PASHTUNS IN AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

For the past fifty years, academics and politicians have been discussing the problem of Pashtun domination in the political life and state structures of Afghanistan. From the very beginning (the Afghan state appeared in 1747), supreme power belonged to members of several Pashtun clans, not counting the two brief periods when ethnic Tajiks filled the highest post: Habibullah Khan Kalakani in 1929 and Burhanuddin Rabbani in 1992-2002.

Until 1973, when Afghanistan ceased to be a monarchy, members of the Pashtun political elite ruled the country as emirs and kings; Pashtuns resided at the very top of the pyramid of power. They owed their exalted position to the prevailing opinion that Pashtuns created the state of Ahmad Shah Durrani.

This is true: the main Pashtun tribal groups and unions set up the Afghan state and remained the pillar of its rulers; their fighting force and military skills were the main factors that added strength to the power of the emir (king) and the key elements of the armed forces of Afghanistan.

KEYWORDS: ***Afghanistan, Pashtuns, the political system, mojahedeen, the Taliban, the Afghan conflict.***

Introduction

In the 1930s, the nationalist chauvinist ideology of the rulers of Afghanistan made the political hegemony of the Pashtuns one of the country's cornerstones. Academics spared no effort to prove that the Pashtuns had every reason to dominate the country's politics and every other sphere of life; they refused to take into account that there were other peoples and ethnicities in the country.[1] Igor Reysner, who dedicated his life to Afghan studies, wrote that "the Afghan chauvinists tried to expand the space of the Afghans' historical homeland … at the expense of lands which belonged to other, non-Afghan, tribes and justify the 'historical rights' of the Afghans to capture these territories and subjugate their populations."[2]

[1] The fairly complicated history of Afghanistan explains why many of those who live in Afghanistan or write about this country used and still use the term Afghan as an ethnonym applied solely to the Pashtun.

[2] I. Reysner, "K voprosu o skladyvanii afghanskoy natsii," *Voprosy istorii,* No. 7, 1949, p. 82.

For many centuries, the monarchy kept Pashtuns at the very top of the country's political ladder, while Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and other ethnic minorities (who constituted the majority of the country's population) had no say in the state of affairs. Tajik scholar Sharofiddin Imomov has pointed to this outstanding feature of Afghan politics: "Throughout the entire life of the Afghan state all peoples, with the exception of Afghans, were purposefully and deliberately ignored. This policy was rooted in the traditional values and customs of only one people—'the main and the greatest;' these values and these customs were at a fairly low moral, cultural and social development level, while the dominating role of the Afghans and their rule limited or even damaged the country's historical and cultural import."[3]

Non-Afghan peoples (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Balochis, Nuristanis, and other ethnic minorities) came to the country before the Afghans and long before they set up their state and should, therefore, have enjoyed the same rights as the newcomers.

Mohammed Nadir Shah, who fought, cruelly and uncompromisingly, those who sided with Amanullah Khan (and even more vehemently against Habibullah Khan Kalakani) and who did not hesitate to suppress the Tajik revolts in Kuhistan and Kuhdoman in the early 1930s, triggered a merciless war against the non-Afghan peoples. Igor Reysner wrote at one time: "Nadir Shah was determined to suppress all nascent national movements of the non-Afghan peoples; 'struggle against the inner enemy' became the beginning and end of his regime."[4]

Determined to finally suppress all shoots of the national-liberation struggle of the non-Afghan peoples, Nadir Shah confiscated the lands and property of the large feudal lords (accused of siding with the Kalakani regime during the civil war of 1928-1929) in the country's center, north, and west. His government revived the policy started by Emir Abdur Rahman Khan of moving Pashtun tribes to these regions, thus causing a lot of discontent among the local people. The government used the Pashtun military forces to suppress the scattered revolts, which widened the gap of mistrust and even increased the enmity among the peoples of Afghanistan.

