At the outset of the Bukhara crisis, there appears to have been much genuine support and heart-felt Islamic concern and sympathy on the part of the young reformist king of Afghanistan, Amir Amanullah, and especially the peoples of northern Afghanistan who received the bulk of the Bukhara exiles. The great majority of Central Asians who came from villages north of the Amu Darya (Oxus river) settled in rural areas of northern Afghanistan joining either existing Uzbek and Tajik settlements or founding new ones. Urban refugees for the most part chose to settle in towns and cities, primarily in northern Afghanistan as well as the western city of Herat and the capital, Kabul. The popular sentiment in assisting the victims of Bolshevik aggression, especially among the local Tajik Turkmen and Uzbek communities who received them, remained unchanged. However, at the

official level, the attitudes turned increasingly inhospitable toward the exiles, especially after the 1929 civil war and the subsequent change of regime in Afghanistan. An oppressive political climate compounded by the impoverished economic conditions in Afghanistan kept the Central Asian muhajirin, pining for Bukhara and Turkestan.

The great majority of those Turkestanis who chose exile, for the most part may not have been at the centre of politics in Central Asia but the very choice of their exodus as an act had a political essence. This fact was by no means lost to the people of the region, especially their hosts, the Afghan government. Amir Amanullah who had 'invited' the Amir of Bukhara to Kabul under the pretext of consultation and the formulation of a joint strategy, in fact tried to prevent the Amir from taking effective political and military measures to support his Basmachi warriors across the Afghan border. The allegedly British instigated internal rebellions, initially by eastern Pashtun tribesmen, against the reformist policies of King Amanullah, and his ineptness in dealing with them gradually dragged the country into a bloody civil war in 1929, forcing him to abdicate.

During a nine-month interregnum, a new Tajik ruler, Amir Habibullah II, occupied the Afghan throne. Unlike Amir Amanullah, the new Tajik ruler publicly advocated support for the Amir of Bukhara and his Basmachi fighters and publicly expressed his willingness to help liberate Bukhara from the Soviet Russians. The Amir of Bukhara and the local supporters of his cause, the Uzbek and Tajik peoples of northern Afghanistan, welcomed the unexpected turn of events. A number of Amir 'Alim Khan's able commanders, including a very well known Basmachi commander, Mullah Muhammad Ibrahimbek Laqay, who had temporarily stopped fighting the Bolsheviks in the late 1920s for lack of arms and ammunition, began to organise fresh resistance units from among the exile communities, as well as local Afghan Uzbeks and Tajiks, and started fighting the Soviets again. This new twist in the politics of Central Asian exiles understandably made the Russians very nervous. British India was equally concerned about the conservative Islamist politics of the new Tajik ruler in Kabul.

Not surprisingly, with financial and military help from British India, a large militia force of Pashtun/Pathan tribesmen from the North-west Frontier Province of British India and eastern Afghanistan were mobilised and led by a distant 'cousin' and former Minister of War of Amir Amanullah, General Muhammad Nadir Khan, and they ended the short-lived reign of Amir Habibullah II. The only Tajik ruler of Afghanistan in recent memory was publicly humiliated and hanged, and a new Pashtun dynasty, that of the Musahiban family, led by Muhammad Nadir Shah, was established in October 1929. The newly installed pro-British monarch was soon under pressure from Moscow. The new Pashtun rulers in Kabul responded positively to Stalin and demanded that the Amir of Bukhara put an end to all military activities, disarm his men and order Ibrahimbek Laqay to turn himself over to the Afghan authorities in Kabul immediately. The Amir of Bukhara complied, and Ibrahimbek Laqay agreed to cease his military activities and disarm, but refused to turn himself in to the authorities or go to Kabul.

