

STRATEGIES AND STRUCTURES IN PREVENTING CONFLICT AND RESISTING PRESSURE:

A study of Jaghori District, Ghazni, Afghanistan, under Taliban control

By Mohammad Suleman and Sue Williams, March 2003

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INTRODUCTION

TEAM COMPOSITION

This case study was undertaken by Mohammad Suleman, deputy director of Cooperation for Peace and Unity in Afghanistan, and Sue Williams, an independent consultant based in Northern Ireland. It involved working closely with the Jaghori District Peace Council and with the local NGO GRSP; we appreciate their assistance very much. We were also assisted by two other NGOs, Afghan Development Association (ADA) and Shuhada, and by the willingness of many people to take time for discussions which sometimes brought back painful memories, so that others could learn from them.

METHODOLOGY

This case study is based largely on extensive interviews both with groups and with individuals, most of them roughly two hours in length, but some ranging up to six or seven hours. From bases in two towns in Jaghori District, Sang-e-Masha and Anghori, we visited a number of villages and outlying areas, covering the following list of key informants:

- Elders
- Religious leaders
- Political leaders
- Military commanders (from this era)
- Business
- Teachers
- Medical staff
- Women
- Farmers
- Youth
- NGOs
- Analysts / journalists
- Artists / craftspeople

A bibliography (appended) lists a few useful written sources.

In addition, in order to get a comparative base from which to see whether Jaghori District was "different", we also visited Farza District and interviewed the Peace Council there.

The paper which follows will briefly outline the previous history of the larger region of which Jaghori is a district (called the Hazarajat, the place of the ethnic group called Hazaras) and the patterns of Taliban activity at the time, based on which the people of Jaghori made their decisions and strategies.

The bulk of the case study will be the findings: What happened, what did not happen, who did what and why, what were the factors determining or explaining what happened, and what do they feel they have learned from this.

Then will follow the brief description of Farza District at this time, which carries its own lessons as well as serving as a comparison with Jaghori. Finally, we will offer our own analysis and interpretation of the findings, the learning we see in the case, and any questions remaining.

Caveat

It is worth pointing out that many of those interviewed resisted answering questions about how Jaghori was different. Three reasons were given for this:

1. It would be arrogant to make this claim ourselves.
2. We were just here, so we are not sure what happened elsewhere, and we take for granted what happened here.
3. If we were luckier this time, then perhaps we will suffer more another time.

It was, and remains, our belief that analysing and learning from Jaghori's experience is neither arrogant, nor impossible, nor tempting fate. Although no one else will encounter exactly this situation, many societies are manipulated and pressurised to behave in ways they would rather not. To learn how one set of people resisted pressure and limited destruction will both help them to systematise what they have done, so that they can build on it in future, and give alternatives and hope to people elsewhere who confront a different but somehow similar reality.

By the end of our interviews, many groups and individuals expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to reflect deeply on this episode in their lives and to articulate together some of the lessons for the future. As one speaker said, in talking of the *jihad* against the Soviet invasion: "At that time, we were trained in war, but no one offered to train us in peace. Perhaps we would not have listened; it might have been the wrong time. But we are glad that now we are learning to build peace." The example of the people of Jaghori may help them and others to learn more about building peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We are grateful to the following people and organisations for making this study/research possible:

- for essential funding: Collaborative for Development Action
- for vital logistical & practical support to conduct the field study: Ghazni Rural Support Program (GRSP), Afghan Development Association (ADA), and Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)

- for useful information and friendly meetings: Members of the Jaghori Peace Council, members of the Farza Peace Council, staff of the District Administration Office in Jaghori, members of the Anghori *Shura*¹, members of the Angori women's *Shura*, women group in the literacy class in Toghai, the carpet weavers in Angori, the schoolteachers, the GRSP staff, the Shuhada Staff, the members of the local youth football team, the local journalists/artists, and the local librarians.

We are also indebted to CPAU for giving us support in many different ways. First a big thank you to the management team of CPAU to release Muhammad Suleman, one of their key staff, to participate in this very interesting research project. We also thank CPAU for offering us guidance in choosing the most suitable sites for the research, encouragement and space to get this work completed.

Secondly, thanks are due to the people of Jaghori for their patient efforts to spare some of their valuable time to meet with us, particularly during Mahram days, and share their experience and knowledge and provide us the necessary information for the research.

And lastly, thanks to all those individuals and friends who made our time very enjoyable and more pleasant.

¹ The *shura* is the basic structure of discussion and decision-making in this district, as in all of Afghanistan. It includes elders, community representatives, various kinds of leaders, and sometimes representatives of particular sectors (e.g., business or NGOs.)

HISTORY

HAZARA HISTORY

Hazaras are one of the largest ethnic groups of Afghanistan, living predominately in the central highland called the Hazarajat. There are 24 districts in Hazarajat and Jaghori is one of the largest. All inhabitants of Jaghori are Hazaras who speak Hazaragi Dari and practice the Shia sect of Islam.

As there has never been a systematic census in Afghanistan, little or no reliable data exist regarding the population of the Hazaras. This is one reason why the subject remains a controversial one. The question of the population distribution and numbers has become highly politicised in the last two decades of war and conflict, particularly among the various Afghan groups. However, in the absence of factual data, estimates do exist. The population of Jaghori district is estimated to be 201,000 people.

There are four major clans in Jaghori, each of the clan is then divided into sub clans. The details are as follows:

No	Clan	Sub-clan
1	Ata	Oqee, Maska, Khosha, Baba, Hecha, Sherdagh, Damurda
2	Bagh-e-cheri	Khudaidad, Loman, Bosaïd/Mahajireen, Sherzayeeda, Nadam, Sadat-e-Shashpar
3	Ezderee	Sayed Ahmad Oludal, Khwaja Ali, Mirdad, Khatir
4	Garee	Angori, Daud, Zeerak, Haider

It is believed that Jaghori is the name of a person who lived in this area and he had four sons. Therefore, the name of each clan is then associated with the name of each of his son. It is also believed that during the conflict in the period of King Amir Abdurhman Khan (1881-1901) some people from the Jaghori area migrated to Pakistan, Iran and central Asia. Generally speaking, the Hazaras unfortunately have suffered a lot from the discriminatory policies of some of the rulers of Afghanistan in the past.

ALTERNATIVES SEEN AT THE TIME

Given their own history and what they had seen of Taliban behaviour as successive districts joined or were defeated, the people of Jaghori District saw only two alternative courses of action for themselves: either fight, or negotiate the best deal they could get for surrender. They do not report seriously considering either a simple, outright surrender, nor fleeing the district. This first section focuses on the two alternatives, and the advantages and disadvantages people saw in each. The second part will detail who consulted and decided, and how.

Fight

The following were reported as reasons to fight the Taliban:

- The Hazara had always been discriminated against in Afghanistan. Taliban leaders were Pashtun, whose culture is very different from the Hazara. Given that the Taliban are severe, fundamentalist Sunni Muslims determined to force others to follow their practices, while the Hazara are Shia Muslims, the Hazara could only expect rough treatment of their religious beliefs and practices.
- Many Hazara had already been killed by the Taliban, though not in this district, and many people hated and feared the Taliban.
- The Taliban were particularly severe toward women, and toward women's education, which is a high priority in Jaghori.
- Jaghori's fighters were proud of their successes in previous battles, including the *jihād*. They were reluctant to surrender.