In 1936, the Pashto language became the country's official language, which further consolidated domination of the Pashtuns in the social and political landscape; this can be described as a historically justified step toward a single Afghan nation.

Pashto was imposed on the non-Pashtun peoples with the help of the army and the police; all other ethnicities could no longer develop their ancient national cultures. The ethnonym "Afghans" was imposed on them by force; they lost the right to remain Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen.[5]

Pashto-speakers could count on privileged positions in education, civil service, and the economy; this was a long-term policy which, according to Mir Muhammad Siddiq Farhang, outstanding historian and politician, did nothing to draw the people closer together. Instead, this policy erected high obstacles on the road toward economic, political, and cultural community and, on the whole, toward a single nation[6] and fanned national strife among the peoples of Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, the government, with the ruling crust's enthusiastic support, spread nationalist ideology far and wide. Very much like the Nazi theory, this ideology spoke of the Afghans as a "pure and holy race" and the Pashto language as purely Arian. The ideas of national and racial superiority were in great demand; Afghan scholars were forced to invent a "correct" history of their country, while writers were expected to laud the Arian race.

Back in the 1940s, Igor Reysner revealed the true meaning of nationalist ideology as an apology for national suppression of the non-Afghan peoples of Afghanistan: the fact of their existence

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[3] Sh. Imomov, "Exploring for Historical and Cultural Values of Afghanistan," *Fonus,* No. 7, 2003, p. 29 (in Tajik).

[4] I.M. Reysner, "Reaktsionnye idei v sovremennoy istorii Afghanistana," *Vestnik AN SSSR*, No. 5, 1948, p. 109.

[5] See: I. Reysner, "K voprosu o skladyvanii afghanskoy natsii…," p. 77.

[6] See: M.S. Farhang, *Afghanistan in the Last Five Centuries,* Tehran, 2001, p, 635 (in Persian).

was denied and their right to self-determination suppressed. In short, national contradictions became more acute, while national suppression became crueler.[7]

In the 1960s, another argument appeared in favor of Pashtun domination: it was alleged that they were the numerically largest nation inside the country. This argument hardly holds water for the simple reason that no population censuses were organized in the past; this means that the ethnic composition and size of individual ethnicities remain unknown. Before 1979, not a single general population census (the only reliable source of information about the country's population) that included all ethnic and social groups was conducted.

The 1979 population census organized amid a military and political crisis was inevitably limited to a small part of the country's (mainly urban) population. This means that no matter what experts and academics of all hues write about the country's population, their conclusions should be treated as assessments far removed from the country's real demographic and ethnic landscape.

Tribal Policy in Afghanistan

Pashtun domination in the country's political life is based on a system of privileges; the loyalty of Pashtun tribes is bought with all sorts of favors: they are exempt from conscription and labor duties; they pay no taxes, customs dues, etc. The Durrani tribes, especially the Barakzai clan, which gave the country its first rulers, enjoyed even more privileges. Its members, exempt from legal prosecution, were liable to prosecution by tribal courts. The male part received annual subsidies; the female part could count on a dowry of 100 rupees paid from the state treasury.

Sardars, minor nobility, the social group which gave the country several khans, occupied the top levels of the feudal pyramid; they filled the highest military and civilian posts in the key provinces where they ruled in the name of the emir or the king. According to Khaknazar Nazarov, the sardars de facto "owned the Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat provinces, which they treated as their inherited possessions and where they stirred up unrest, enmity, and feudal strife."[8] When they dropped their centrifugal intentions, the sardars became the main pillar of central power.

Throughout the entire history of the Afghan state, the Pashtun tribes guarded the border with Pakistan along which they lived.

