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Niamatullah Ibrahim
Crisis States Research Centre

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Crisis States Research Centre

At the sources of factionalism and civil war in Hazarajat

Niamatullah Ibrahim

Crisis States Research Centre

Introduction

Following the defeat of the central government of the *Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq* (HDK) in Kabul through spontaneous local rebellion in 1979, Hazarajat, the central highlands inhabited by the Hazara people, was mostly abandoned and left in the hands of several *mujahedin* organisations. These organisations were predominantly created and led by the Shiite clergy and represented different clerical networks and ideologies. Historically the region was dominated by the *khans*, the landlords that in collaboration with the clergy liberated the region from government control in 1979. The *khans* were soon marginalised by this more organised and motivated clergy that then rose as the dominant political force.

The Soviet army and the Kabul government refrained from large scale military offensives in the region. Militarily, these mountainous areas would have been difficult to control and would have required a significant amount of manpower and military resources in exchange for no considerable strategic advantage. The government only maintained control of the provincial towns of Bamyan, Cheghcharan and Ghazni and conceded the mostly mountainous and rural districts to the opposition. Sporadic clashes between the Hazara *mujahidin* and government or Soviet forces only occurred around provincial towns and at the fringes of Hazarajat, such as in the Pishiband area of Doshi district in Baghlan, in Dawlatabad in Balkh, in the southern parts of Behsud in Wardak and in the Jaghori and Qarabagh districts in Ghazni which border strategic areas and highways.

The vacuum created by the almost complete state withdrawal did not lead to the creation of an idyllic stateless environment but rather to a series of bitter struggles to re-establish some form of polity in Hazarajat. This environment allowed for all social and ideological groups in the region to organise along political and military lines in order to assert their roles in the stateless region. The first such attempt was that of *Shura-ye Inqilab-e Ittefaq Islami*, an organisation established in September 1979.¹ The khans and traditionalist Shiite religious leaders, deriving their influence and power from their pre-war dominant social status and from their leading role in the rebellion against the HDK, formed the backbone of the *Shura* and claimed monopoly over the political and military leadership of the liberated areas. However, several competing Islamist groups soon rose up against the *Shura*. In the absence of control and any threat from the central government, the rival mujahedin organisations engaged in endless competition and hostility as they began to establish footholds and secure territorial control. This territorial and ideological competition turned Hazarajat into a scene of political and military hostility throughout most of the 1980s.

¹ See Ibrahim (2006) for further discussion on this.

This paper will first attempt to explain why radical clericalism became the dominant political and ideological force in Hazarajat. It will then examine why the conflict started, and why it lasted so long. Finally, it will try to explain why no single faction in the civil war succeeded in emerging victorious and imposing a new order in Hazarajat.

The argument of this paper is that the succession of civil wars in Hazarajat was the result of a complete absence of social and political networks from the region, which in turn derived from the prevalence of vertical connections between the local rulers (the khans) and the state. Only the clergy had relatively wide networks including many local communities, but these only covered relatively small areas within Hazarajat. Therefore the clergy played an important role in mobilising the population for collective action during the initial revolt but were then unable to coordinate at the wider Hazarajat level. They could not form a functioning political system with agreed 'rules and norms of the game' nor regulate competition for power so that it could take place without violence. Inevitably, the formation of an effective and unified political system from a situation of fragmentation was going to require time. In the absence of time and a level playing field for the different players to compete without violence, civil war was a very likely possibility. The rivalry for power could only express itself through political assassinations and warfare. Ultimately, the development of an incipient political system by the late 1980s was the result of a trial and error process and of the demonstrated inability of any particular group to establish a political monopoly.

The first civil war within the clergy: Khomeinists versus traditionalists

The competition for power started with the elimination from the scene of the khans and intelligentsia in the early 1980s. State collapse and the absence of other organised social forces provided a unique opportunity for the Shiite *ulema* to rise as a dominant political and military force in the Hazarajat area. Deriving their legitimacy from their ability to speak in the name of and as interpreters of Islam, as well as from having been the source of ideological inspiration for the rebellion against the HDK government, the *ulema* effectively marginalised the khans and the weak intelligentsia.² At this point, one might have expected a stable Hazarajat to emerge, as all power was concentrated in the hands of the clergy. However, the *ulema* also suffered from deep rivalries among different networks. Such rivalries were in turn strengthened by disagreements over matters of religious doctrine, particularly with regard to the role of the *ulema* in public life, and by the different social backgrounds of various groups of *ulema*. The inexperienced factional leaders and the almost-as-inexperienced patrons supporting them in Iran held inflated expectations about what they could achieve in terms of expanding their influence and even becoming the sole power in Hazarajat. Revolutionary enthusiasm, inspired by the fresh memory of the revolution in Iran, compounded this problem. External Iranian support and the continued radicalisation of the political and military environment created the conditions for the bid by the Khomeinist component of the clergy for absolute power.

The role of clerical networks

One major factor in the emergence of the clergy as a dominant player in Hazara politics was the existence of widespread *ulema* networks throughout the region, which allowed sections of the clergy to act as relatively more cohesive political groups in comparison to the khans.³ A

² See Ibrahimi 2006 for further discussion.

³ For an anthropological analysis of pre-war religious networks and their implications for the Shiite religious movements in the region see Canfield (1986).

growing number of Shiite religious students had been returning to Afghanistan since the 1960s after attending religious training centres in Iraq and Iran. Many of them were returning with a higher level of religious education and new ideas regarding matters of religious interpretation. They built new mosques and *madrasas* in cities as well as in rural areas, which further expanded their network and amplified their ideological propaganda. Their reliance on foreign centres of learning and influence contributed to the creation of linkages between smaller networks. Members of different networks would meet abroad and sometimes find that they had the same patrons among Shiite *ayatollahs*. This, together with the polarisation and mobilisation created by the April coup of 1978 and by the Iranian revolution, caused different clerical networks to, at least temporarily, coagulate into a single entity. This wider network could then spread its influence throughout the region and major urban centres, and was vertically connected to like-minded religious authorities in Iraq and Iran. The connection to Iran's clerical state provided access to external financial and military assistance, which helped the *ulema* networks to transform into political and military organisations.⁴ By contrast, the other two main social forces within the region, the *khans* and the intelligentsia, were in a disadvantageous position.⁵ The *khans* had no regional network and had previously maintained vertical relations with the central government and local alliances with members of the traditionalist clergy. As a result, they suffered from bitter regional, tribal and personal rivalries. The communities gathered around them through patronage were very segmented at the regional level (Harpviken 1998: 185). Lacking education, they were unable to produce a cohesive political ideology or long-term plan for the future of the region. The intellectuals, on the other hand, had the resources to produce a plan for Hazarajat but they were divided between two main groups: Maoists and nationalists. They were also few in number and unevenly distributed, with very little influence in the villages. Their networks were smaller and more limited geographically than those of the clergy.⁶

In sum, between 1979-80 the clergy was the closest group to being a region-wide force in Hazarajat. This fact gave it a major advantage and led to its emergence as the leadership of the *Shura*. However, after the defeat of their common enemies, the *khans* and the intelligentsia, the clergy started fragmenting again into rival networks. Initially, these were grouped into two opposing alliances: the traditionalists and the Khomeinists.⁷ Those described here as 'traditionalists' were the followers of what had once been the mainstream view in Shiite Islam, that the clergy should not aim for political power or claim a political role in society, and should least of all support social reforms. They were also known as supporters of Ayatollah Kho'i, the most prestigious traditionalist figure in Shi'ism at that time. The Khomeinists were mostly junior clerics with an initially small social following in Hazarajat. Their role in the alliance of clerical networks, which dominated Hazarajat in 1979-1982, was modest. However, they proved to be more dynamic and better organised than the traditionalists. In particular, they invested considerable energy and resources to strengthen their networks by, for example, creating new *madrasas* for the ideological training and recruitment of new mullahs. The importance attached to the *madrasas* throughout the 1980s resulted in a sharp rise in *madrasa* enrolment rates across Hazarajat. Moreover, the collapse

⁴ For more on the background of the Shiite *ulema* and their involvement in politics in Afghanistan, see Edwards (1986).

⁵ The intelligentsia is here defined as all those who are involved in the production, manipulation and distribution of culture and ideas.

⁶ See Ibrahimi 2006 for more details.