Negotiate a Surrender

Factors favouring negotiating toward a surrender included:

- Most other areas had already been conquered or joined the Taliban.
- The Taliban had outside support and weapons, while Jaghori was a remote district with only itself to rely on.
- War in the area would bring destruction and many casualties.
- If the Taliban won, there would be reprisals against the people of Jaghori (destruction, injury to civilians, possibly forced movement, all of which had taken place in other districts.)
- The Taliban had made a standing offer not to punish people in districts which surrendered to them peacefully.

- Because the Taliban leadership was predominantly Pashtun, and other ethnic groups were represented also, fighting might seriously damage communal relations for a long time.

The people of Jaghori District reported that they were inclined to negotiate the best surrender possible, both because of the balance of reasons listed above, and because of several additional sources of confidence:

- They were confident of their own ability to negotiate.
- They were confident of the solidarity of the leaders and the community in choosing and following a strategy.
- They had confidence and trust in their Pashtun neighbours, though not in the Taliban.
- They had confidence that there would be few Taliban present in such a remote area, in which case local people could find a way around many of the Taliban restrictions.

These were the considerations people reported having in mind at the time that they discussed their decision.

The Process of Decision-Making

At this time (in 1997), as the Taliban approached, but before they actually tried to take Jaghori District, the people of the district saw the need to take their decisions and to act. First, the leaders and community representatives met as a *shura* (the basic, local structure for discussing and deciding issues.) There were 200 of them, and they met at Sang-e-Masha for ten days. During this time, they discussed the situation with each other, and in addition, they consulted military commanders and communicated with the population. They were essentially negotiating with both the commanders and the people, getting their views, sharing other views they had heard, and eventually bringing them to understand, accept, and share the decision reached by the *shura*.

They decided to be pro-active, and to negotiate a surrender while preparing for the time to follow. They sent delegations to meet with the Taliban in Kandahar, Kabul, and Ghazni. This was already quite a sophisticated strategy, as well as a pro-active one. Ghazni is the provincial capital, Kabul the national capital, and Kandahar the seat of Taliban leadership. Negotiating in all three places simultaneously was an acknowledgement that the Taliban were not monolithic, nor strictly hierarchical, so that it might be prudent to negotiate with and get the best agreement possible from all levels of command. The delegations from Jaghori did the following:

- Reminded the Taliban of their promise not to punish those who surrendered

- Reminded them of Islamic teachings about the responsibilities of leaders and soldiers toward civilian populations
- Pointed out the values they shared: Islamic teachings, historical examples, that the people of Jaghori District were fellow Muslims living out shared principles and teachings

Made some precautionary points:

- Reminded them of how much the Russians were hated for their violent behaviour;
- Pointed out that the district was controlled and peaceful, that the people were not misbehaving or fighting among themselves;
- Acknowledged that their culture was different, but that it was modest and Islamic;
- Pointed out that, if the Taliban were not extreme in their behaviour, people of the district would be more easily governed and also would not kill them (a thinly-veiled threat);
- Insisted on the importance of education, including the education of girls and women, to people of the district.

The delegations exhibited some of the key strategies decided upon: to act preventively, to inform, to communicate, to build contacts, and to set out their own values and priorities as standards, not in opposition to what the Taliban might do. Thus, they set out their interpretation of Islamic teachings and their commitment to women's education as foundations of their lives, not as defeated people seeking concessions, but as equals negotiating an agreement. They initiated negotiations before fighting had commenced, while the Taliban were still preoccupied with military battles in other places.

During this time, the community representatives continued to communicate with the people, keeping them well-informed and getting their views. As expected, the community demonstrated a high degree of solidarity in supporting the decisions and strategies.

Evidence from Interviews

In our interviews, there was consistent awareness of the operations of the *shura*, the alternatives facing the population, the key advantages and disadvantages of fighting and surrendering, and the preventive insistence on girls' education as the key priority. Different groups, understandably, had different degrees of inside knowledge of processes and negotiations. Members of the *shura*, community and religious leaders, military commanders, and members of the negotiating delegations were able to tell the full story, complete with alternatives under consideration at various points. Farmers, women, businessmen, and other ordinary citizens were generally unaware of the details of choices, negotiations, and temporary setbacks, while quite aware of the broad choices and decisions, and tending to see the eventual results as having been achieved from the beginning. Only

the youth, who would have been children at this time, were unaware of much of what had happened, how, and why.

RESULTS

The *shura* offered explicit grounds for an agreement: That the military units in Jaghori would turn in their arms, return and be re-integrated into their villages, and promise not to go to war, provided that the Taliban would promise not to commit atrocities or interfere in cultural affairs. This was the basis for the settlements with all three levels of Taliban leadership. The Taliban insisted on limiting girls to primary education, though the *shura* insisted that this was not acceptable and that they would continue to negotiate, persuade, and work toward full education.

On the basis of these agreements, arms were handed in and Taliban control was imposed, keeping in place many of the existing structures, changing a few individuals for others trusted by the Taliban, and adding a layer of Taliban leaders responsible for administering the district. People reported that, though the people of Jaghori kept their side of the bargain, the Taliban did not. In particular, there were some individuals tortured or hounded out of the district, and considerable interference in Hazara cultural affairs (see next section.)

The *shura* continued its strategies of information, negotiation, persuasion, secrecy, and solidarity. In a few instances, this extended to the point of bordering on bribery or veiled threats, though these were rarely used. Generally, the district was able to maintain its most important priorities and to resist pressure to change, through the consistent hard work of leaders and the consistent solidarity of the population.

FINDINGS

IMPACT AND STRATEGIES

Over the course of the four years of Taliban control and eventual collapse, the Jaghori community and its *shura* adopted a variety of strategies to cope with actual and anticipated negative impacts.

1. Destruction and Casualties

- The *shura* took immediate, preventive strategies, as described in the previous section, to forestall battles, defeat, and reprisals.
- When young fighters wanted to battle the Taliban, religious leaders met with them to discourage them. Military commanders had a two-pronged strategy: to discourage them from fighting, and to put them to work instead to preserve security.
- Fighters were encouraged, as they had been during the *jihad* against the Soviets, to try to ensure that, if battles were necessary, they took place in the mountains, far from inhabited areas. This would minimise civilian casualties and destruction of property, as well as reprisals against civilians.
- The *shura* itself, and other existing structures, exerted control over people's behaviour, to make it less likely that Taliban would punish them.

For all of these reasons, although there was some impact on the district, it was limited, and less than in most other districts. Although there were people beaten and intimidated out of the area, there were few killed. Jaghori was reportedly able to hold onto most of its earlier developmental gains, and even progress a little bit, as for example through the establishment of electrical cooperatives.

2. Violence

The Taliban were well known for the violence of their treatment of ordinary people who transgressed their many and increasingly restrictive rules.

- In Jaghori as elsewhere, they beat and publicly humiliated many people. The *Shura's* main strategy to limit this was to encourage people to control their public behaviour so as not to come to the attention of the Taliban. At the same time, they continued to remind Taliban leaders that extreme behaviour would make the district more difficult to govern, and potentially make them hated to the point where someone might attack them.
- The Taliban did succeed in hounding or intimidating some people to leave the district, particularly the well-educated and outspoken. However, local solidarity meant that,

unlike in other areas, most people refused to accept Taliban standards of behaviour or punishment or to join the Taliban in punishing fellow citizens. People generally held to the view that this kind of violent punishment was not part of local culture.

- One group, the women's literacy class in Touray village, reported that the impact of Taliban violence was to increase and legitimise violence in the home. They reported that, after experiencing or witnessing public beatings and humiliation, men would come home and beat women, and women would beat children. Men did not confirm this, nor did women interviewed in the presence of men. The literacy class did report that this impact has diminished since the Taliban left.