In one of his articles, Victor Plastun pointed to an exceptionally important role the Pashtun tribes played in the country's politics: "It is especially important that until 1978 political stability in the country was maintained through a precarious balance between central power and its armed forces and the loyalty of the Pashtun tribal chiefs."[9]

From time to time, the upset balance between central power and the tribal chiefs caused political earthquakes. Under Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, for example, the Ghilzai, traditional rivals of the Durrani, were placed in practically all the top party, state, and military posts. It was decided to consolidate central power in the east and south of the country which largely infringed on the power of the local khans and tribal chiefs. In an effort to protect their privileges, they allied with the leaders of the military-political groups, whom they helped fight the pro-Communist government.

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[7] See: I. Reysner, "K voprosu o skladyvanii afghanskoy natsii…," p. 82.

[8] Kh. Nazarov, *K istorii proiskhozhdeniia i rasseleniia plemen i narodov Tsentralnoy Azii*, Irfon, Dushanbe, 2004, p. 86.

[9] V. Plastun, "Pushtuny i ikh rol v politicheskoy zhizni," *Azia i Afrika segodnia,* No. 10, 1995, p. 49.

The tribal chiefs had two trump cards—their relative independence and strong and well-armed volunteers—in their far from simple relations with central power; not infrequently, their disagreements caused a lot of tension.

Emir Abdur Rahman Khan, the founder of the centralized Afghan state, and all rulers who came after him, could not destroy the traditional system of tribal relations. It should be said in all justice that Abdur Rahman Khan undermined it to a certain extent and smoothed over feudal strife and tribal disagreements. "This circumstance," he wrote later, "convinced me that we should liquidate the feudal system and put an end to tribal strife to introduce one law across the country and a unified system of power."[10]

From time to time, the relations between the tribes and central power, which limited or even annulled tribal privileges, worsened to the point of unrest. Here is an example. Early in the 1920s, Emir Amanullah Khan exempted the tribes Mangal, Ahmadzai, Zadran, Chamkani, and some others from tax. After 1924, "when the state, badly hit by economic problems, decided to annul all privileges so that the tribes started paying taxes like all other peoples of Afghanistan and to extend two-year conscription to their young men, the insulted tribes rebelled."[11]

The Pashtun nomads figured prominently in the country's politics. The Afghan state developed in the unique social and economic conditions shaped by the specifics of the Pashtun traditional tribal structure, the tribes' settlement geography, the deeply rooted traditions of the liberation struggle, and the specifics of their social, psychological, and mass consciousness. Taken together, these factors were responsible for the complicated and contradictory nature of the nomads' political role. They took an active part in all three wars against the British (the colonial wars of 1838-1842, 1878-1880, and 1919).

The nomadic tribes, which constituted a considerable part of the population, also enjoyed certain privileges: they were free to roam across the country and use pastures free of charge. They were entitled to state subsidies and easy bank loans; they could count on support in cattle breeding and sale of their products, in improving their standards of living and cultural level through easier access to secondary and higher education, etc. The Ministry of Frontiers, Nations, and Tribal Affairs coordinated these efforts together with special commissions in other ministries.

The state tried in vain to settle the nomadic tribes. They have preserved their clan system. Today, there are over 2.5 million nomads and semi-nomads in Afghanistan.[12]

According to Sultan Akimbekov, prominent Kazakh scholar, the nomads and semi-nomads (there is a fairly large number of them in Afghanistan) did not abandon their lifestyle because the state redistributed the country's resources in their favor, thus paying for their continued existence and, most importantly, their social status, which was and is much higher than those of the rest of the population, the ethnic minorities in particular.[13]

Khaknazar Nazarov, a well-known Tajik student of the history of Afghanistan, has pointed out that "it was the self-contained nature of the tribes and clans, one of the greatest contradictions of Afghan society of the last two centuries, independence of the tribal chiefs, and their privileged position and permissiveness that did not allow the former Afghan rulers to strengthen the position of central power."[14]

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[10] *Avtobiografiia Abdurakhman-khana emira Afghanistana. Izdano Sultanom Magometkhanom,* in 2 vols., Vol. I, St. Petersburg, 1901, p. 233.