In retaliation, the Afghan government sent thousands of Pashtun tribal militia to northern Afghanistan to hunt down suspected Central Asian fighters or their local Uzbek and Tajik supporters. The government of King Nadir Shah, according to recently published eyewitness reports of the tragic events,13 also offered an undisclosed amount of money for every severed head of Ibarahimbek's Uzbek Laqay fighters delivered to the local government authorities. This unfortunate policy of the Musahiban dynasty unleashed months of bloody war in northern Afghanistan in 1930-1931, between the anti-Soviet Basmachi guerrillas, their local Uzbek and Tajik supporters and the Pashtun tribal mercenaries roaming the area. This state-sanctioned attack on Central Asian exiles resulted in countless killings of innocent people and the plundering of local communities, mostly Uzbeks, by the southern Pashtun tribal militia as well as some local mercenaries who joined them. The Afghan government's unholy war drove many Central Asian Basmachi fighters, including Ibrahimbek Laqay, back across the Oxus river, where he was captured on 23 June 1931, tried and executed a year later in Tashkent on 31 August 1932.14 With the capture and execution of Ibrahimbek, the Soviet Union finally declared its total victory against the Basmachi movement in Central Asia, and with that death the hopes of the Central Asian exiles for a continued military struggle for Bukhara turned bleak. As to the Afghan government's role in ending the Central Asian exiles' hope of continuing their armed struggle against the Soviets, a public conspiracy of silence was put into effect and meticulously enforced. Indeed, from 1930 to about 1980, for nearly half a century, the identity,

social visibility and cultural presence of Central Asian exiles - generally referred to as Bukhara-i (from Bukhara), Ferganachi (from Fergana) or, collectively, especially if their place of origin was unknown, as Pan-i Daryayi (from the other side of the Amu river) - and those of their northern co-ethnics, the Uzbeks and Tajiks, diminished in Afghan national political life. Indeed, a Pashtun-dominated Afghani government policy of suspicion and contempt and an ethnic policy of oppression and internal colonisation confronted the Uzbeks, Turkmen and Tajiks of Afghan Turkestan. A massive and systematic settlement in Afghan Turkestan of Pashtun tribesmen from the southern frontier areas began in the 1930s and continued well into the 1970s. In this process, government officials confiscated from the local Uzbeks and Tajiks hundreds of thousands of hectares of fertile cultivated land and prime pasture and distributed it to Pashtun settlers (Naqileen). In the same way as the Russian land grab in the northern steppe regions of Russian and western Turkestan turned their local Kazakh and Kyrgyz owners into virtual indentured surfs to newly arrived Russian settlers, most of the disposed Uzbek and Tajik peasants in northern Afghanistan were made to serve their new Pashtun masters. According to some print media revelations based on local informants' oral accounts,15 the destruction of considerable local cultural heritage accompanied these land appropriations and demographic aggression. These reports hold the Governor-General of the area, Wazir Muhammad Gulkhan Muhamand, a well-known Pashtun ultra-nationalist, responsible for these activities, which included the destruction of architectural and archaeological artefacts, toponymic and literary texts, especially rare manuscripts in Persian and Turki/Chaghatai (literary Uzbek) of the peoples of this region. Through administrative fiat similar to Stalin's policies of National Delimitation in Russian Turkestan, the widely used term (Afghan or Southern) Turkestan in reference to northern Afghanistan and the appellation Qataghan (the name of a large province within it, named after an Uzbek tribe inhabiting the area) were effectively removed from official use. Pashtu names replaced countless Uzbek and Tajik place names throughout Afghan Turkestan. In the face of such adversity, the Central Asian exiles and the local inhabitants appear to have adopted a strategy of self-censorship and minimised the exposure of their personal and collective cultural and emotional expressions.

Despite an overwhelming desire, at least on the part of urban Central Asian exiles, to leave Afghanistan for the less oppressive environments of the Indian subcontinent, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the West, very few Central Asian exiles managed to do so before the 1980s. Predictably, at least on the part of Central Asian exiles, the long anticipated Soviet Russian direct military intervention in support of the Ghilzai Pashtun-dominated Afghan communist regimes materialised. During the Soviet occupation, 1979-1989, the exiles, together with millions of other Afghans, were once again driven into exile - this time into refugee camps across the Pakistani and Iranian borders - adding fresh salt to the old emotional wounds. Many Turkestani and Bukharan exiles immediately joined the ranks of the Afghan Mujahidin (warriors for the cause of Islam) forming their own resistance groups to fight their old enemies, the communist Russians.16

**THE FRUITS OF ANTI-COMMUNIST JIHAD**

The radically altered political environment of populist jihad resistance - and the consequent collapse of Pashtun-dominated central authority in Afghanistan - opened unprecedented opportunities for self-expression (military, political, verbal and textual) to all the peoples of Afghanistan. The real essence of the altered conditions in Afghanistan, especially for the Central Asian exiles and the Turkic and Tajik peoples of Afghan Turkestan, proved to be their newly found political freedom for self-expression.