4. Education

Beginning even before the arrival of the Taliban, Jaghori delegations presented education as their key priority, the one area where they would be prepared to confront and resist restrictions. As elsewhere, the Taliban began with the position that only Koranic teachings were necessary. With some difficulty, the *shura* was able to negotiate to allow primary education for both boys and girls, and post-primary education for boys only. They were not able to get the Taliban to agree to post-primary education for girls, but they continued to insist that this was a high priority for them.

The key strategy to limit the negative impact of educational restrictions was to build contact with the Taliban Education Officer. In addition to laying out their own commitment to education and the Islamic support of it, they also told him that, if schools remained open, people would not kill him, and would help him build his house. It is not clear what the weight of different factors was; the clear values and priorities, the character of the Education Officer himself, the implied threat or bribe. However, the Education Officer did become an ally. After some time, he allowed schools to open, provided that they were closed whenever a Taliban delegation was visiting. He also allowed women to be employed as teachers, at a time when all education ceased in some districts because women were not allowed to teach.

- In the first months of Taliban control, many girls were educated in secret or in home schools, as in most of the rest of the country. Some girls would dress as boys in order to continue their schooling, or would dress in the burqa and appear to be adult women going about ordinary errands.
- Although most Afghans even now believe that no girls' high schools were open in Taliban times, they were open in Jaghori. The Education Officer would warn people when a delegation was expected, and schools would close temporarily. This compromise allowed the girls to continue their education.
- Even when delegations were present, there were strategies to continue girls' education. Some schools had both primary and high school, and people would insist that the little girls were students and the big ones teachers. Other girls would be dispersed to primary schools and introduced as teachers. This, of course, depended on community solidarity:

When the Taliban visitors asked about girls' schools, everyone replied that there were none.

- The Taliban insisted on a "correct" curriculum, limited to approved Islamic teachings. In Jaghori, schools continued to teach science, history, and math as usual. When delegations were expected, they would use Taliban-approved materials.
- It was a risky time to be a teacher. Teachers showed their commitment by continuing under such difficult circumstances. They reported that the community supported them strongly. One NGO, Shuhada, increased teachers' salaries during the most difficult time.
- One head of school reported another strategy. When a Taliban member seemed to be spying on a particular school, determined to get it closed, he was invited to become a teacher at that school. This seems to have allayed suspicions and relieved the pressure.
- Teacher training was completely banned. Experienced local teachers assisted young ones. Occasionally, a seminar would be held in secret. Opportunities were found to send teachers to training seminars in nearby countries. Nevertheless, this is one area where there is real negative impact. Many older teachers retired or left the country, and those who replaced them had little training and no follow-up. It is now a major priority of the community and local NGOs to close this gap.
- Throughout this time, there was no outside assistance with education. The local community built and repaired schools and provided all materials necessary, with some support from local NGOs.

As a result of these strategies and commitment, the impact of Taliban restrictions on education was much less than elsewhere. The community is proud of its commitment to education of girls as well as boys. This is the one area where they will actually admit to being proud of what they have done (pride being normally unacceptable.) This is also the first thing most people mention when asked whether Jaghori was different from other districts during this time.

5. Women's Situation

The Taliban are, of course, well known for imposing restrictions on women. They justify these as Islamic restrictions, although many scholars dispute this. Women everywhere in the country were confined by the concept of "purdah", of being unseen by men other than relatives. In many rural areas, this did not have such a great impact, since houses were built with rather large compounds, and since it was accepted that families lived among relatives. Women were therefore permitted to move freely within their own compounds and those of relatives.

- In Hazara, the traditional architectural style is of a house only, with no compound. The Taliban restrictions therefore had the effect of limiting women to the interior of the house only. This meant that women had little access to fresh air, sunshine, or socialisation even with other women.

- If women went to the local bazaar to buy supplies, or tried to continue with employment or to seek health care or other services, they were severely punished. This had the effect of intimidating most women from attempting to leave their homes. It was almost impossible even to visit a doctor or take a sick child or elderly relative to be treated.
- Restrictions on movement were particularly severe for women who lacked male relatives to accompany them. Since Jaghori is a district with a very high rate of out-migration (of young men working outside the country and sending back remittances), many women were severely affected by these restrictions.
- As elsewhere in the country, the Taliban officially forbade women to take up employment or education.
- However, as it became apparent that the community would be warned when official Taliban delegations were expected, many women did continue as teachers or health workers, and left their homes for shopping, errands, or to visit doctors. Schools and medical centres continued to employ some women, while others made provisions for home schooling and home health care. They were aware that they were running a risk in doing this, but knew also that the community supported them and would not report them.
- Elders and community leaders continued their strategy of information and communication, repeatedly emphasising to the Taliban that the local culture was different, that there was no tradition of restricting women, and no justification for it in the Koran. They also reminded the Taliban that everyone suffered if women were unable to go about their usual tasks, and that this suffering might cause people to hate the Taliban and even attack them.

6. *Inter-Communal Relations*

All over Afghanistan, the Taliban (like many rulers before them) exploited ethnic and religious differences to divide and rule. In their early thinking, the members of the Jaghori *shura* were particularly worried about this. Jaghori is surrounded on three sides by Pashtun groups, and Hazara and Pashtun had made good relations, reciprocity and interdependence a priority for generations. The tradition was that communal conflicts were dealt with by bringing the two sets of elders together. In addition, intractable conflicts within each community were often referred to arbitrators from the other community as trusted neutral parties.

- When the *shura* met, their unwillingness to fight the Taliban had partly to do with the perception of their ethnic make-up as largely Pashtun (and including a mixture of other non-Hazara groups with whom they did not want to establish bad relations, either.)
- They made contact with old allies who had now joined the Taliban, to re-activate those relationships and get them to act as intermediaries and guarantors. They recognised the need to build trust, so that the Taliban would believe their assurances that no one would kill them.

- They continued to maintain good relations with neighbouring Pashtun groups, invoking shared traditions and continuing the pattern of elders meeting together regularly.
- In the first year of their control, the Taliban imposed a blockade on Jaghori, refusing to allow food or essential supplies to pass. Pashtun neighbours came at night to bring food.
- Four years later, with coalition forces bombing and Taliban control collapsing, local businessmen decided to agree to supply money to enable Pashtun Taliban to return home.
- Having promised that the Taliban leaders in Jaghori would not be killed, the *shura* saw to it that they were accompanied home safely.

7. Interference in Cultural Affairs

This was a broad area, encompassing many different ways in which the district's distinctive culture was under pressure from a group which did not acknowledge cultural relativity. Some of these kinds of interference have already been mentioned, e.g., in the section on Education.

- People reported that they resisted strongly the pressure to abandon what they saw as their tradition of a peaceful and principled culture, in favour of the Taliban culture of violence, humiliation, and self-serving. On one level, this resistance occurred internally, as people did not take up behaviours of humiliation or return to the gun. At another level, there was considerable pressure on organisations engaged in practical work, whether businesses, local administration, or NGOs, to engage in bribery and corruption. As one NGO manager reported: "We cooperated where we could, we resisted where we felt we had to, and sometimes we compromised." A memorable example was the Food for Work programme. The Taliban insisted that they should receive the standard rations without doing manual work. The agreement negotiated was that they would receive rations for working 6 hours rather than the standard 8. They were put to work building the District Administration Office (which still brings a smile to the faces of those involved.)
- Meetings of people were banned, because they were seen as threatening. In this district of frequent consultation and discussion of issues, this restriction was a serious problem. The main strategy here was to meet secretly, not to confront the Taliban on this point, but not to lose the tradition of communication and shared decision-making. The leaders kept reminding the Taliban (1) that they had nothing to fear from the unarmed population, but (2) that even unarmed people could kill them if they were hateful enough.
- Music was, as everywhere, forbidden. Sometimes, people played music in their own homes, and usually got away with it, though some musicians were publicly beaten for this, and one traditional instrument was "hanged" in the Taliban office. Another strategy was to adapt traditional music to leave out the instruments, sing *a cappella*, and insist that this was their own form of prayer.