[11] Kh.N. Nazarov, *Tajiks in the History of Afghanistan*, Donish, Dushanbe, 1998, p. 350 (in Tajik).

[12] See: *Afghanistan*, Handbook, Vostochnaia literatura Publishers, Moscow, 2000, p. 29 (in Russian).

[13] See: S.M. Akimbekov, *Afghanskiy uzel i problemy bezopasnosti Tsentralnoy Azii*, 2nd revised edition, Almaty, 2003, p. 23.

[14] Kh.N. Nazarov, *Tajiks in the History of Afghanistan*, p. 353.

As a result, the Tribal Area has preserved its traditions and autonomy intact. Today, it is the least economically developed and most politically conservative part of the country. At all times, it remained on the side of reactionary and anti-government forces. In the past, it served as a safe haven for persecuted religious figures and rebellious feudal lords.

In the country's recent history, the Pashtun tribes of the eastern and southern areas (some of which later became part of Pakistan) invariably sided with the political opposition. This happened under King Nadir Shah and Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, at the time when the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was in power, and also under the Taliban, etc.

The Administrative-Territorial Division of Afghanistan: "Divide and Rule"

The Pashtuns dominate all spheres of life in Afghanistan; this can be described as its main specifics. The administrative-territorial division inherited from the past has not yet been adjusted to the ethnic, lingual, and religious composition of the Afghan population.

The feudal Durrani Empire spread first to the territories of the largest Pashtun tribes; later vast areas of non-Afghan peoples were likewise captured after long and bloody wars.

Under Ahmad Shah, the Durrani state was divided into provinces (vilaets); at first there were about 30 of them; later the descendants of Ahmad Shah cut down their number.

The vilaets were divided into three groups:

(1) the Pashtun-populated areas;

(2) the areas with predominantly non-Afghan populations (Herat, Farah, Ghazni, Kabul, Bamyan, Jelalabad, Peshawar, Kashmir, Balkh, etc.) under the shah's direct rule;

(3) the vassal principalities of Khorasan, Balochistan, Seistan, Sindh, and others ruled by dynasties.[15]

Bit by bit, the Afghan state acquired its multiethnic and multicultural nature. Today there are 34 administrative units (provinces) in Afghanistan, practically all of them (with the exception of Bamyan and Nuristan) are multiethnic.

At the same time, ethnic territories, as a rule, belong to several provinces. Hazarajat (a mountainous region in the center of Afghanistan), for example, the historic homeland of the Hazaras, is divided among the provinces of Bamyan, Sar-e Pol, Samangan, Baghlan, Urozgan, and Ghazni.

This administrative-territorial division was inherited from the monarchy. At all times, the kings preferred to see the vast territories of the non-Pashtun ethnicities divided to keep people in check and the local elites disunited. Today, the non-Pashtun peoples survive as a huge number of small regional groups with their own dialects and traditions, although they have common ethnic identities.

The organizations that defend the interests of the non-Afghan peoples, such as the Afghan Labor Revolutionary Organization, Organization of Toilers' Fedayan of Afghanistan, Islamic Unity of Afghanistan, and the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan, as well as at least some of the political figures and academics, insist on a revision of the country's administrative-territorial division.

[15] See: Iu.V. Gankovskiy, *Imperia Durrani,* Vostochnaia literatura, Moscow, 1958, p. 75.

During transfer to a peaceful life inside the country, this might fan confrontation and enmity among the peoples.

In principle, administrative units with predominant ethnicities can be set up; this can be done for the Hazaras, Turkmen, Balochis, Nuristanis, Pashais, and some others and cannot be done for Pashtuns and Tajiks scattered across the entire territory of Afghanistan. Today, if changed, the administrative-territorial division will create the problem of distributing hundreds of thousands of people of different ethnic groups among the new administrative units; this will undoubtedly threaten Afghanistan's continued existence as an independent state.