⁷ See Ibrahimi (2006) for more details.

of the formal education system in the region had left no other choice for young boys who wanted to pursue some form of education. In these new *madrasas* students were exposed both to militancy and political Islamic ideology. In many cases, they were located inside or close to military bases. The military base of *Nasr* in the Sholgarah district of Balkh, named *Paygah-e Al-fat'h*, serves as a good illustration. This base, established by Abdul Ali Mazari, included a mosque, a medical centre, a prison, a *madrasa* and several weapon depots. Militants and *madrasa* students were required to attend daily religious, ideological and military training.⁸ Given the role of Abdul Ali Mazari as an emerging leader, his military base served as a model for leaders of other organisations. *Nahzat-i Islami* established and supported *madrasas* in Jaghori and Malistan districts, where instructors also played the role of political and military leaders. However, ideological training was not only limited to the *madrasas*. Young and well-indoctrinated activists from the different organisations often travelled to bases throughout the region to ensure the acquaintance of militants and rank and file members with the ideological directions of their organisations.⁹

The role of external influence and support

The success of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 held enormous implications for the Shiite resistance organisations in neighbouring Afghanistan. By establishing the Islamic Republic of Iran under his leadership as supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini provided a role model for the religiously-motivated Shiite clerics around the world. He transformed Shiite Islam into a mass political ideology and spoke in the name of the downtrodden against the corrupt upper classes and traditionalist religious elites that, by their silence and inaction, were endorsing the ills in Islamic society originally spread by the colonial powers. He articulated a wide range of socio-political agendas that entailed reforms in all spheres of society with the ultimate aim of establishing a puritan Islamic society based on the example set by the Prophet Muhammad in the sixth century.¹⁰

Khomeini-led Iran opened up its borders for Afghan refugees, allowing an estimated two million people, mostly Hazaras, to settle in various cities within the country. Exporting the Khomeinist revolution to other parts of the Muslim world became a key foreign policy objective, particularly in neighbouring countries like Afghanistan. Shiite activists from around the world turned to Iran with the hope of receiving military and financial assistance as well as ideological training. The influx of refugees into the country provided a unique opportunity for ideological indoctrination and recruitment, both for the Iranian authorities and the Shiite militant organisations. Several training centres were set up where the trainees would mix with participants from other parts of the world and be exposed to the ideas of an expanding Islamic revolution, centred around and led by the Islamic Iran. An indication of the internationalist character of this brand of Islamism was the fact that often many non-Iranian militants, including Afghans, were being deployed in the front lines to fight with Iranians against Iraq.¹¹

⁸ This was one of the central bases of *Nasr* throughout the region and controlled bases in several surrounding districts. Mazari, who directly supervised the base, later emerged as a key player in the region and was elected as leader of *Hizb-e Wahdat*. (Samangani 2001: 102-111).

⁹ This was confirmed through personal interviews by the author with former Shiite mujahedin leaders in Bamyán-Kabul between July and December 2006.

¹⁰ Ayatollah Khomeini explains the objectives, programmes and ways of establishing an Islamic state in his book, *Welayat-e Faqih, Hokowmat-e Islami* (Guardianship of the Jurist and Islamic Government).

¹¹ For more details see Emadi (1995).

Less than a year after the Iranian revolution, Hazara Khomeinists had established contacts with various agencies within the Islamic regime, which started to provide them with financial and military assistance. By the end of 1979, groups of militants trained in Iran began to arrive in several areas of Hazarajat. This group of revolutionaries did not play a key role in the overthrow of the HDK government apparatus in Hazarajat in 1979 but, thanks to their ideological inspiration, higher spirits and better military equipment, they quickly asserted themselves across the region. Upon their arrival, they began to articulate and spread revolutionary ideas. Their influence expanded to the extent that adherence to Khomeinist political Islam became the major determinant of credibility of a person's standing at home and abroad.¹² However, compared to Western and Arab supplies for the Sunni *mujahidin*, Iranian support for the Shiite resistance organisations in Afghanistan was limited and cautious. From 1980, Iran was busy defending itself from neighbouring Iraq in a war of huge financial and military cost to Iran. The Iranians did not want to antagonise the Soviet Union by actively sabotaging the HDK government in Kabul. They were instead trying to improve relations with Moscow, which was supplying arms to Iraq in its war against Iran. Thus, external support for Shiite resistance activities was by and large limited within the boundaries of Hazarajat. Priority was placed on staging an internal revolution in that region (Harpviken 1995: 66).

The role of ideology and legitimacy

The credibility of the khans and of the traditionalist *ulema* was seriously compromised due to their historical role as agents and associates of an Afghan state which had long been perceived to discriminate against the Hazaras.¹³ Together with the new political climate created by the Iranian revolution, this contributed to their vulnerability before the ideological offensive of the Khomeinists. The latter, known as *pairawan-e khatt-e imam* or 'followers of the path of Imam', questioned the legitimacy of the *khans* and the traditionalist clerics as leaders, let alone their claim to a monopoly of leadership. They labelled the *khans* and clerics as reactionaries, backward and ill-suited for the leadership of an 'Islamic revolution'. Though Islam was invoked as a source of legitimacy and was equally used to mobilise fighters by the *khans* and the traditionalist *ulema*, the new revolutionaries questioned both the traditionalist interpretation of Islam and the figures representing it. To the revolutionaries, Islam not only provided legitimacy for the resistance against the communist regime in Kabul but was a comprehensive dynamic political ideology that required constant change and reform across all spheres of the individual and social life of a believer. They imported new criteria for a legitimate political leader and a new vision for an Islamic society. Their religious revivalism was in stark contrast with the locally accepted religious values and practices. For the *khans* and the religious traditionalists, the collapse of the state in the region and its defence against future penetration by the Kabul regime was the ultimate goal of the rebellion, but for the Khomeinists this was just the beginning. Their revolutionary ideas were not only directed against the communist regime in Kabul, but more immediately against the local notables, traditionalists and folk religious practices and values.

In a way, the Khomeinist radical reformist ideology was similar to the reform packages of the Kabul regime, which provoked the rebellion of the conservative traditional society in 1979.

¹² This was elaborated upon during personal interviews by the author with former Shiite mujahedin leaders in Afghanistan in the autumn of 2006.

¹³ For detailed analysis of the Hazara *khans* and their relationship with the Afghan state before the war see Canfield (1971).

Both Khomeinists and the HDK activists were predominantly rural youth of humble social backgrounds who were disenchanted with the injustice, class inequality and slow pace of development of the country. Members of each were also returning to their villages after spending years in education, where they embraced new ideas and lost contact with their social and cultural backgrounds. Upon their return to the villages, they wanted both to shake up society in favour of the 'dispossessed' (the Khomeinists) or the 'proletariat' (the Khalqis) (Ayatollah Khomeini 1987:43 and Dawlatabadi 1992:300-312). Although the atheism of the Khalqis was fundamentally opposed to Islam, both ideologies promised to deliver the masses from oppression and injustice and to establish a utopian society. The Khomeinist synthesis of elements of Islamic tradition and of modern political ideologies undermined any potential influence that educated Hazaras with Maoist inclinations or secular outlooks could have exercised. Thus the Khomeinists no longer had competition in mobilising the semi-educated and dislocated youth, whom they turned into the core component of their militias.

The legitimacy of the political ideologies held by the Khomeinist *ulema* would also soon be undermined. During the second half of the 1980s, the role of the *ulema* in instigating the infighting and allegations of corruption against those appointed as judges at the *hawzahs* contributed towards the undermining of their credibility and of the ideologies associated with them. By then, however, the *khans* and intelligentsia had been completely marginalised and no longer represented a potential challenge. Hence, the *ulema* continued their unchallenged domination of all spheres of public life in Hazara society.

The defeat of the traditionalists

One of the major sources of conflict was the internal rivalry of the *ulema*. These political leaders adhered to different schools of thought and social orientation. As already mentioned, the first conflict within the clergy was between two alliances, each based on one of two main Shiite schools of thought with regard to the role of the *ulema* in public affairs of the *ummah*. In short, these two schools are the Khomeinists and the traditionalists, the former arguing in favour of the control of political power by the *ulema* and/or radical social reforms and the latter against both. The traditionalists represented the mainstream in 1979-80, but the Khomeinists soon rose to challenge them. As argued elsewhere, the lack of a comprehensive political and military strategy, internal rivalry and excessive demands on the local population, compounded by a failure in foreign diplomacy and in attracting foreign assistance, inevitably led to the defeat of the traditionalists.¹⁴

Small scale military confrontation began as early as 1981. Central Hazarajat experienced the worst of the first phase of the civil war and of the power struggle between the Khomeinists and traditionalists. The reason was that the *Shura*, under the leadership of Ayatollah Behisthi, was headquartered in Waras and enjoyed the backing of the most powerful *khans* in the whole region. As a result, the Khomeinists' attempts for expansion met with greater resistance by the *khans* and the traditionalists. Conflict broke out as ideological warfare. The Khomeinist propaganda campaigns against the *khans* and the traditionalist clergy in 1980 had resulted in attempts by the *Shura* to arrest and restrict activities of the young Khomeinist leaders of *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* in Yakawlang and surrounding areas. Thus many of their activists were forced to flee into northern districts where they were protected by like-minded clerics who enjoyed relatively greater influence far away from the reach of the *Shura* headquarters.¹⁵ However,

¹⁴ For more details on this phase of the civil war in Hazarajat see Ibrahimi (2006).