- There was considerable pressure to close libraries and many books were burned. Religious leaders worked hard to maintain libraries of religious books, often by hiding them, as well as by insisting that religious scholarship should be supported by the Taliban. While the national library in Kabul was destroyed, local libraries continued to function for some time. When one librarian was finally hounded into exile (after being required to report every 24 hours to the Vice and Virtue Police), the community showed its support by keeping the books safely hidden and returning them when he was able to return.
- As everywhere, the Taliban interfered minutely in issues of dress and appearance. Women were required to wear the *burqa*, men the turban, and men's hair and beards were measured and criticised. This was not the issue on which the district was prepared to risk confrontation. However, they did succeed in getting the local Taliban administration to look the other way with respect to children's attire. Only when a Taliban delegation was expected were boys required to put on turbans and girls the *burqa*.
- A particular grievance was that the traditional form of greeting between men includes an embrace and a kiss on the cheek. This was forbidden by the Taliban, and led to many beatings. Despite considerable negotiation and persuasion, this continued to be a problem.

Of course, when the Taliban power collapsed, Jaghori returned immediately and happily to its traditional greetings, costumes, music, and other cultural practices.

8. Impact on the Taliban

Several speakers reported that the district had had some degree of success, not only in limiting the impact of the Taliban, but also in having its own impact on them. They reported that the Taliban arrived as rather brutal, uneducated men, accustomed to dealing harshly with other people. After years of exposure to the courtesy and constructive interactions of the people of Jaghori, they became less brutal. They found that brutality did not work well with these people, did not cause them to become fragmented and argumentative, but on the contrary seemed to make them more determined to resist. As one man reported: "When the Taliban behaved in their usual ways, the population did not respond as others did. They exhibited less reactivity, more solidarity, and were more clear about their values and priorities." In the end, as Taliban rule collapsed and many were killed in revenge, those serving in Jaghori were escorted safely home. This lesson will not be lost, people feel; it is an investment in good future relations.

IMPACT AND STRATEGIES: CONCLUSIONS

The assessment of people both inside and outside the district is that Jaghori was different during the Taliban time. This is particularly clear in the district's ability to continue women's education, and to limit the restriction of women. Some people were aware of this difference. Others believed that no post-primary education of girls occurred at this time,

though it is now clear that it did continue in Jaghori. Many people outside Jaghori were aware of the difference, but not of how or why it occurred. Inside the district, most people attributed the difference to the early meetings, the extensive consultations, and the preventive strategies undertaken. Jaghori was better able to ward off destruction and resist pressure because people were analysing and reacting to possibilities before they were confronted with actualities.

The next section will report how people in Afghanistan accounted for Jaghori being different. If preventive strategies were the “how,” what was the “why”? What were the factors which enabled the people of Jaghori to devise and implement strategies to resist Taliban pressure?

FACTORS CITED TO ACCOUNT FOR DIFFERENCES IN JAGHORI

When asked what factors explain why Jaghori District was better able to prevent damaging consequences of war and resist Taliban pressure, there was remarkable uniformity among respondents’ replies: **Because of the high level of awareness among the general population.**

1. Awareness

This encompassed several key factors:

- Education levels
- High levels of opinion formation and expression
- Participation in discussions, consultations, and (at least through representatives) decision-making
- Awareness of the connections between their situation and regional, national, and international levels
- Uniformly high levels of all of these, that is, among women as well as men, rural as well as town populations

In one form or many, this factor was mentioned prominently by every individual and group interviewed. Those outside the district cited only the first and last, that is, high levels of education and literacy among the whole population.

People saw this factor as enabling and predisposing the population of the district to discuss what to do about the Taliban well before the military threat was present. It also enabled them to know what alternatives were under consideration, to contribute their views through representatives, and to understand and support decisions and strategies which were chosen by the *shura*. As was clear in the section on Impact and Strategies, the general population demonstrated great solidarity during this time. This solidarity, in turn, is

considered a key reason that negotiation and other strategies succeeded in limiting the damage and restrictions of the Taliban. The high level of public awareness made possible earlier, more preventive actions and kept the population united in supporting agreed strategies. The Taliban were unable to exploit divisions and doubts to manipulate the population.

Other Factors

A great many other factors were also mentioned to explain how Jaghori was different. In descending order of frequency, they were:

2. Individual Example²

This was distinct from the role of leaders, whether religious, military, or civilian, because people cited here did not occupy positions of leadership. These were people who exhibited particular conviction, courage, or charisma in their actions or public statements, beyond what would have been expected of them. A number of specific examples were cited here, some of them historical figures, most of them active during the Taliban time, of which we will give two examples:

- Dr. Seema Samar was mentioned several times for her leadership as head of a prominent NGO, her commitment to the district, and the example she set as a woman.
- A woman whose name was not known was mentioned several times for having spoken out in the bazaar against the Taliban restrictions on women. She was targeted by the Taliban, and in the end left the district at that time, but she continued to be held up as an example of courage and forthrightness as an anonymous, ordinary person.

3. Religious Leaders³

This factor was cited by many of those interviewed and in several forms, some of them contradictory.

- Individual religious leaders, specifically a man named Burhani, were remarked for their courage as well as their scholarship. He frequently confronted the Taliban leadership, both before they took control and throughout their rule. He reminded them of their responsibilities according to the Koran. He challenged their mullahs to discuss the Koran and Islamic practices, but he was more scholarly than they, and

² This factor was cited by the following kinds of groups and individuals: teachers, youth, journalists, NGOs, military, women, and local leaders.

³ This factor was cited by: local administrations, teachers, NGOs, journalists, women.

knew more about both Sunni and Shia practices, so they never dared debate him. In part because of him, the district was able to defend its priorities in terms the Taliban found difficult to reject.

- The institution of religious leadership in general was considered an important factor as well. This covered a range of interventions, from persuading young men not to take up arms, to ensuring that the population was well-behaved and therefore less likely to be punished by the Taliban, to making mosques available for girls' schools.
- There were also interlocutors who cited the opposite, that there were religious leaders who were opposed to any education other than the madrassas, and who tried to get girls' schools closed. This mixed view included the observation that some religious leaders allied themselves with Iran as a Shia power, and tried to influence the community in that direction. A balanced example was one group's observation that moderate religious leaders made helpful interventions, while more extremist or fundamentalist religious leaders tended to oppose resistance to the Taliban or to favour alliance with Iran.

4. *Leadership*⁴

This category described patterns of leadership, rather than individual leaders, although individuals were sometimes cited as examples to illustrate the pattern. This factor also illustrates the boundaries to the role of individual example and religious leaders cited above. Everyone agreed that the quality of leadership here depends on the awareness and participation of the general population. Those who aspire to be leaders depend on the consent of the people. This takes the specific form that people sometimes simply refuse to follow a leader, boycott or ostracise him, and he must eventually resign in disgrace (and generally leaves the district.) Numerous examples were offered. Perhaps particularly interesting is the choice of representatives to the Loya Jirga, the national meeting which eventually selected the current government. As in many districts, military commanders, religious leaders, and political party leaders stood for election, as well as community leaders. Several interlocutors reported on the process, and we will quote the most graphic of these. "Some who wanted to be elected were already discredited. People wanted to throw rotten fruit at them to keep them from standing, but we said: Let anyone stand, and they may not get any votes. Some were publicly discredited by getting no votes, and left the district. We selected 80 representatives, all of them educated people, including elders and women and all kinds of community representatives, and a doctor got the most votes of all."