The only major Pakistan-based Afghan resistance organisation headed by a Tajik from Badakhshan province, the Jamiat-i Islami, began to publish, for the first time, the 'Memoirs of the Amir of Bukhara, 1910-1920' (Tarikh-i Huznulmelal) in a monthly journal, Methaq-i Khun. The complete 'Memoirs' were later re-issued several times in a single volume book format by different organisations and got a very wide circulation. The history and struggle of the Basmachi movement and its major leaders such as Ibrahimbek Laqay, utterly absent from the print media in Afghanistan since at least 1930, began to be written about in Afghan Mujahidin publications. The new situation offered the educated Bukharan exiles the opportunity not only to reveal what was previously written about their struggle and to retell their personal and collective stories of prolonged suffering, but also to reclaim their suppressed identities and creatively express their past sorrows, present challenges and aspirations in a burst of literary productions - narrative histories, versified

histories and memoirs, and poetry and more poetry, one of the most effective culturally recognised means of political and personal expressions in Central Asia.

The Afghan Mujahidin's defeat of the Soviet army of occupation in 1989, the unexpected implosion of the Soviet empire in 1991 and the subsequent collapse of the communist regime in Kabul in 1992, all had important consequences for the phenomenal growth of literary production by and about the experiences of Central Asian exile communities in Afghanistan as well as the experience of the peoples of Afghan Turkestan under internal colonial rule. These developments have included:

1. Renewed efforts by independent researchers and government organisations of the newly independent states of post-Soviet Central Asia to rewrite the previously distorted history of their peoples in general, and those of the Basmachis and Central Asian exiles in particular

2. The emergence of an independent political movement, the Junbushi Islami Itihadi Shamal (The Islamic Movement of United Front), headed by an Uzbek strongman, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, in northern Afghanistan, who give voice to the long-silenced Turkic-speaking peoples by supporting new publications and broadcast media, focusing on the history, identity and politics of the peoples of northern Afghanistan, including those of the Central Asian exiles.

3. The establishment of small but enterprising communities of Central Asian exiles in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Europe and America, who are also active in the production of new literature about their own history and experiences.

Two things are striking about the nature of these textual productions, especially the materials produced in Afghanistan or by Central Asian authors about their experiences of exile in Afghanistan: first, the sheer volume of what is being produced in a wide variety of genre and media. Second, the obvious political nature and deeply emotional quality of these writings in which poetry seems to occupy the dominant form and styles of expression. Both of these phenomena, although novel at this time in the history of Central Asian exile literature, are nevertheless not unusual because, politically, they were prevented from any form of self-expression. That is, for well over six decades their heart rendering stories of human suffering were kept untold and were even untellable - i.e., their personal and collective efforts to make sense of the historic events that brought them so much grief under the yoke of an internal colonial occupation were publicly banned. However, as the recent outpouring of textual productions demonstrate, the search for meaning through the muffled voices of those who have lost their watan (homeland) as well as their liberty and, with it, significant aspects of their personal and collective identities, and potentially their self-respect, were not totally silenced.

**TALIBAN, TALIBANISM AND THE LEGACIES OF PERSON-CENTERED POLITICS AND INTERNAL COLONIALISM**

The Afghan rulers accomplished their task by utilising the discourses of Islam, tribe and kinship and Durrani kingship to hold together myriad linguistic, sectarian and tribal groups in virtual subjugation within a buffer state. Resistance and popular revolts against the state were repeatedly crushed with weapons and money outside colonial powers provided to the governments - initially Great Britain and later the Soviet Union. These efforts, however, did not disrupt the kin-based personalised politics of what Edward Banfield17 has termed, "amoral familism" - a tendency to "maximize material, short-run advantage of the ... family [and kin], assuming that all others will do like-wise" - but strengthened them. Indeed, I would argue that the contradictory policies and practices of state building in Afghanistan have promoted a political culture of person-centred politics to the virtual exclusion of nurturing broader and more inclusive national ideologies, institutions and moral principles. Therefore, I also contend that the rise of the Taliban movement during the post-jihad crises of succession, with their form of Islamic extremism or Talibanism, is the inevitable culmination of the legacies of a long history of internal colonialism and the person-centred, Pashtun dominated, Afghan political culture. Some, though by no means all, of the most significant of these legacies which haunts the Afghan body politic now, and may well do so into the distant future, include:

First, the state authorities' consistent policies and practices of political mistrust directed against the great majority of Afghans have promoted a general attitude of distrust of politics and politicians. Such prolonged experiences, in turn have seriously weakened traditional communities of trust (jama'at) - i.e., civil society. And it has caused the general erosion of the 'social capital' of trust beyond the circles of family and close kinsmen or at most one's own ethno-linguistic group.