¹⁵ This was discussed in a personal interview by the author with Ustad Muhammadi, a former *Nasr* leader in the region, in Yakawlang, Bamyan during July 2006.

the situation drastically changed in favour of the Khomeinists after two key *Shura* leaders, Mohammad Akbari from Waras and Sadiqi Nili from Daikundi, split from the *Shura* and became important leaders of *Pasdarán* after short trips to Iran in 1982. They returned with greater military assistance and fresh revolutionary enthusiasm, rapidly outclassing the *Shura* and eventually altering the balance of power in favour of the Khomeinists. In autumn 1984, *Pasdarán* and *Nasr* forces jointly attacked the poorly organised *Shura* commanders in their bases in La'al, Panjab, Yakawlang and Waras districts. They captured these districts and forced the *Shura* leadership to flee into Nawur district of the Ghazni province.¹⁶

Ghazni itself was the theatre of much bitter fighting, due to its high strategic value for all organisations involved: it was one of the major supply routes of the *mujahedin* for their northern bases. All were trying to hold areas that could ensure security for the movement of their personnel as well as supplies across the province. The leadership of *Hizb-e Islami* was trying to expand into the Hazara area of the province in order to open routes to supply and support their commanders in northern Afghanistan, whilst *Pasdarán* and *Nasr* were desperate to connect to their strongholds in the central and northern districts of the region. The *Shura* was fighting for its survival in Nawur, its only foothold in the country. The increasingly obvious contrast between the *Shura* and the Khomeinists had led to the formation of an informal alliance of the *Shura* with *Harakat-e Islami* of Sheikh Mohseni, the only other significant pro-Kho'i organisation in Afghanistan. Contrary to the *Shura*, *Harakat* was mainly led by urban educated non-Hazara Shiite elites, even if it managed to gather some support among rural *khans* opposed to *Nasr* in northern Afghanistan and in southern Hazarajat. The alliance of *Harakat* and *Shura*, though not officially announced, proved important in containing the Khomeinists, at least for some time. This was particularly true of Ghazni, where the fighting started in 1981 when Sayed Qasim, a Shiite commander of *Hizb-e Islami*, attempted to expand and exert his supremacy over the local commanders of *Harakat* and *Shura*. As *Shura* and *Harakat* joined forces to defeat Sayed Qasim, *Nasr* and *Pasdarán* clandestinely supported *Hizb-e Islami*, hoping that this would weaken the *Shura*. Instead, *Shura* and *Harakat* emerged victorious and drove *Hizb-e Islami* out of most of the Hazara areas. *Nasr* itself was forced to retreat from its base in Qarabagh into the neighbouring Jaghori district.¹⁷

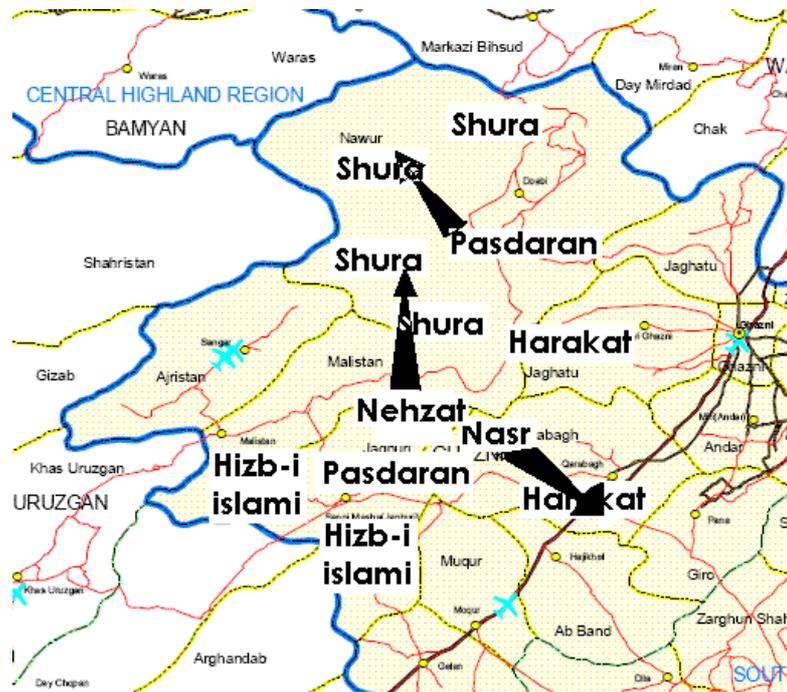
Weakened by this development, *Nasr* and *Pasdarán* had to delay their confrontation with the *Shura* and spend another two years building up their organisations. In 1982, Jan Ali Zahedi of *Pasdarán* returned from Iran with better weapons and established a base in the Ala'a-uddin valley of Nawur, while *Nasr*'s small group of fifty educated cadres in the Naiqal'ah area of Qarabagh grew into the hundreds. By 1983-84, the Khomeinists had developed into a force capable of taking on the *Shura* and *Harakat*, favoured by the weakening of the latter. By chance, senior cleric Ayatollah Wahedi in the Qarabagh district withdrew his support from *Harakat* in protest against the presence of alleged Maoists among the *Shura* commanders engaged in attacks on *Nasr*. His departure effectively weakened the support base of *Harakat* in the district and a year later a more organised and better equipped *Nasr* drove *Harakat* out. Simultaneously, *Nasr* and *Sepah* were advancing into other parts of the province. *Harakat* became mostly limited to the Torgan and Kakrak areas, although the *Shura* managed to survive frequent attacks by Zahedi and other commanders.¹⁸

¹⁶ Personal interviews with former leaders of *Shura*, *Pasdarán* and *Nasr* Kabul, December 2005 and Bamyan July 2006.

¹⁷ Personal interviews with former leaders of *Harakat*, *Pasdarán* and *Shura*, Ghazni, January 2006.

¹⁸ Personal interviews with former leaders of *Harakat*, *Pasdarán* and *Shura*, Ghazni, January 2006.

Map 1: The conflict in southern Hazarajat, 1983-4

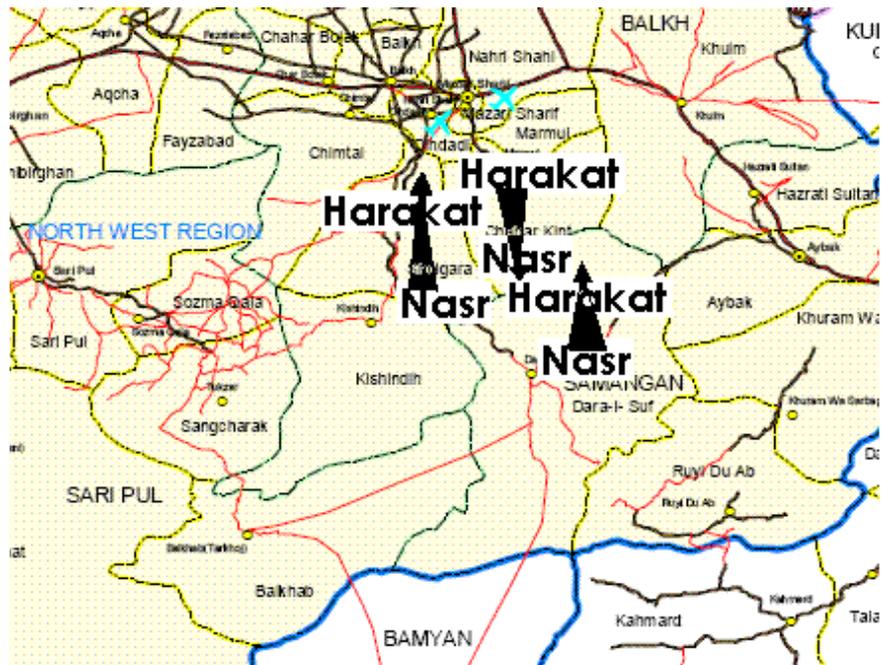


The map is based on the information contained in the text.

Similarly, in the northern provinces, ideological differences and attempts to expand at the expense of rival groups led to low scale clashes and assassination tactics in the early 1980s. Here, *Harakat* alone had to face *Nasr* and other smaller Khomeinist organisations. The first conflict broke out in the Charkent district of Balkh between Abdul Ali Mazari of *Nasr* and Din Mohammad Khan of *Harakat*. By the mid 1980s the conflict had turned into civil war. *Harakat*, owing to the social influence of Din Muhammad, pushed *Mazari* out of Charkent. *Mazari* moved into Sholgarah district, which was becoming the main stronghold of the organisation in the northern region. Muhammad Muhaqiq, the provincial leader of *Nasr*, had already defeated rival organisations in Shulgarah. Daresuf, the predominantly Hazara district of Samangan, remained a battleground between the two organisations. The capital of the district was fiercely fought over. In September 1987, Qarayadar Talib of *Harakat* and his forces overran the central bazaar and killed several members of *Nasr*. A year later *Nasr* mobilised forces from Sholgarah and other surrounding districts and captured most parts of the district. Thereafter, *Nasr* emerged as the dominant organisation in Sholgarah and Daresuf districts whilst *Harakat* maintained control of most of Charkent district.¹⁹

¹⁹ Samangani p.368 and 411.

Map: northern Hazarajat in the second half of the 1980s.



The map is based on the information contained in the text.