5. *Channels Of Information*⁵

This factor is an aspect of the key element, public awareness. Channels of information were maintained in both directions, i.e., representatives kept people well-informed of issues and alternatives, and people expected representatives to solicit and express their views. It was frequently cited, as well, in a way which emphasised the structural aspects, that is: Jaghori

⁴ This factor was cited by: local administrations, journalists, women, NGOs, and people outside the district.

⁵ This factor was cited by: journalists, NGOs, military, local administrations, and people outside the district.

District was better able to resist pressure and prevent confrontation with the Taliban because there were in place structures and channels which spread information among the populace and the administrative systems. When people heard rumours, they knew how to check whether they were true, and were therefore less easily stampeded into emotional reactions. When new issues or problems arose, people knew how to inform others and get ideas of how to respond. In the early days of Taliban rule, particularly, interlocutors mentioned the importance of everyone knowing what had been negotiated, of monitoring and reporting when the Taliban violated their agreements, and of trusting that problems would be dealt with by their representatives.

6. *International Involvement*⁶

This was another factor cited both as an advantage and a disadvantage. There was positive acknowledgement of the role of international agencies in providing assistance, particularly in overcoming the food embargo and in continuing women's education and employment. The role of coalition forces in attacking the Taliban was acknowledged as a mixed blessing; the following quotes are examples: "We could not have got rid of the Taliban by ourselves, but it would have been better to do it in another way." "Even peace was imposed upon us." Several people felt that the district had learned important lessons, and was no longer so easily fooled by smooth operators from outside. "We now understand that, when the Russians invaded, and Pakistan gave us weapons, it was not to defend ourselves, but them."

7. *Solidarity / Communal Relations / Not Divided Politically*⁷

In this context, solidarity meant that people were able to remain united and to continue to uphold what they had decided, in the face of considerable pressure by the Taliban to divide them. In many districts, ethnic groups or political parties were set against each other, or one sector such as business was played off against another, such as elders or religious leaders. In Jaghori, people reported that solidarity was maintained. There had been political divisions, but people transcended these during the Taliban time. Inter-communal relations had always been a high priority. As was mentioned earlier, maintaining good relations with neighbouring Pashtun was a primary reason for negotiating rather than fighting the Taliban. In the early Taliban times, neighbouring Pashtun groups violated the blockade against Jaghori and brought food at night. At the end, as the Taliban regime collapsed, the people of Jaghori escorted Pashtun Taliban safely home.

8. *Out-Migration*⁸

It was, of course, a disadvantage that Jaghori was so poor that many young men needed to seek work elsewhere and send home remittances to support their families. Many people also saw the side-benefits, however. In particular, people who lived away from home brought back new ideas and different ways of understanding the world. This was

⁶ This factor was cited by: local administrations, women, the *shura*, and people outside the district.

⁷ This factor was mentioned by teachers, journalists, youth, NGOs and a local peace council.

⁸ Cited by: teachers, NGOs, journalists, and a local peace council.

considered one of the factors which helped the people of Jaghori to resist and to think of alternatives to the relentless pressure of the Taliban.

9. *Peace-Loving Culture*⁹

Some people believed that their local culture and traditions were just naturally more peaceful than others and that they themselves were more peace-loving. It would be difficult either to prove or disprove this, but it was a conviction of some of the local population. They acknowledged that this district had, at times, participated in wars, such as the *jihad* against the Soviets. They also cited historical examples of peace-loving leaders and peace initiatives.

10. *NGOs*¹⁰

A few of those interviewed thought that NGOs had, through their commitment and professionalism, set an example of principled resistance to the Taliban. Their staff generally tried to be open in their dealings with Taliban leadership, and to cooperate with them when possible. They continued to provide assistance to the population at a time of great difficulty and at some risk to themselves. They were often put in a difficult position, asked to provide bribes in order to continue their work¹¹. Here, they tried not to reinforce or legitimise administrative corruption, though this sometimes meant long negotiations and compromises.

11. *Remoteness / Time*¹²

These factors were intertwined explanations that Jaghori benefited from being remote, and, in part for this reason, one of the last districts to fall to the Taliban. This is an acknowledgement that people here had more time than others to see what was happening, to anticipate what might happen to them, to consider, and to take preventive action. Although it was not explicitly mentioned by a great many of those interviewed, it is likely that it was understood implicitly by nearly all of them, and simply taken for granted. Implied in this is the recognition that other districts may have been strategically more important, historically enemies of the Pashtun, or simply located in a front-line area, all of which would have made it more difficult to act preventively to resist.

⁹ Cited by a local peace council, local administration, teachers, and women.

¹⁰ Cited by teachers and a doctor.

¹¹ Some people reported that international agencies in some areas did provide bribes in order to continue their work. While understandable, this had the effect of undermining ethical behaviour.

¹² These factors were cited by journalists, a military commander, and a peace council.

LESSONS DRAWN BY THE COMMUNITY

“If you plant an apple tree, and tend it well, when it bears good fruit, it will be a positive experience for others as well as yourself. If you tend it badly, it will be a sour experience for everyone.”¹³

In the course of interviews, people drew a variety of lessons which they hoped to pass on to their own children, or to people elsewhere. In general, they were quite similar, tending to emphasise the following points:

- The importance of peace, which cannot be taken for granted
- Afghanistan should be seen as contributing constructively to world peace.
- The importance of discussion and participation to permit preventive strategies
- Peace requires sacrifice. Often, we are more willing to make sacrifices for war than for peace. Everyone bears this responsibility.
- The importance of the community’s unity and commitment to shared priorities
- Culture:
 - The importance of a culture of peace rather than war
 - Cultural heritage can be destroyed, and is irreplaceable.
- Experiences should be shared with others: other districts, other countries, as well as future generations.
- It is necessary to confront problems in the world: hunger and racism as well as violations of human rights.
- Jaghori remains under-developed. Do government and the international community understand that they could (unintentionally) be teaching the lesson that violence pays off in attention and aid?
- The importance of being aware of issues, and of how local problems are linked to national and international levels

In addition, there was a serious division between those who felt that these issues should be discussed and analysed, and those who felt that doing so would only re-open old wounds and disagreements. This divergence had, at least in part, to do with whether the speaker believed that the culture of violence still controlled people’s behaviour. Those who believed this, tended to favour remaining silent about the past unless new dilemmas required that leaders teach people about strategies in the past.

¹³ In this area, where there are fruit orchards everywhere, and everyone knows the name of the former Minister of Agriculture who introduced the best varieties of apple trees, this is a particularly fitting metaphor.

Questions about distinctive roles for women prompted only one observation, from a women's *shura*: Men made war and peace. Women were just observers.

ANALYSIS

So far, this report has been closely based on interviews with individuals and groups in Afghanistan, using their comments as evidence and presenting the results of their analysis. This next section gives us the opportunity to reflect on what we saw and heard, and to show how we understood and weighted different views.

There came a moment when it seemed clear that, in order to understand what had and had not happened in Jaghori, we needed to talk with people outside the district. For purposes of comparison, we chose Farza District, north of Kabul, which had suffered considerable destruction and damage under the Taliban. We also interviewed a variety of people in Kabul itself. This section, then, will present a brief, comparative description of Farza, followed by our analysis, lessons drawn, and questions remaining.