Second, person-centred, paternalistic politics has encouraged commoditisation of loyalties, the creation of a political economy of dependency and patron-client relationships at all levels of Afghan society, including the increasing dependence of governments on foreign aid. This situation has been exacerbated because of the collapse of the state and the rise of multiple centres of power, all of them receiving assistance (economic and military) from numerous governmental and non-governmental international agencies during the more than two decades of devastating war. This new political ecological condition of continuous warfare has also introduced a new weapon into the arsenals of person-centred political combatants. It is access to a thriving print and electronic media - inside Afghanistan, in Afghan refugee communities around the world as well as the BBC and VOA radio services in Dari and Pashtu languages - utilised for a more effective vilification and demonisation of the opponent's character. These pervasive attempts at mutual character assassinations (of the 'other', defined increasingly in ethnic terms) have left no room for the possibility of constructive dialogue and discussion about national goals, ideas or strategies, and has lead to the inevitable escalation of political contests into violent military conflicts, justified increasingly by adherence to religious extremism and Talibanism.

Third, person-centred politics has placed all ideologies (Islamic and otherwise) and moral principles at the service of preserving self-interest and the protection of personal, familial, tribal or ethnic group honour. This has resulted in serious discrepancies between public policy pronouncements of the contending groups and their actual practices. The rising production of opium poppies and the manufacture, sale and trafficking of illicit drugs in the areas under Taliban control may be a case in point.

Fourth, the treatment of non-Pashtun Afghans as mere internal 'colonial' subjects (not citizens) has produced a deep sense of alienation, resentment and distrust. Their role in national history was depicted as marginal and their participation in national politics was purposefully undermined. That is, through a well established policy of demographic aggression, ranging from resettlement of Pashtun in non-Pashtun territories to underestimating the 'minorities' actual numbers by administrative means,18 their political representation in national assemblies were severely curtailed. At the same time, the non-Pashtun groups were subjected to excessive taxation, appropriation, looting and other extra judicial sanctions. It is because of these painful historical memories of oppression and injustice that the non-Pashtun minorities in Afghanistan are fighting with such powerful determination to resist the Taliban attempt to return the country to the status quo of before the anti-communist jihad (1978). As such their struggle is not simply for access to power, but for freedom of local self-governance19 and fair representation and participation in national politics.

Finally, the ultimate product of the person-centred, tribal Pashtun political culture in Afghanistan is the rise of the Taliban militia movement with its enigmatic, and increasingly apotheosised leader and his militantly anti-Shiah, anti-modern, anti-Western, anti-women and, especially, anti-democratic policies and practices. On 4 April 1996, a gathering of some 1200 mullahs in Kandahar, the spiritual capital of Talibanism, proclaimed the Taliban's 'divinely ordained' reclusive leader, Mullah Omar, the Amirul Mu'mineen (Commander of the Faithful). As the Amirul Mu'mineen, he is the ultimate source for the articulation and enforcement of the 'new' Muslim orthodoxy/orthopraxy of Talibanism in Afghanistan - the basis of his legitimacy. The essence of Talibanism, relying on their particularistic interpretation of Islam, is to deny "the division of society into divergent interests, whether economic, ideological, or what have you." Indeed, religion has "become a means to hide these divisions.... [and] is mobilised in order to avoid the creation of institutions that can express social and ideological differences within the community".20 The rulers of Afghanistan in the past, as well as the Taliban in the present, have tried to maintain the fiction of national homogeneity of their umma or nation - i.e., by equating the name Pashtun with Afghan, which are synonymous in popular usage, and generalising it to cover all those living in Afghanistan, the land of

the 'real' Afghans (the Pashtuns). And, by doing so, they have also "attempted to negate the reality of conflict and resistance by political [and military] suppression of dissent in the community".21