In the end, key factors in the defeat of the traditionalists were the lack of external support to match that given to the Khomeinists by Iran, and their weak capacity in terms of organisation and mobilisation. However, it is important to point out how the Khomeinists were never able to completely wipe out the traditionalists, both in terms of military presence and in terms of social influence. Similarly, in Hazarajat as a whole the *ulema* had never been able to completely eliminate the *khans* and the secular intelligentsia. Some *khans* even maintained a role in the conflict by becoming local commanders of the *Shura* or of *Harakat*, while some intellectuals infiltrated the various political factions and continued to play a role in the shadows. Hence, it can be argued that although Iranian patronage allowed the Khomeinists to expand their influence and power, after the first two phases of civil strife and war in Hazarajat large sections of Hazara society had already been excluded from any political system that could have emerged at the end of each phase of conflict. When the Khomeinists decided to stabilise Hazarajat in 1984-5 and establish a working political system, this could not be very inclusive and its chances of confining political competition to non-violent means were limited. What made things much worse, of course, is the fact that such an attempt was internally flawed and collapsed rapidly.

The second civil war: Khomeinists vs. Khomeinists

From 1984, the pro-Kho'i school was effectively marginalised, with the help of the Iranians. Loyalty to the Khomeinist school was ensured mainly by making Iranian assistance conditional on allegiance to the authority of Khomeini as supreme leader. Trainees were required to fill forms stating their firm belief in the leadership of Khomeini and condemning the enemy of the day. Those refusing to do so were rejected. Independent-minded clerics and organisations were thus definitely marginalised.²⁰ Apart from the *Shura*, this happened also

²⁰ Personal conversation with a former Hazara *mujahed* familiar with the training of *mujahedin* by the revolutionary guards, interviewed, December 2005. According to him some trainees were rejected by

to the other main pro-Kho'i organisation in Afghanistan: *Harakat-i Islami*. Mohsini's close ties with the Iranian religious authorities helped him attract significant assistance from the Iranian Islamic regime in the first few years, when *Harakat* actually deployed one of the first group of militants trained in Iran. However, in the aftermath of revolution the radical Khomeinists swiftly marginalised moderate scholars in Iran, including followers of the Kho'i line of thinking. Moshini's relationship with the Iranian authorities soured to such an extent that in 1984 he had to leave Iran for Quetta in Pakistan, where he established his headquarters. From then on he would entertain closer ties to Pakistan and Peshawar-based mujahedin groups than to Iran.

Khomeinist networks fragment

While Iran's discrimination against the traditionalists might have secured the influence of its Khomeinist clergy among Afghanistan's Hazaras, it did not pacify Hazarajat. The conflict between Khomeinists and traditionalists was just the first in a series of civil wars that devastated Hazarajat in the 1980s and 1990s. The Khomeinist social reform agenda was particularly polarising because it entailed specific threats to the privileged status of the khans and the traditionalist clergy, in particular to the *Sayeds* who were accused of shielding gratuitous privileges under traditionalist religious practices. The Khomeinist reform agenda was wide-ranging, encompassing family relations as well as the socio-economic structure and inter-ethnic relations at the national level. For instance, *Nasr's* constitution rejected all forms of patriarchy in families and called for the elimination of the feudal and khan-dominated system in the country (Dawlata'badi 1992: 309). They were aiming to transform the local folk version of Shia Islam into a modern political ideology with a rational understanding of Islamic history and leaning towards the establishment of an Islamic polity. The entire Hazara society was mobilised and polarised along ideological and factional lines and almost all sections of the society were involved in infighting in one way or another. In such a situation and in the absence of a working political system, the victory of the Khomeinist informal alliance was not going to stabilise Hazarajat. While the Khomeinists had no intention of recognising a role for the defeated but not annihilated *khans*, intelligentsia and traditionalist clergy, they could not even agree a framework for lasting cooperation within the Khomeinist tendency itself.

The separate Khomeinist networks, which had been brought together in 1979-80 after the defeat of their common enemies, started breaking apart quite rapidly. The fragmentation and factionalism of the Khomeinists has often been blamed on the officials of the Iranian Islamic regime, who allegedly encouraged and supported multiple organisations in order to have multiple channels of influence on the Afghan Khomeinists.²¹ While there is some logic to this statement, the division of the Shiite *mujahedin* seems to have been more a result of internal power rivalries within official and clerical circles of post-revolution Iran, resulting into non-cohesive and disorganised policies abroad. Several Afghans, both Hazara and non-Hazaras and mostly clerics, travelled to Iran after the revolution in search of patrons in various agencies of the regime. As a result several organisations sprang up in Afghanistan and Iran, often based on pre-existing clerical networks. However, to make their existence felt and their organisations politically relevant, they all started to establish bases and claim control

Iranian authorities because they had refused to sign a statement condemning Ziaul Huq, the Pakistani military leader, as an ally of American colonialism.

²¹ Many including former Hazaras that had closely worked with the Iranian authorities often blame the Iranians for purposely dividing the inexperienced Shiite mujahedin for their own influence in Afghanistan.

of territories. This had already been a major factor of conflict with the *khans* and traditionalists, organised into the *Shura*.²²

As Iranian political infighting was being reflected in Hazarajat, the success of an organisation largely depended on its ability to claim territory and on the degree of influence of its patrons in the changing context of power rivalries within Iran. Control of territories was demonstrated through an organisation's strength, capability and political relevance, which would consequently attract Iranian assistance. Once associated with a particular patron however, the Afghan organisations were exposed to the side effects of the ongoing factional struggle in Iran. The weakening of a patron in Iran could result in the reduction of the level of financial and military supplies. For instance, *Nahzat Islami*, mostly supported by Ayatollah Muntazari, the official successor of Ayatollah Khomeini, significantly declined after the marginalisation of Muntazari in Iran in the mid 1980s. *Pasdaran-e Jihad-e Islami* remained a powerful player thanks to the lasting backing and influence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.²³

Table 1: Major Shiite *Mujahedin* Organisations in the 1980s

1	<p>Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Movement of Afghanistan) Leader: Ayatollah Asif Mohsini Place and date of formation: Qom, Iran 1979 Ideology: Kho'i line Areas of operations: Ghazni, Kandahar, Wardak, Parwan, Bamyan and Samangan provinces</p>
2	<p>Shuray-e Ittefaq-e Enqelab-e Islami Afghanistan (Unity Council of the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan) Leader: Sayed Ali Behishti Ideology: Kho'i line Place and date of formation: Bamyan, September 1979 Areas of operations: Nawur district of Ghazni and Panjab and Waras district of Bamyan (after 1984)</p>
3	<p>Sazman-e Nasr-e Afghanistan (Victory Organization of Afghanistan) Leaders: A central council of 10 members Ideology: Khomeinist Place and date of formation: Iran 1979 Areas of operations: Kabul, Wardak, Ghazni, Bamyan, Ghor, Samangan, Baghlan, Balkh and Uruzgan provinces.</p>
4	<p>Pasdaran-e Jihad-e Islami Afghanistan (Guardians of the Islamic Jihad of Afghanistan) Leadership: council of leaders Place and date of formation: Iran, 1983 Ideology: Khomeinist Areas of operations: Wardak, Ghazni, Bamyan, Ghor, Uruzgan and Parwan provinces</p>
5	<p>Hizbullah (Party of God) Place and date of formation: Iran, 1981 Leaders: Sheikh Wusuqi and Qari Ali Ahmed Darwazi known as Qari Yakdastah Ideology: Khomeinist Areas of operations: Herat and Jaghori district of Ghazni</p>

²² For more on the Iranian foreign policy towards the Shiite resistance organization see Farr and Lorentz.

²³ Interview with a Hazara intellectual, December 2006.

6	Nahzat-e Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Movement of Afghanistan) Place and date of formation: Iran 1979 Leader: Council of Leaders Ideology: Khomeinist Areas of operations: Jaghori district of Ghazni and Herat
7	Jabhe Muttahed-e Inqelab-e Islami Afghanistan (United Front for Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan) Leadership: Council of Leaders Place and date of formation: 1981 Ideology: Khomeinist Areas of operations: Jaghori, Saripul
8	Hezb-e Da'wat-e Ittehad-i Islami Afghanistan (Party of Invitation for Islamic Unity of Afghanistan) Leadership: council of leaders Place and date of formation: 1986 Ideology: Khomeinist
9	Sazman-e Nairooy-e Islami Afghanistan (Organisation of the Islamic Forces of Afghanistan) Leader: Sayed Muhammad Zahir Muhaqiq Place and date of formation: 1978 Ideology: Khomeinist Areas of operations: Behsud and Herat

Source: Authors' interviews; Dawlatabadi 1992; Dawlatabadi 1999).