COMPARISON WITH FARZA DISTRICT

Farza District, north of Kabul, is noticeably different from Jaghori. Its experience at this time was altogether different. It had been considerably more prosperous. It represented a strategic advantage, being located in the hills overlooking Kabul. It was the front line of the war at some stages, and changed hands several times. People here took up arms and fought long and hard against the Taliban. There was a lot of physical and infrastructural damage, including the destruction of most of the vineyards and orchards as well as the buildings. Many people were killed. At one stage, the Taliban imposed as a reprisal that everyone must leave the district, so it was deserted for a time. Schools were closed and destroyed. Eventually, local fighters were able to win back this district and the Taliban fell back, eventually collapsing altogether.

On the face of it, this experience is very different from that of Jaghori District. The differences make clear that Jaghori really did have a degree of success in preventing damage and resisting pressure to close schools, which was not possible here, nor even attempted. Neither district was critical of the other, understanding that their circumstances were different, and so were their choices.

Farza had its successes, as well. People were proud of having fought, endured, and eventually contributed to defeating the Taliban. They were disappointed to acknowledge that they had been manipulated and divided along political party lines, while pointing out that some people resisted even then, and it is important to learn from them. Yet they had resisted pressure to divide along ethnic lines (the district is 60% Pashtun, 40% Tajik), and maintained good relationships and many mixed families throughout this time. They were also very clear that they had learned lessons from this time:

Until recently, we knew war, we knew fighting, we knew how to use guns to get what we wanted. After defeating the Taliban, we gave up our guns willingly (to the government

disarmament programme.) Now, we understand the benefits of peace, the disadvantages of war. This kind of discussion has reminded us of the good things we had, the solidarity, our own good leadership. We must make the same sacrifices we made for the *jihad*, but now for peace.

People acknowledge that they were vulnerable to both economic and political pressure. The *shura* continues to function, and will be their key mechanism for working together in future. They are also particularly proud of their commitment to reconciliation. Then, as during Soviet times, even if local people joined the hated regime, their families were not targeted and their property was kept safe. Since the collapse of the Taliban, there have been special services in the mosque, and “We have even forgiven the Taliban, because the religious leaders said to.” So far, there have been no reprisals or court cases.

All over Afghanistan, people did what they could at the time of the Taliban, as they had during previous wars and invasions. No one had the perfect answer, but all districts did some things from which others can learn. Farza, like Jaghori District, was anxious for opportunities to meet and learn from others.

AUTHORS' ANALYSIS

The experience of Jaghori District is important to an understanding of how communities work to prevent conflict and war, and to resist strong pressure to change their culture and priorities. It offers a complex, nuanced example of determination and perseverance. This is not a stark, heroic, sacrificial stance (although there is certain heroism in persisting against such unremitting pressure.) This is an example of pragmatism as well as principle.

The people of Jaghori did what they could and what they had to. Their shared commitment met Taliban pressure particularly on the issue of women's education. In the final analysis, the community was successful. Jaghori did not suffer extensive battle damage or casualties. Girls continued their education. Local structures maintained their authority and their integrity. The Taliban came and went, and the people of Jaghori remained committed to the education of all their children, to Shia Islam, to consultative decision-making through the *shura*, and to good relations with their Pashtun neighbours. They feel they were fortunate, so much so that many were not sure they wanted to talk about these issues at all, for fear of re-opening old wounds, appearing arrogant or tempting fate. All of those asked did agree to reflect on this time, and almost without exception they ended the discussion with gratitude for the opportunity to describe what they had achieved and to draw new lessons from it.

The people interviewed have outlined already the key factors in their successful resistance. It is worth noting that much of what was said seemed to be taken for granted by local people. For purposes of discussion, they articulated elements which seemed obvious to them, reacted to our perceptions, and thereby saw things a bit differently. The simple processes of framing issues, of asking about things which did not happen, of comparing with other places, of making different assumptions about what might have happened, all of these

processes contributed to the evidence cited in this report. Our analysis, then, is really just a re-framing. It is our effort to understand by re-arranging the furniture (the local knowledge which is the only real basis for understanding this experience.)

It seems to us that there are five key factors in the Jaghori resistance, which in turn incorporate the ten factors listed by local people, and which in some ways show different facets of the experience.

1. Probably the key to the resistance was **the use of preventive strategies**. The fact of early awareness, consultations and decisions meant that the *shura* was in a position to negotiate. Throughout this time, strategies were adapted and invented to deal with changing circumstances. Precautions were taken because people continued to hypothesise and to deal with possible problems. Each strategy involved dealing in different ways with a variety of authorities, trying different tactics, compromising, and persevering.
2. Being strategic depended in turn on **trusted patterns of leadership and participation**. The community's awareness of possible future problems, its shared view of alternatives, and its solidarity in supporting decisions all reflect the traditions of community participation and bounded leadership. Everyone understood and accepted the process of consultation, representation, and decision-making. They trusted leaders to carry out responsibilities, and they knew what they would do if the leaders turned out not to be trustworthy. All of this made prevention possible.
3. The third key element for preventive strategies was **structures already in place**. At the moment when the *shura* met to consider what to do about the approaching Taliban, it was far too late to begin inventing a consultative structure or channels to send information up and down. Prevention was possible because systems existed which everyone knew and trusted. There were village and district structures in place, with representatives already selected and in communication with the community. The *shura* gathered, as they would when the Taliban fell, to consider pro-actively what to do next. War tends to disrupt systems, so having good ones already known and working is a great advantage in mitigating the damages of war.
4. There were also within this community **existing skills** which would prove to be essential. Between the civic, military, and religious leaders and the community representatives, there were experienced negotiators, community mobilisers, Koranic scholars, legalists, linguists, and cross-cultural interpreters. All of these skills were called upon in this era. They also noticed what they did not know, and invoked networks and alliances to find out, for example, the military as well as the religious structure of the Taliban.
5. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there were **clear, shared values and principles**. They knew and agreed about what was important, and what could be compromised. Ordinary people as well as leaders were aware of the community's priorities, able to articulate them, explain them, defend them. On the one hand, this enabled the community to demonstrate the solidarity which was so important. In addition, it flummoxed the Taliban, who were accustomed to being the people with clear values, imposing them on communities which were confused and divided in their disagreement about what was important.

The combination of all these factors enabled Jaghori to take some measure of control over their situation, even in the face of Taliban implacability. This is, of course, a process of reading backwards, of attributing effects to causes. It is quite possible that this is not a unique, inevitable causality, that is, different kinds of things might have happened or have been explained in other ways. It is apparent, however, that the people of this community explained this experience in a surprisingly uniform way. As one source said: "People in other areas may not know exactly what happened or why, but they have certainly noticed the basic facts: That girls continued to be educated, and that we suffered less damage than most." There was a degree of success in both prevention and resistance, and everyone has noticed it.

LESSONS AND LEARNINGS

In addition to the lessons identified by the community, we would add a few more. Perhaps because we carry experiences and viewpoints from the wider world, we have not taken these events for granted. We have tended to look at this case in a somewhat broader perspective, and have drawn lessons accordingly.

Prevention

The keys to the prevention of destruction in this case are in early awareness and having in place ways to deal with conflicts. The *shura* acted long before they were confronted with actual Taliban fighters. They had in place structures, traditions, skills, and considerable solidarity and shared values. They had, in a sense, already acted preventively, by having devoted time and attention to developing their own capacities and the level of public awareness. This earlier investment enabled them to respond quickly, creatively, and strategically.

In addition, they were not overwhelmed by the threat. Many groups thought it was useless to try to fight or negotiate with the Taliban, because they were ruthless fighters, and because they were strongly supported by external forces. Jaghori District thought it was possible to manage the local consequences, even if it could not defeat the Taliban and their backers. These people persevered.