The Taliban project themselves as the bearers of peace and 'true Islamic justice' in the country, a form of justice bent on the enforcement of the harshest principles of hudud in the Shari'ah - for example, the amputating the limbs of thieves, stoning adulterers to death, public execution of murderers by the victims relatives in sport stadiums with thousands of spectators. Their real claim to infamy comes from the imposition of a policy of 'Gender Apartheid' directed against the girls and women of Afghanistan. This collective self-image of Talibanism is further buttressed by the projected images of their foreign Muslim allies, the various conservative and radical Pakistani Muslim political organisations. These include, among others, two factions of the Jamiat-e Ulema Islam (JUI) led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Moulana Samiul Haq, the two rabidly anti-Shiah terrorist groups, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Harakat-ul-Ansar, as well as bin Laden's military organisation, Al-Qa'ida. True to the nature of person-centred tribal political culture, the projected positive 'Islamic' self-images of the Taliban, is contrasted by demonising the Muslim character of their many opponents. Ironically, many of those being damned are in fact well known heroes of the anti-Soviet jihad. Taliban also demonise their opponents' foreign patrons, Muslim and non-Muslim, such as Iran, Russia and the Central Asian republics, except for Turkmenistan.

The rise and successes of Talibanism, fleeting as it may turn out to be, fits well within the structural patterns and dynamics of wars of succession in Afghanistan, at least during the last one hundred years. The mysterious beginnings of the Taliban and their quick adoption by foreign forces - in this instance, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia22 - have had major precedents in Afghan history.23 The economic support of foreign Muslim sponsors has made it possible for the Taliban to purchase loyalties from a huge chain of economically desperate and dependent local commanders (including some Uzbek and Tajik commanders) within the country. These external patrons, by extending official recognition to the Taliban regime, have also condoned the Taliban version of Islamic extremism, as well as facilitating the recruitment of much needed foreign fighters (Pakistanis and others) from Pakistani Muslim seminaries (madrasas) and beyond.

What distinguishes the Taliban and the rise of Talibanism at this juncture in the history Afghanistan, is the radically altered political ecological and economic conditions, both inside Afghanistan and in the region, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. That is, the presence of multiple competing foreign Muslim sponsors, with their divergent or conflicting strategic, ideological, political and economic agenda have proved to be ideal for the emergence of an extremist militia organisation such as the Taliban within the person-centred tribal political culture of the Pashtun in Afghanistan. Indeed, these same political ecological realities in the region have also fuelled the wars of resistance against Taliban hegemony, forcing them to resort to increasingly violent policies and practices against women, Shiahs and the non-Pashtun ethno-linguistic communities in Afghanistan. Any comprehensive solution to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan that could bring a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of Afghanistan must attempt to find a long-term solution to all of these tragic historical legacies of state and society in that beleaguered country.

1 Zalmay Khalilzad and Daniel Byman, 'Afghanistan: the Consolidation of a Rogue State', Washington Quarterly, 23:1 winter 2000, p. 67.

2 See: Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia, Yale University Press, 2000; and various authors in William Maley (ed.), Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban, C. Hurst, London, 1998.

3 Two important exceptions are: Olivier Roy, Afghanistan: from Holy War to Civil War, Darwin Press Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, 1995. Roy examines the evolving relationship between the notions of qawm (language, kinship, sectarian and locality based solidarity groups or ethnicity) and ideologically organised Islamist political groupings during and a couple of years immediately following the Afghan Jihad. And David B. Edwards, Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier, University of California Press, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1996. Edwards blames the

co-existence of three sets of contradictory and incompatible moral codes - honour based ultra-individualism (nang), the universalist moral principles of Islam, and the rules of state and kingship - that underpins Afghan society.

4 See, Zalmay Khalilzad, Daniel Byman, Elie D. Krakowski and Don Ritter, US Policy in Afghanistan: Challenges & Solutions, Afghanistan Foundation White Paper, Washington DC, 1999, p. 7.

5 Parts of my argument on this theme are taken from: Nazif Shahrani, 'The Taliban Enigma: Person-Centered Politics & Extremism in Afghanistan', ISIM Newsletter, 6, pp. 20-21, 2000, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden, The Netherlands

6 For a description and analysis of this phenomena see the classic ethnography of Fredrik Barth, Political Leadership among Swat Pathans. London: Athlone Press, 1959.

7 Eric Wolf, Europe and People without History, University of California Press, Berkeley: UC Press, 1982 p. 94. For a further development of this idea, see M. Nazif Shahrani, 'State Building and Social Fragmentation in Afghanistan: a Historical Perspective', in Ali Banuzizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, Syracuse University Press, 1986, pp. 23-74.