Although the role of Iranian factions in stimulating violent competition among Khomeinist factions was crucial, the dynamic of the intra-Khomeinist civil war was also affected by the different nature and composition of some of the factions. Politically, militarily and ideologically, *Nasr* was one of the best organised of all *mujahedin* groups in Afghanistan. Its political and military activities were pursued in conjunction with ideological propaganda and indoctrination through mosques, *madrasas* and libraries that it had set up in areas under its control. It published eight magazines both within and outside of the country. This propaganda aimed to spread the concept of Iranian-style political Islam and advocate for socio-economic reforms, specifically targeting *khans* and well established clerical families. Many of its leaders were influenced by Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati, whose religious doctrine preached social protest against the privileged upper classes and unfair domination in Islamic society. The ideological propaganda and the ideas of social reform unleashed such a reaction from conservative and privileged sections of Hazara society such as *khans*, *sayeds* and traditionalist clerics that rivals began to portray *Nasr* as a left wing, Hazara nationalist and non-Islamic organisation. What made the backlash more inevitable was the fact that all of the key *Nasr* leaders came from humble social backgrounds and, despite their modernist interpretation of Islam, none of them could claim prominence in matters of religious interpretation.²⁴ Moreover, there were only two *sayeds* in its Central Council. The criticism of *Nasr* on ethicist grounds did have some foundation. Indeed, *Nasr* stood out among the Khomeinist groups, and in particular the *Pasdaran*, because of its combination of radical Islam and Hazara nationalism. The increasingly evident role of this in *Nasr* ideology caused trouble in its relations with the Iranian authorities.²⁵ The criticism of *Nasr* from the

²⁴ From among the *Nasr* leaders only Sadiqi Parwani is called an Ayatollah, a title that is still insufficient to give him the right to independent religious interpretation.

²⁵ The *Nasr* combination of Hazara nationalism and radical Islam was mainly due to the development of smaller groups that merged together to establish it. Its leaders were trained in religious *madrasas* in Najaf, Iran and Kabul in the 1960s and 1970s and had formed discussion groups and circles prior to the war in Afghanistan. Those trained in Najaf were more heavily influenced by Khomeini's doctrine of

conservative side would soon also be picked up by competitors within the Khomeinist movement.

Compared to *Nasr*, *Pasdarán* was less cohesive and functioned more like a network of local mullahs and military commanders evenly spread across the region. It was the most radical of all the Afghan Khomeinist organisations. Its close association with the Iranian *Sepah-e Pasdarán* (Revolutionary Guards) was so strong that it is still known as *Sepah-e Pasdarán* rather with its actual name, *Pasdarán Jihad-e Islami Afghanistan*. This reputation did not help it in attracting the support of more moderate and nationalist Hazara *mujahedin*. At the leadership level it was composed of radical *mullahs*, but its rank-and-file was characterised by the strong presence of young militants with lower literacy rates than the other Khomeinist groups. As a result, cultural and propaganda activities were not given much attention within the organisation. It did not publish any magazine in Afghanistan or abroad. Militarily, it was the most aggressive and violent and, thanks to greater Iranian military assistance, it operated with better military equipment. As a result the organisation quickly asserted itself as a key political and military player both in the factional infighting of 1984-1988 and after the victory of the *mujahedin* in 1992.²⁶

By 1984, when the *Shura* was dislodged from its headquarter in Waras, *Nasr* and *Pasdarán* had emerged as the most powerful of the Khomeinist organisations. During these years, the two organisations were receiving the highest levels of Iranian military and financial assistance. For instance, in 1984-5 *Nasr* alone deployed around 4,000 militants recruited from among refugees in Iran and trained by the Iranian agencies.²⁷ The organisation also bought more than five thousand Kalashnikovs and some heavy weapons from East Germany.²⁸ *Pasdarán* commanders in different parts of the region were directly supplied by the officials of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard who frequently travelled to the Hazarajat and monitored the activities of *Pasdarán*.

Nasr and *Pasdarán* had been the core of the Khomeinist alliance. It was an assembly of *Pasdarán* and *Nasr* local leaders from Waras, Panjab, Yakawlang and Laal wa Sarjangal districts, protagonists within the overthrow of the *Shura* in Waras, that announced the dissolution of the political and military structure created by the *Shura*. Instead, a new *Shura* called *Shuray-e Chaharganah*, or council of the four districts, was announced. The new *Shura* formalised the alliance of *Nasr* and *Pasdarán* leaders in the four districts dominated by the two organisations. Muhammad Akbari of *Pasdarán* acted as *de facto* leader of the alliance. The two organisations had reached an agreement on the distribution of positions of power based upon the relative military strength and size of territories controlled by each organisation in the four districts.²⁹ This can be seen as an attempt to establish a political system to manage intra-Khomeinist competition in a non-violent way. Indeed, it was successful in containing violent conflicts between the two organisations in those four districts.

Welayat-e Faqih, the role of Shia jurists as political leaders, while those trained in Kabul were more concerned with the disadvantaged position of the Hazaras under the Afghan state. The Mashhad and Qom circles were more inclined towards the Ali Shariati's political Islam and would send his books to their counterparts in Kabul.

²⁶ Interview with former *mujahedin* leaders, Bamyan, July 2006.

²⁷ In Iran, the militants were trained in Taibad, Qom, Gelan, Sabzwar, Tehran, Zabul, Torbat-e Jam and other military centres in the country.

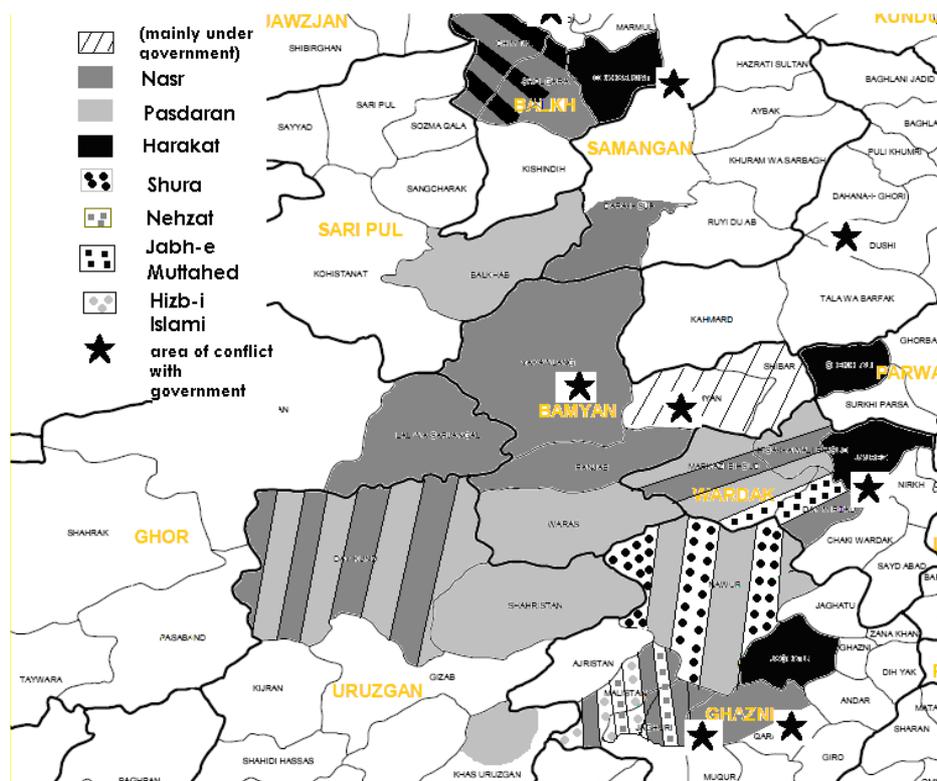
²⁸ Interview with Shaikh Yosuf Waezi, Kabul, July 2006.

²⁹ Interview with former leaders, Bamyan, July 2006.

They introduced a new administrative and military structure. The district unit of this structure was called ‘*hawzah*’, a Persian word meaning centre, instead of the commonly used term ‘*Wuluswali*’. The head of the *Hawzah* would usually be appointed by the dominant organisation in the district. However, there was no attempt to establish a monopoly of armed force for the new *Shura-ye Chaharganah*: each organisation was allowed to maintain and establish its own base, called ‘*Qarargah*’ or ‘*Paygah*’, in areas under their control in the district.³⁰

The limited inclusiveness and the internal flaws of the *Shura-ye Chaharganah* as a political system for Hazarajat resulted in ongoing civil strife in most of the region. Where the *Nasr-Sepah* alliance was better able to hold together, it was mainly because it still faced the opposition of the remnants of *Harakat* and the *Shura*.

Map 3: Factional control over Hazarajat by the late 1980s



Source: Author’s research and interviews with participants in the conflict.

- *Shura* commanders had maintained a stronghold in Nawur district and posed a continuing threat to the central districts of Panjab and Waras by conducting hit and run operations on *Pasdaran* and *Nasr* bases, which therefore had a strong incentive to cooperate effectively;
- *Nasr*, *Pasdaran*, *Nahzat* and *Nairoy-e Islami* had to join forces to contest *Harakat*’s strong base in Siasang area of Behsud district (Wardak);

³⁰ In Waras the head of *Hawzah* was from *Pasdaran* and his deputy was a *Nasr* member, in contrast to Laal wa Sarjangal where *Nasr* appointed the head and *Pasdaran* the deputy. In Yakawlang, where *Nasr* controlled the entire district, the head, military commander, judge and other significant positions were all filled by *Nasr*. On the other hand, in Panjab there was a mostly equal distribution of power. (Personal interviews with *Pasdaran* and *Nasr* leaders, Bamiyan, July 2006).