Resistance

In many ways, what can be learned from this case study about resistance revolves around perceptions. In these circumstances, many people would have perceived themselves to be powerless, indeed, many did. This would have deterred them from attempting to devise any strategies for lessening the impact of the Taliban. Because the people of Jaghori District perceived themselves to have some possibility to influence their situation, they looked for and invented alternatives. Because they perceived themselves to be unified, they were. Because they were confident of their ability to negotiate in their own interests, they were strategic in choosing which priorities to emphasise, which battles to fight. Because they perceived themselves to be on a footing of equality with the Taliban, they negotiated as equals, cooperated where they could, compromised where they had to, held to their

priorities, and thus presumably influenced the Taliban by behaving as equals, rather than as supplicants.

Luck

Perhaps the community was also correct in attributing some of their success to luck. Certainly, it is wise and humble to consider factors beyond human control. However, even luck might not have helped if they had not been so well-prepared and so hard-working. To be well-prepared, when you do not know what you are preparing for, is perhaps the ultimate in prevention.

APPENDIX

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MAP

Jaghori District is the area northwest of Ghazni, around Sang-e-Masha (Sang-e-Masheh)



PUSHTUN-HAZARA RELATIONS

By Mohammad Suleman (2001)

Introduction:

During the decades immediately following World War II, most of the social scientists believed that racism and ethnicity were disappearing throughout the world. They believed that race and ethnicity were ceasing to be significant issues in industrialised or in more developed nations and that they would soon be irrelevant elsewhere, as countries become more urbanised and industrialised. However, today's reality does not support this view because for the last few years, we have been witnessing significant increase in the number of intrastate wars or violent conflicts – the conflicts that frequently occur among different ethnic groups in many parts of the world. Actually, this occurrence or reoccurrence of violent ethnic conflicts draws the attention to the widespread confirmation of the fact that if anything, ethnicity, according to Howard (1996, pp 237), has undergone a period of revitalisation.

As defined by Brown (1993, pp 5), an “ethnic conflict” is a dispute about important political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities. Generally speaking, this definition actually confirms the fact that in an ethnically heterogeneous society, each group tends to struggle for more political and economic power and fight for self-determination and cultural autonomy. Furthermore, this definition of ethnic conflict implicitly as well as explicitly communicates the message that in multiethnic societies there are always potentials for ethnic conflicts and tensions.

Current social analysts offer various explanations on the factors causing ethnic conflicts. For example, they present the arguments that collapse of the authoritarian rules, especially after the end of the cold war, is one of the consequential reasons for escalation of ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe. Some arguments suggest that ethnic heterogeneity in a state in itself is a source of ethnic conflicts, especially in situations where larger groups discriminate against the smaller ones. In some arguments weakness of the national, regional and international authorities, to keep the groups from fighting and to ensure the security of individual groups, is viewed as an obvious factor for ethnic conflicts. Some arguments present the view that state's incapability to provide economic prosperity, security and equal rights and opportunities to its populations is a factor of ethnic conflicts.

More interestingly, according to Brown (1993, pp 11), some explanations of ethnic conflict focus on the false histories that many groups have of themselves and others. Reciting Posen and Snyder, he describes the following processes as to provide deeper understanding (according to perceptual explanations) of the causes of ethnic conflict:

“these [ethnic] histories are not subjected to dispassionate, scholarly scrutiny because they are usually passed from generation to generation by word of

mouth. These stories become part of a group's lore. They tend to be highly selective in their coverage of events and not unbiased in their interpretation of events. Distorted and exaggerated with time, these histories present one's own group as heroic while other groups are demonised. Grievances are enshrined and other groups are portrayed as inherently vicious and aggressive. Group members typically treat these ethnic myths as received wisdom".

In this essay, I have chosen Afghanistan to present a case study on conflict between Hazara and Pushtun ethnic groups. The purpose of this case study is to discuss the extent of the processes described above and to examine the implications of these processes for attempts at conflict resolution.

In the first section of the essay, I will present a brief overview of ethnic composition in Afghanistan, while in the subsequent section, I will discuss the extent of the processes by looking at key issues between the two groups and their implications on conflict resolution.

I. A brief overview of the ethnic composition:

Since Afghanistan has evolved from the continuous process of displacement and integration of different people and culture, therefore, it is not a self-contained ethnic unit, and its national culture is not uniform. Few of its ethnic groups are indigenous. Not all Pushtun (the largest group), for example, are Afghan citizens. Almost an equal number of this group live in the tribal agencies and the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. Tajik, Uzbek, Turkoman and Kirgiz have their own states in central Asia. Most inhabitants of the extreme western part of Afghanistan, geographically and culturally an extension of the Iranian Plateau, are simply Persian-speaking farmers. Baluch live in the Southwestern corner of Afghanistan, Northwest Pakistan, and Iran; several large groups also live the Turkoman.

Hazara is another distinctive group inhabiting in Afghanistan. Today they may be found living in regions throughout the country, although the majority still inhabits the areas of central Afghanistan traditionally inhabited by them and known as the Hazarajat.

II. Conflict between Hazara and Pushtun - Key issues:

Pushtun (largest ethnic group) are Sunni Muslim while the Hazaras are Shiite Muslim. Pushtun speak Pushtu, while Hazara speak Farsi (Persian), though with a particular accent known as the 'Hazaragi' dialect.

These two ethnic groups have traditionally been trapped in chronic disputes over economic resources, political power and territorial and cultural autonomy. However, during recent Afghan-Soviet war, the disputes intensified, resulting in a severance of communication and

eventually open warfare that claimed human lives, led to displacement and brought about destruction of homes and of the infrastructure.

Throughout Afghan history, countless events have occurred between Hazara and Pushtun, however, the following three major events and their biased interpretation by Hazara and Pushtun can give a good explanation for the continuation of conflict between Hazara and Pushtun:

1. Hazara Uprisings (1890 –1901):

Due to its geopolitical location, the Hazara group until the 1890s, was completely autonomous and in full control of the areas in Hazarajat. The Pushtun had not yet found their way into these areas and the central government had not yet succeeded in bringing the Hazara under its rule. Hazarajat came under the control of central government for the first time, during the reign of the Pushtun King, Abdur Rahman (1890 – 1901). During this period, the Hazara carried out the largest uprisings against the king, inflicting heavy losses and damages on the government in Kabul. Some estimates suggest that the war against the Hazara cost the king one half of the country's budget and military force. Thus the Hazara uprisings constituted a real major threat to the Pushtun King and his government. In order for the government to suppress the Hazaras' uprisings, the King called upon all Pushtuns and declared war against the members of Hazara group. This war consequently resulted in indiscriminate killings of the Hazara people, displacement of tens of thousand of them to Pakistan and their evacuation from plain agricultural land to mountainous areas in central Afghanistan.

After this event, the Hazara group was ruthlessly subjugated. Moreover, as a consequence of the discriminatory and segregationist policies of the ruling Pushtun government the Hazaras remained politically, economically and socially the most underdeveloped group in Afghanistan.

It is interesting to point out that the major causes of the Hazaras' uprisings are as yet uncertain and under debate. So far, no research has been done nor proper documentation produced to explain an unbiased picture of the causes of the Hazaras' uprisings. Each group has its own mythical images, interpretations and stories about the causes of the uprisings. For example, Hazaras' interpretations focus on repressive and unjust economic and social pressure enforced on the people. Some stories present the view that the conflict between the Hazara and Pushtun is basically one of class, with each side defending its own interests. Some people hold the view that the principal reason behind the Hazaras' uprisings was long-term tribal conflict. According to this view, Abdur Rahman's continuous war against different tribes and clans of Afghanistan can be explained in terms of long-lasting unresolved tribal conflicts, some of which had been on going for centuries. This conflict can also be seen in terms of an 'historical conflict', the roots of which can be traced back to 1747, when the Pushtun rapidly increased their power and expanded their domain.