8 For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see M. Nazif Shahrani, 'State Building and Social Fragmentation in Afghanistan: a Historical Perspective', in Ali Banuzizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), ibid., pp. 23-74.

9 See: Sayed Askar Mousavi, The Hazaras of Afghanistan: an Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study, St Martin Press, New York, 1997; Hassan Poladi, Hazaras, Mughal Publishing Co., Stockton, California, 1989; and M. Hasan Kawun Kakar, Government and Society in Afghanistan: the Reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1979.

10 See: Nancy Tapper, 'The Advent of Pushtun Maldars in North-western Afghanistan', Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 36(1), 1973, pp. 55-79; and Jon Anderson and Richard F. Strand (eds.), Ethnic Processes and Intergroup Relations in Contemporary Afghanistan, Asia Society, Afghanistan Council, New York, Occasional Paper No. 15, 1978.

11 See Sayyid Abdulebir Azmi, Amir-i Bukahara, Gaziantep, Turkey 1367/1997, pp. 49.

12 For a detailed discussion of these questions, see M. Nazif Shahrani, 'Pining for Bukhara in Afghanistan: Poetics and Politics of Identity and Exilic Emotions'. Presented to an invited panel on Population Movements in the Middle East, Past and Present: Politics, Ecology, and Cultural Identity, at the 97th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Philadelphia, 2-6 December 1998.

13 See Afifi, Muhammad Ibrahim, 'Mukhtasaraki Khaterat, bakhsh duwum' (Minutia of Memoirs, part two), Omaid Weekly, 244, 1996, p. 4. Also see Muhammad Isma'il Mushfiq, 'Hatam Beg (Atam Beg) Cheguna ba Shahadat Raseed' (How was Hatam Beg [one of Ibrahim Beg's well known commanders] Martyred?), Andisha, 7, 1372/1993, pp. 18-23, published in Mazar-e Sharif, northern Afghanistan.

14 See Kamoloudin Najmudinovich Abdoullaev, 'Central Asian Refugees: a Historical Retrospective,' Central Asian Monitor, 5, 1994, p. 26.

15 Reported in Andisha (Reflection/Mistrust), a short-lived journal published by the Junbushi Milli-i Islami Afghanistan (National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan), in Mazar-e Sharif during General Abdul Rashid Dostum's semi-independent rule (1992-1997/8) in parts of Afghan Turkistan. See 'Wazir Muhammad Gulkhan Muhmand wa Karnamaha-i Fashisti Uo' (Minister Muhammad Gulkhan Muhmand and His Fascistic Legacies), Andisha, 1372/1993, No. 6, pp. 16-43, and No. 7, pp. 24-28.

16 See Audery Shalinsky, Long Years of Exile: Central Asian Refugees in Afghanistan and Pakistan, University Press of America, 1994.

17 Edward Banfield, The Unheavenly City: the Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis, Boston: Little, Brown, 1970, p. 85.

18 A policy that created large numbers of provinces and district units in Pashtun inhabited areas for relatively small numbers of people while creating fewer such electoral units in non-Pashtun areas with larger populations.

19 For further details on the desirability of community based self-governance as a means of resolving the civil war in Afghanistan, see M. Nazif Shahrani, 'The Future of the State and the Structure of Community Governance in Afghanistan', in William Maley (ed.), Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban, Hurst and Company, London, 1998, pp. 212-242.

20 Lahaouari Addi, 'The Islamist Challenge: Religion and Modernity in Algeria', Journal of Democracy, 3, October 1992, p. 4.

21 For a discussion of this general tendency in Islamist political movements and the history of Islamic states, see Fatima Mernissi, 'Arab Women's Rights and Muslim State in the Twenty-first Century: Reflections on Islam as Religion and State', in Mahnaz Afkhami (ed.), Faith & Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World, Syracuse University Press, 1995, pp. 36.

22 For details of the involvement of these two countries and others in the region see Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000; and William Maley (ed.), Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban. London: Hurst & Company, 1998.

23 For example, at the end of the long wars of succession in 1880 when Amir Abdur Rahman, the so called 'Iron Amir' assumed power and, in the 1929 civil war, Nadir Shah came to power, both with patronage from British India and the discourse of jihad against their real and presumed enemies.