- In the Hazara part of the Ghazni province *Nasr*, *Nahzat*, *Pasdaran* and *Jabhe Muttahed* were helping each other in the fight against *Shura*, *Harakat* and later *Hizb-e Islami*.³¹ Following the defeat of *Harakat* in Qarabagh of Ghazni (1985) at the hand of *Nasr*, the Khomeinist organisations united to contest *Hizb-e Islami*'s supremacy in the districts of Jaghori and Malistan.
- In the north, *Jabhe Mutthahed* and *Nasr* were allied against *Harakat* in the districts of Darra-ye Suf and Charkent.

Elsewhere, in the absence of an external threat, the common revolutionary ideology and the *Shura-ye Chaharganah* framework failed to hold the Khomeinist together. Soon Shahrستان and Daikundi became the battleground of Khomeinist infighting. *Pasdaran* emerged as most powerful in these areas mainly due its leading role in the overthrow of the *Shura* and its stronger emphasis on military activities. By contrast, *Nasr* had tried to establish itself in these areas through ideological and cultural activities, but had been confronted by the intolerance of the military commanders of *Pasdaran*. In 1985 *Nasr*'s ideological campaign, centred at a local school in Shahrستان and run by a former teacher, provoked Commander Afkari of *Pasdaran* to attack the school, execute the teacher and throw the organisation out of the district. For many years *Nasr* was not able to return to Shahrستان. Following this incident, the leaders of *Nasr* realised the need to build up their military strength in order to survive in the two districts. Whilst *Nasr* completely failed to compete with *Afkari* in Shahrستان, it managed to establish military bases and cultural centres in parts of Daikundi. It took control of areas such Dare Khodi and Shakardarah, while *Pasdaran* controlled Nili, Sangemom and Lazir. Other areas such as Khidir, Sang-e Takht, Bandar, Ashtarlai, Charqol and Baghal-e Kando were turned into battlegrounds. Attacks and counter-attacks between the two rival organisations became routine in these areas for many years.³²

Similarly, once *Harakat* was effectively weakened in Jaghori and Qarabagh, tensions developed between *Nasr* and *Nahzat* commanders in those areas. *Nahzat*'s initial dominance in eastern and northern Jaghori and southern-western parts of Malistan was challenged by *Nasr*'s commanders, who accused *Nahzat*'s local commanders of corruption and deviation from ideological principles. Similarly *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* did not feel it necessary to cooperate with *Hizb-e Islami* in Jaghori and Malistan districts. Indeed, local *Hizb-e Islami* commanders turned into the real enemies. This occurred despite the fact that the two organisations had clandestinely cooperated with *Hizb-e Islami* in its conflict with the *Shura* and *Harakat* in other parts of the province in the early 1980s.³³

The merging of political factionalism and segmented society

Given the segmented character of Hazara society and the dislocation caused by civil war, either an overwhelming military superiority or a sophisticated and inclusive political system would have been needed to pacify the region. The inexperienced leadership of the Khomeinist groups, by contrast, did not know how to handle societal tensions, nor how to prevent them from affecting the Khomeinists themselves. Without a political system able to absorb such tensions and translate them politically, the fault lines between Khomeinist

³¹ Hezb-i Islami was a largely Sunni party led by Guldubbin Hekmatyar, which from the early 1980s tried to penetrate the Hazarajat and had some success in recruiting Hazaras in parts of Ghazni.

³² Interviews with intellectuals and aid workers from Daikundi and Shahrستان, Bamyān July 2006.

³³ Interview with former mujahedin commanders, Ghazni, September 2006.

factions were only going to be reinforced. Soon tensions among local communities threatened to hijack the Khomeinist movement.

As the conflict was prolonged and rivalries intensified, ideological rhetoric lost the pre-eminence of the early days. Local hostilities and growing frustration about the endless infighting required many local leaders to adopt more pragmatic approaches, suitable to local contexts. Many Khomeinist leaders acknowledge that by the mid 1980s they had to recognise the need to slow down their ideological campaign in the face of growing local sensitivities.³⁴ As they expanded the territory under their control, the incompetence and ineptitude of the *ulema* in effectively administering the 'liberated' areas was plainly displayed. They failed to manage social tensions and created even more tensions through their insensitivity towards local norms and traditions. Being trained in religious *madrasas*, where only holy texts and Islamic and Arabic literature were taught, they lacked the basic skills to control and manage even ordinary local disputes. In addition to this, overpopulation and scarcity of resources in most parts of the region, compounded by social tensions and displacement as a result of the war, created daunting challenges for the clerical leadership. In many cases the *ulema* themselves indulged in activities incompatible with their early ideological rhetoric. The role of the *ulema* as judges exposed them to severe criticism when bribery became a common occurrence in solving land disputes. The declarations of *jihad* against similar Shiite groups, which were supported by a different cleric, eroded public confidence in the future role of the *ulema* as political leaders. Cases of land disputes involving members or sympathisers of two different groups could spark violent conflicts dragging whole organisations into armed battle. As associates of unpopular and ruthless commanders, the *ulema* provided a religious justification for the infighting, seriously undermining their credibility in the long run. It was not only the Khomeinist factions that were drawn towards civil society and its contradictions; the contrary was also true. In the chaos caused by infighting, ordinary Hazaras had to join some organisation in order to protect their properties and lives. By joining, however, they would in turn encourage local rivals to join an organisation hostile to their own. The defeat of one's organisation would result in a loss in a property dispute. This vicious cycle gradually affected all sections of society and pushed them into one organisation or the other.³⁵

Not surprisingly, the increasing inclination towards adapting to local contexts produced different results on the ground. In some contexts, political and military rivalries reinforced existing social rifts and tensions while in some other situations they crossed traditional socio-economic boundaries. For instance, in southern parts of Hazarajat such as Ghazni and the Behsud area of Wardak, where the population were exposed to urban lifestyles as a result of migration to the cities, the different factions mostly recruited across tribal and local identities, including in their ranks members from all tribes, sub-tribes and villages. By and large in these areas political alignment and party affiliation were mostly determined on the basis of individual interests and ideological inclinations.³⁶

In parts of Hazarajat less exposed to the influence of urban life, tension among groups tended to reflect social and tribal cleavages. Local communities tended to use the factions for their own purposes, as the factions used communities. This was true in the more remote parts of southern Hazarajat too. A good example is the conflict between *Pasdaran* and the *Shura* in

³⁴ Interview with Shaikh Yosuf Waezi, Kabul, July 2006.

³⁵ Interview with Hazara intellectual, Bamyan, July 2006.

³⁶ This is based on author's interviews with local elders and former Jihadi commanders conducted during field trips as well as in Kabul during 2005-07.

Nawur. Here *Pasdarán* was predominantly represented by the *Ala'a-uddin* tribe.³⁷ The tribe, known for their distinct history as warriors and for their poorer economic conditions, had traditionally been at odds with the *khans* of Khawat, a landed and more prosperous local community. The ideological conflict between the *Shura* and the *Pasdarán* reinforced these old tensions. *Ala'a-uddin* tribesmen, organised by Ali Jan Zahedi of *Pasdarán*, were frequently attacking the Khawat area, but were repulsed by the joint resistance of the *Shura* and the *khans*. After the defeat of *Pasdarán*, the opportunism of Khawat's alliance with the *Shura* became clear once community resistance drove out the unpopular militias of the *Shura*.³⁸

In some parts of Hazarajat, identities were even more tribal and local than in Khawat. However, they did not necessarily reinforce rivalry. Sometimes they could have the opposite effect. The Hazaras of Turkman valley in Sorkh Parsa district of Parwan provide a good example. Despite substantial migration to Kabul, where they gained a reputation of successful businessmen, they maintained a strong tribal identity and their affiliation to *jihadi* organisations was mostly decided at tribal and sub-tribal levels. For instance, *Nasr* predominantly recruited from the Khidir, *Pasdarán* from Ali Khani and *Harakat* from Dawlatkhani branches of the tribe. Local *mujahedin* groups were called '*group-e ali khani*', '*group-e khidi'r*' and '*group-e dawlatkhani*', after the names of tribes. Despite the local tribal character of the organisations operating in the valley, infighting was largely contained by shared local interests and community pressure on local commanders.³⁹

However, in the absence of such shared interests or dominance by one particular organisation, disastrous conflicts could emerge. In villages where several organisations competed for influence and none exerted dominance, petty personal, familial and local disputes determined the affiliation of an individual. For instance, in Patmasti, a village in south of the provincial centre of Bamyan, *Harakat* and *Nasr* activists, who were members of the same clan, even cousins and relatives, indulged in one of the bloodiest conflicts. The number of deaths caused by shooting, assassinations and armed battles in this small village has been estimated at more than 80.⁴⁰

The rise of the military class and its destabilising role

Origins and mutation of the military class

Tensions among local communities were not the only factor threatening the complete implosion of the Khomeinist movement in Hazarajat. The prolongation of the war resulted into the rise of a military class as well as of a culture of militancy throughout the country. Thus in a society where traditionally age, property and family lineage determined the social standing of individuals, a Kalashnikov and affiliation to militant organisations now paved the way for the rise of a formerly repressed ambitious youth who became known as '*qomandan*', or commanders. They could have up to hundreds of armed men stationed at military bases

³⁷ The tribe are believed to be descendants of the army of Sultan Ala'a-uddin Hussain, one of the strongest of the Ghoris dynasty that invaded Ghazni and overthrew the Ghaznavid kingdom in the second half of the 12th century. They have settled in two valleys in eastern part of Nawur and are estimated to be around 3000 families.