As stated by Brown (1993, pp 12), authoritarian regimes fail to promote objective historical inquiry or scholarly standards of evidence in political discourse. Afghanistan's history was

very much influenced by the ruling Pushtun group. The history says that the Pushtun government of that time had the agenda to achieve economic development and national unity. Therefore, it was necessary to have a powerful central government, capable of coordinating and leading different forces of production in order to successfully achieve and maintain economic growth and expansion on the one hand, and to implement domestic and foreign affairs of the state, on the other. However, Hazaras perceive that government policy and the whole notion of centralization was a threat to their local power and they, therefore, challenged the government's idea of centralization in a violent way.

2. Fighting in Kabul (1993):

One of the civil war's horrific moments occurred in February 1993 in Kabul, where government forces massacred hundreds of Hazara residents. In actual fact, after the collapse of the communist regime in April 1992, different groups and commanders controlled different parts of the country and each group struggled for power and control. They took violent measures and used every means to defeat other groups.

At that time there were rumors that the Hazara group, which controlled part of the capital, had non-Hazara women captive and that they were killing and torturing non-Hazara people wherever they found them. The forces loyal to government also believed that the Hazaras in Kabul were the agents of outsiders and that they were serving the interest of the Iranian government. After the defeat of the Hazaras, the government forces claimed that they released several non-Hazara women from Hazara prison and that they discovered wells where hundreds of non-Hazaras were killed.

The Hazaras claim that the government forces committed a genocide, raided the Hazaras controlled areas, killed, raped, set fire to homes, and took young boys and girls captive. Therefore, the military assault by the government forces, according to Hazaras, was totally a criminal act.

3. Killing of Hazaras' political and religious leader (1995):

Another major incident occurred when the Taliban took control of the capital Kabul in 1995. During this period, the Taliban captured Mazari, a prominent Hazara political and religious leader. He was highly influential among the Hazara community because they regarded him as their Imam. He received the same sort of respect as Khomeini received in Iran. He was killed in detention, however the reason of his killing remains a mystery. Each group has its own version of the story that is very much biased in its interpretation of this event.

Because of the Pushtun -Hazara wars, tens of thousands of Hazara women lost their fathers, husbands, brothers or sons. In the memory of the deceased, they began reciting eulogies. These eulogies not only reflect profound grief; they also show the qualities of the Hazara warriors. *Makhta* is a lament sung by women at times of mourning and it is believed *Makhta* emerged during the Hazara-Pushtun war (1890-1901). *Makhtas* are generally named after

one particular person (warrior, hero), and identified thereafter by that name. Among the most famous ones are Faiz Mohammad (Faizo) and Ghulam Mohammad. Below, I have translated the excerpt from Gol Mohammad Makhta:

*The city of Kabul is chaos,
The red flag is raised,
Bachi-Saqqau is King,*

*What a loss, Gol Mohammad was killed,
What a pity, Gol Mohammad was killed,*

*There was a war at Sar-e-rauza,
Where Gol Mohammad lost his life,
Where he lost his head,*

*What a loss, Gol Mohammad was killed,
What a pity, Gol Mohammad was killed.*

On the basis of what has been said so far, it can therefore be concluded that the lack of fair and neutral evidence in political discourse fosters ethnic mythology and that stories are often exaggerated, distorted and misinterpreted. Once stories of the events are distorted, it is likely to prepare ground for political leaders to stir the emotions of their ethnic groups through overly sensational speeches and manipulative strategies, and mobilise them for offensive actions against others.

In the case of Afghanistan, ethnic mythologies have been very instrumental in shaping peoples' attitudes and behaviour and very powerful in the process of ethnic mobilisation and ethnic conflicts. So far, all efforts to achieve restoration of peace and reconciliation have failed. The simple reason is that each group sees themselves as victims and others as aggressors or assailants. Presently, both sides refuse the proposal for negotiation because each group demands that perpetrators of events be brought to justice, while none of them accept that anyone on their own side is blameworthy or guilty.

Apart from what has been mentioned above, the followings are some of the key issues that have always remained hot and impeded the processes of peace and reconciliation between the two groups:

Issue of Name (Khorasan or Afghanistan?): Until about 150 years ago the country today known as Afghanistan, was called 'Khorasan'. While its geographic boundaries changed frequently, Khorasan at any time was a bigger country than today's Afghanistan. The name Afghanistan, which is a Persian compound name, is composed of two words 'Afghan' and 'stan'. There is no dispute over the word stan, which means land or place, but the dispute is over the word Afghan. According to Hazaras, the word Afghan means Pushtun, therefore, Afghanistan means the land of Pushtun.

According to the Hazara, the name Afghanistan was chosen by foreign powers for the people of Afghanistan, rather than by the people of the land themselves. They say, Afghanistan, as known today, is a county composed of different ethnic groups, only one of which are Afghans (Pushtuns) and this name exclude other ethnic groups. While Pushtun believe that everyone who lives in Afghanistan is Afghan by nationality and, therefore, the word Afghan does not refer to Pushtun group only. When Hazaras raised the issue of the name, Pushtuns blamed the Hazara for being foreign agents who destroy the national unity and integration of Afghanistan.

Issue of population and share of power: Any discussion of the population of Hazara confronts a major problem. For example, the population of Afghanistan itself has not as yet been ascertained, in other words, no reliable and accurate population census has yet been carried out in Afghanistan. This is due to the lack of an effective central government able, on the one hand, to act independently of tribal pressures and influences, and on the other, to successfully implement national and long term-term development plans and to provide money, equipment, and trained staff. Indeed, the debate continues as to whether governments that have been in power in Afghanistan since 1929 should be referred to as 'national', that is, representing the interests of the whole nation, or as 'ethnic/tribal', since tribal interests, specially those of the Pushtun, have exercised a major influence on politico-economic decisions and general development plans of successive governments.

This lack of independent and effective central government has inevitably led to the lack of a reliable and accurate population census. Given this, any discussion of the population of the various peoples of Afghanistan is bound to be at very best an approximation. Such estimates can be reliable only when an accurate national census of the population of Afghanistan has been successfully carried out.

Hazaras believe that in terms of numbers they form the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Therefore, they should have a fair share in power and in government. However, Pushtuns totally disagree with this claim. On this basis, after the collapse of the communist regime in April 1992, the negotiation between Hazara and Pushtun failed.

Issue of language: The history of Afghanistan is regarded as consisting of no more than the accumulated histories of the reigns of Pushtun kings, and Pushtun tribes and people. Other groups are acknowledged only on the margins of Afghanistan's history. It is by extension of this approach that Pushtun domination and rule is justified and its success hailed. Pushtu is represented as an historical language, and was made the official language of Afghanistan, its teaching made compulsory by government policy nationally. Therefore, Hazaras believe that in Afghanistan, 'central government' has traditionally meant the monopoly of power and domination by the Pushtuns, with the inevitable consequence of underdevelopment of the whole of the society in Afghanistan.

III. Conclusion:

In order for a country to achieve national unity and economic prosperity it must fairly represent all its inhabitants; it must have a name with which they all identify, a culture which does not alienate them but instead is representative and reflective of their historical, social and spiritual needs, aspirations and values, and a political structure and economy based on justice and equality. Only then can there be reconciliation between 'nationhood', nationality, and ultimately individual identity.