³⁸ Interviews with former mujahedin leader, Bamyan, July 2006 and Ghazni January 2006.

³⁹ Interview with former mujahedin commander of the Turkman valley, Kabul, June 2006.

⁴⁰ Interview with former jihadi commanders, Bamyan, July 2006.

known as '*nezamis*'. The commander's control over the fighters was exercised through '*sargrups*', or group leaders, in charge of ten to twenty men. The group leaders earned their reputation and authority by demonstrating their fighting skills and bravery and were the key agents of mobilisation. They were also instrumental in achieving tactical superiority in battle.⁴¹ The growth of this new generation of local leaders contributed to increasing the vulnerability of the khans and traditionalist elite. Militancy became a new and easy way of elevating one's social standing.

The growth of the military class conferred significant advantage to the Khomeinist organisations. By virtue of their role as local military-political leaders, the military class represented a societal change in opposition to the traditional leadership of the *khans*. The anti-government rebellion in 1979 was successful because of the spontaneous mobilisation of fighters under the leadership of local notables and traditionalist clergy. However, following state collapse and the ensuing disappearance of an imminent external threat, the spontaneity of the movement of mobilisation evaporated. Many fighters returned to their farms and members of the privileged *khans* and traditionalist clergy preferred to avoid the risks of direct involvement in military activities. This allowed ambitious and underprivileged individuals to engage in long-term militancy as a way of life. What further encouraged this trend was the way the new Khomeinist organisations recruited, trained and equipped dedicated militants. The emergence of several competing organisations strengthened the role of these militant individuals. However, the relationship of the military class with their political leaders was not always unproblematic. The prolonging of the civil war and the associated militarisation of society increased the weight of the commanders in comparison to political leaders. Unlike the political leaders, who were either based in Iran or frequently travelling, the military commanders were mostly based in their districts and as a result had better grasp over local political and military affairs. Many political leaders were aware of the rise of their commanders throughout the 1980s. One of them described this process after 1985 as a trend towards anarchy and the tendency of commanders to indulge in corrupt practices at odds with their stated political ideologies.⁴² A good example is provided by the local leadership of *Nahzat-e Islami* in Ghazni. The rank-and-file of the party led by Eftekhari, a senior cleric from the Jaghori district, gradually lost its initial ideological commitment and engaged in local infighting and rivalry under the leadership of local commanders. Attempts by Eftekhari and other leaders based in Iran to preserve the ideological character did not produce any results and ultimately the organisation fell completely under the control of various local commanders.⁴³

The local strength of any organisation derived initially from a group of activists who had mostly received ideological and military training at home or in Iran. These core groups were mostly dedicated militants committed to their ideological principles, which demanded disciplined and decent behaviour towards the ordinary population as well as an obligation to fight against rival political and ideological groups. However, to broaden their base of support, the different organisations tried to attract other followers as well, who were collectively known as '*muttahedin*' or allies. The allies were not required to volunteer as full-time militants or play very active roles. They were only expected to support their respective organisations as needed at the times of conflict and offer accommodation for the troops that

⁴¹ For more on the impacts of war on the social structure of the Hazara see, Monsutti (2006).

⁴² Interview with Shaikh Waezi, Kabul, July 2006.

⁴³ Interview with a Jaghori intellectual, Kabul, October 2006.

would pass through their areas. In return, the organisations would promise protection, security and often support in local disputes.⁴⁴

Throughout the 1980s, the military class would play an important role in prolonging the conflict and preventing a political settlement. As long as its interests were not taken into consideration, the military class would continue to wage local wars and to consolidate its hold over portions of Hazarajat.

The characteristics of civil warfare

Multiple sources of support from within the Iranian Islamic regime and religious circles allowed multiple organisations to continue to exist even when they fared badly in the battlefield, contributing to the prevention of even the most powerful players, such as *Pasdaran* and *Nasr*, from gaining sufficient political credibility and military strength to dominate the entire region and take the lead in an effort to build a strong political system. However, this was far from being the only important factor impeding political consolidation. The mountainous character of the terrain and harsh climatic conditions was another important one. Timely coordination by the senior leaders and organisational communication was a nearly impossible task in a context of conflicts and shifting alliances that required quick communication and decision making. Most of the districts are cut off from the rest of the region through the long winter. The intensification of conflict and rivalries, and control of territories by hostile opponents often made it impossible for local leaders of an organisation to communicate with senior leaders across the region. In the absence of effective radio equipment, the only means of communication between different units of an organisation in different districts were letters carried by trusted messengers. These letters would often take weeks and even months to reach to their destination. Hence, most decisions about war and peace, alliance and hostilities, had to be made in the local context. This meant that local commanders, though affiliated to larger organisations, had to adapt and cope with the local political, military and social conditions.⁴⁵

As a result, this was a series of local conflicts rather than a civil war, each only very loosely connected to another. The aims of the fighters were usually limited to seizing control of districts and villages, with little sense of region-wide concerns. Whilst some districts were dominated by a single organisation others remained areas of conflicts. Where a single organisation gained supremacy, the situation was mostly stable. For instance, Yakawlang district was entirely dominated by *Nasr*, and Shahrستان by *Pasdaran*. Neither of these experienced the reciprocal slaughter that occurred in Patmasti village. In these areas, opposition activities were not tolerated and members of other organisations were effectively subdued or even forced to flee. Afkari, the *Pasdaran* commander of Shahrستان, established full control over the district after he successfully ousted the activists of *Nasr* and *Hizb-e Islami* in 1984. *Khans* and local notables, affiliated to *Shura*, were already defeated a year earlier. Afkari was assisted by Sadiqi, *Pasdaran*'s ideological and clerical leader in the district, in gaining ultimate control. *Khans*, *Nasr* activists and *Hizb-e Islami* members were not permitted to operate. He applied the most severe measures against the khans. He forced them to leave and distributed their lands to their previous farmers. These farmers were then required to provide one fighter per family as human tribute to Afkari. These fighters, numbering more than one thousand, joined the ideological cadres in ensuring that nobody

⁴⁴ Interviews with former mujahidin leaders, Bamyan, Ghazni and Kabul, 2006.

⁴⁵ Interview with former jihadi leaders, Bamyan, July 2006.

could challenge the dominance of Afkari in the district.⁴⁶ Despite their ruthless tactics and intolerance, Sadiqi and Afkari introduced reforms and development programmes that boosted economic and social development in the district. Often by using forced labour, they built roads, rehabilitated schools and water canals. They required farmers to plant a certain number of almond trees every year or otherwise risk the transfer of land to another farmer.⁴⁷

The parties involved in the conflict were using and developing a range of tactics and approaches suitable to the mountainous terrain of the region. These included full-fledged battles, assassinations, ambushes and forced displacement of the opponents. The military-political bases were usually located high up in the mountains in order to control and monitor the surrounding valleys. The bases served as more than a simple military unit. The prolongation of the conflict and the increasing importance of mountainous areas at the expense of bazaars and valleys were turning the bases into public authorities that would administer justice by settling land disputes and punishing offenders, including collaborators with the enemy. To serve these purposes, the commander of a base would usually be assisted by a judge, normally a cleric, and would have at his disposal a prison where he would incarcerate and torture the opponents. Control of strategic and unassailable mountains was essential for the survival and dominance of an organisation in a given district. As a result, many bloody battles took place to ascertain their control. For instance, in Hutqol and Patu areas of Jaghori and Pashi valley of Malistan, mountain bases were established by the district Hazara commanders of *Hizb-e Islami* to ensure control of the valleys and villages throughout the southern parts of Jaghori and western parts of Malistan. An alliance of *Nasr*, *Pasdaran*, *Nahzat* and *Jabhe Mutaahed* frequently launched attacks at these bases, but they were never taken. These bases ensured the dominance of *Hizb-e Islami* until 1990, when *Hizb-e Wahdat* was formed.⁴⁸ Flat valleys and bazaars such as the main bazaar in Sangmishah, the district capital, and Angori, the second main trading post in Jaghori, were constantly the object of fighting. At times, hostile parties would dig trenches in and around the bazaar with machine guns and RPGs pointed against one another. The control of bazaars was essential for raising funds, collecting taxes from villagers, shopkeepers and obtaining fees from travellers.⁴⁹ During the years of war, Angori bazaar boomed as the major transit point connecting Hazarajat to Pakistan through the Pashtun provinces. Its control was ensured by a base right below the bazaar on the edge of Hazarajat.

The absence of an effective political system was the ultimate cause of the prevalence of local commanders and their petty interests. However, once these became established, they turned into one of the main causes of delay in the development of such political system, as it emerged during the inter-factional negotiations of 1985-9.

⁴⁶ Interview with former jihadi leaders, Bamyān, July 2006.

⁴⁷ As a result the level of literacy is much higher in Shahristan now. There are now eight high schools in the district that place it in stark contrast to other parts of Daikundi province. (Personal interview with Musa Sultani, Head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission who is originally from Shahristan, Bamyān, July 2006).

⁴⁸ Please see below about Hizb-e Wahdat and its formation.

⁴⁹ For instance control of the Bazaar of Angori by Bashi Habib of Hizb-e Islami provided him access to significant revenues collected as tax on the shopkeepers and tributes paid to him by the Pashtun drivers and smugglers transporting goods, migrants and IDPs from Hazarajat to and from Pakistan. He had set up an agency that controlled and coordinated the movement of people and goods through the bazaar.

The slow emergence of a political system

The political leaders of the different organisations gradually realised the extent of damage that infighting and factionalism were causing to their image at home and abroad. Since the early 1980s several attempts were made to reach an agreement to form a unified organisation or at least an alliance that could contain factionalism and infighting. However, several alliances crafted in Iran failed to produce results on the ground. This was mostly because the urgency of unification or coalition-making felt by the political leaders were not necessarily relevant to the local situation of mutually hostile commanders, concerned with their territorial control and personal powers.

An important initiative to contain the infighting was taken in the Iranian city of Qom in spring 1985, when senior leaders of the organisations involved in the internecine conflict announced a ceasefire and appointed a peace commission to travel to all parts of the region.⁵⁰ The commission including senior representatives of all the organizations and independent *ulema* travelled to all parts of the region, although with a focus on Darra-ye Suf district of Samangan where *Harakat* and *Nasr* were engaged in one of the most persistent conflicts. As a result, local commanders of the organisations in the district were persuaded to agree to a ceasefire and to the formation of an independent council of the *ulema*, which would ensure implementation of the agreements and prevent eruption of future conflicts. The agreement dictated the return of the militants to their bases, better coordination in the fight against the government and in the administration of the district, as well as the withdrawal of militia forces from the *madrasas* and other public places. The commission also travelled to Parwan, Ghazni and Wardak provinces where they brokered similar agreements, which were to be implemented by local independent council of the *ulema*. The attempt, however, was flawed and the truces did not last long. Negotiations could not have delivered lasting peace without the establishment of a solid framework, offering a vision of a future inclusive political system to all involved and allowing them to overcome their mutual distrust. The independent councils of the *ulema* failed to enforce their decisions and the different regions, dominated by distrust and burdened by a long history of hostilities, erupted into violence once again. Many commanders were still hoping to defeat their adversaries militarily. Interestingly, the *Shura*, which was still a key party to the war in Nawur and in Bamyan province, was not included in the peace agreements, a fact which presumably reflects an Iranian concern with securing peace only within the Khomeinist movement (Dawlatabadi 1999: 220-238).

Despite the persistent failures on the ground, the leaders based in Iran carried on discussing alliances and debating unification. The most important outcome of this process was the creation of the *Shura-ye Itelaf-e Islami Afghanistan* (The Council of the Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan) in July 1987 in Tehran. At this point, at least, the factional Khomeinist leaders had reached a satisfying agreement about power sharing among themselves, thanks to Iranian brokering. Enjoying the backing of Iranian officials, the Alliance succeeded in taking more cohesive and consistent stands on key nationwide issues. A more effective coordination of the organisations was established at the political level. Major political decisions were taken by the central committee of the alliance and announced by a spokesperson appointed by the different organisations on the basis of a three-month rotation.

⁵⁰ The ceasefire was announced by leaders of Pasdaran-e Jihad-e Islami Afghanistan, Sazaman-e Nasr-e Afghanistan, Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan, Nahzat-e Islami Afghanistan, Jabhe Muttahed Enqelab-e Islami Afghanistan and Nayroy-e Islami Afghanistan. All of these organisations were involved in the civil war in part of the Hazarajat.

Although the *Shura-ye Itelaf-e Islami* in Afghanistan was a step in the right direction, it had many flaws too. It excluded the non-Khomeinist groups and was directly under Iranian influence, a fact that limited its independence. Most importantly, despite its successes at the political level, the alliance failed to address the issue of how to curb factionalism and infighting on the ground. To achieve this objective, a number of leaders based in the region put their efforts together to move beyond the formula of the alliance. While Iranian authorities and political leaders abroad were in favour of a political alliance mainly to respond to the rapid political developments in the region, the infighting and hostilities on the ground pushed the agenda towards a more radical process of unification. The new situation created by the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 made clear the need for a collective voice of the Hazaras to play a role in a possible post-war settlement, thus strengthening the rationale for the formation of a single party. Even though the process was largely driven by leaders of *Nasr* and *Pasdaran*, other factions too were given space. An assembly of leaders of the two organisations in La'al district of Ghor in September 1988 decided on a merger into a single organisation and continued efforts for negotiation and inclusion of other organisations. This was followed a number of congresses in different parts of Hazarajat, aiming to engage political and military commanders of all organisations in the discussion about the urgency of merging all factions into a single party. That years of infighting were beginning to demonstrate that military victories were not achievable also helped. Parallel discussions in several districts of the region led to a regional congress in Bamyan, which announced the formation of the *Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan*, (Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan) in mid 1989.⁵¹ The formation of a single party in Hazarajat was the first major step towards the creation of an effective political system for Hazarajat. Although *Wahdat* is usually described as a party and indeed described itself as such, it was meant to include all political groups operating in Hazarajat, including the previously excluded *Shura* and *Harakat*, on the basis of a shared agenda and agreed 'rules of the game'. In the absence of a working all-Afghan political system, therefore, *Wahdat* emerged as the political system of the Hazarajat. Although it had its own flaws, for a few years it at least brought peace and stability to Hazarajat.

Conclusion

The turbulent history of civil war and factionalism in the Hazarajat was a predictable and natural consequence of state collapse in a closed society where experience of inclusive and tolerant politics was almost non-existent. The region was forcefully integrated into the Afghan state by a military campaign featured by mass displacement, killings and fragmentation of its population under King Abdur Rahman Khan in early 1880s and was subsequently controlled by successive Afghan rulers by means of coercive power and continued exclusion from political participation and socio-economic development. Thus for almost a century locals were denied the opportunity to participate in state politics and develop the ability to manage and administer society. Their socio-economic affairs were handled by the central government without much involvement of their own. Historically, the Hazara *khans* dominated the social and economic affairs of the community but under the Afghan state their role was largely reduced into district or village agents in a vertical relationship with the central government. As a result of exclusionary policies towards the region, the Hazara intelligentsia was taking its first steps and only the clerics had some potential for regional political leadership. In addition, historical frustration and grievances led sections of the

⁵¹ For more on Hizb-e Wahdat and series of discussions that led to its formation please see Earfani (1993).

intelligentsia and the clerics to embrace imported radical ideologies such as Marxist and Islamism. Both groups were seeking to establish an idealised society by fixing all social ills before obtaining their political credibility or developing legitimate tools for doing so. The ethno-nationalism of a tiny section of the educated class failed to compete successfully with the two revolutionary ideologies. The impact of competing imported ideologies in Hazarajat's very nascent phase of political development was inevitably polarizing and fragmented society into violent and hostile factions. The polarisation deepened to the extent that it triggered and transformed existing social cleavages into incessant violent conflicts.

As demonstrated, all social forces in the region failed to articulate a viable vision for an inclusive and acceptable form of political system. In the absence of peaceful mechanisms of power sharing and a system of control, they attempted to define their status and to play a role in crafting a polity by resorting to violence and eliminating their adversaries. The intelligentsia were the first to vanish, as a competitor to be reckoned with, followed by weakening of the *khans* and the traditionalist clergy. By the mid 1980s the Khomeinist clergy rose into power in most parts of the region. They too fragmented further along clerical networks and still had to compete with the khans and the traditionalist clergy in territories controlled by the *Shura* and *Harakat*. Hereby, a political and military stalemate emerged in the region that, despite continued military confrontation, created an increasingly conducive environment for negotiations for political settlements. The desire for political settlement was further instigated by the UN-led peace process in the country which provided for the Soviet Army withdrawal in 1989. What further prompted the Hazara political leaders to concentrate their efforts in building a more forceful political organization was their exclusion by the Sunni organizations from interim governments in Pakistan. The exclusion renewed the historical sense of exclusion and deprivation that necessitated the urgency for collective political presence in the national arena. It was such an environment that brought the different political leaderships together to impose peace on the field commanders and then unify in Bamyan in 1989 under *Hizb-e Wahdat*. Hazarajat finally had its own political system, although it would soon be confronted with the issue of finding its place in a dramatically changing Afghanistan.

Glossary

Hazaras: the third largest of Afghanistan's ethnic groups who are mostly Shiite in terms of religion.

Hazarajat: the predominantly Hazara central highlands of Afghanistan, including districts in nine central and northern provinces.

Hawzah: Persian word, meaning centre.

Khan: local notable, often a large landlord that traditionally exercised influence in several villages.

Madrasah: Islamic high school.

Mujahedin: plural of mujahed, holy fighters, the militants that fought the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Sayed: alleged descendant of Prophet Mohammad and his family.

Shura: Islamic council.

Ulema: plural of 'alim', the scholars of Islamic laws and traditions.

Ummah: the Muslim community of believers.

Welayat-e Faqih: guardianship of the jurist, the key tenet of Khomeini's conception of the role of the clergy in society.

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