Throughout the history of Afghanistan, its central power was weak and undeveloped; no matter how hard it tried, it failed to control the country's outskirts. People in the center had to use bribes to keep the belligerent Pashtun tribes in check. With strong armed forces, the tribes remained relatively independent; the state, in turn, bought their loyalty with significant preferences and privileges.

Nothing has changed so far in Afghanistan or the Tribal Area (in the north-west of Pakistan). The army of Pakistan, one of the largest in the east and one of the best equipped, can hardy oppose the armed tribal forces on the other side of the Durand Line.

State policy regarding the Pashtun tribes failed. Together with other factors, it "became the main cause of conservation of Afghanistan in the widest sense."[16] The state had to retreat; its involvement in tribal affairs became minimal, which allowed the Pashtuns to preserve their political domination countrywide together with their tribal consciousness and structure.

The System in Crisis

In 1978, the advent to power of the PDPA weakened the political system of Afghanistan rooted in the Pashtuns' political, military, and economic domination; it finally ended in the spring of 1992 when the mojahedeen captured Kabul and removed Najibullah.

From that time on, the military-political mojahedeen groups gradually added national-ethnic hues to their regime. This gave rise to a new, obviously ethnic, dimension of confrontation between the Pashtuns (in the south and east of the country) and the non-Pashtun peoples (Tajiks in the north-east, center, and the west, Uzbeks in the north, and Hazaras in the central mountainous areas).

In the mid-1990s, Anwar ul-Haq Ahady, leader of the Afghan Mellat Party (which wanted to restore the Pashtuns to their former dominance), pointed to the main factors behind the collapse of the old political system: "The collapse of the Najibullah regime in Kabul in April 1992 not only ended the communist era in Afghanistan but also heralded the end of the Pashtun domination."[17]

According to Ahady, this happened for the following reasons:

- By April 1992, the political elite and the leaders of the non-Pashtun peoples had come to the fore in national politics;
- The leaders of Peshawar Seven (six of them were Pashtuns) could not agree among themselves;
- The Pashtun population refused to support the leaders of the military-political groups;
- The West, the U.S. in particular, was negatively disposed toward Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the Islamic Party of Afghanistan, while the regional powers and the neighboring

[16] S.M. Akimbekov, op. cit.

[17] Anwar ul-Haq Ahady, "The Decline of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey,* No. 7, July 1995, p. 621.

countries (Iran, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan) carried a lot of weight with the ethnic groups inside the country.

These factors warped the political system, but did not bury it. It crumbled under the weight of the country's development in the 20th century when the non-Afghan peoples became aware of their ethnicity and their national interests, which it became vitally important to defend.

On the other hand, the communist government not only declared, but also strove to establish equality among all the ethnic groups, which stirred up political awareness among the non-Afghan peoples.

The military-political organizations that defended the non-Afghan peoples, as well as the national and religious minorities, fortified their position during the war the mojahedeen groups waged against the pro-Communist regime in Kabul and Soviet presence in Afghanistan. The Islamic Society of Afghanistan headed by Prof. Rabbani held a special place in the Peshawar Seven and was prominent on the domestic political scene.

The Shi'a Hizb-e Wahdat (the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan) relied on the Hazaras and, therefore, was popular in the mountainous Hazarajat area. Not involved in the hostilities against the communist regime, it preferred the wait and see policy.

The communist leaders (especially when Babrak Karmal was president) viewed the Pashtuns as their irreconcilable enemies. The PDPA strengthened its ties with national minorities and drew them into political activities, which loosened the Pashtuns' grip on local politics.

Domination of the Pashtuns and the Taliban

The Taliban, which gradually occupied the country's political scene, revived the idea of Pashtun domination. Its leaders supported the Pashtun nationalist movements and were dead set against any administrative-territorial units based on religious or ethnic principles. On the other hand, the Taliban, a radical Islamic movement, was steadily pushing the country toward a unitary Muslim Pashtun-dominated state.

The pro-Taliban *Tulu-ye-Afghan* (Afghan Sunrise) newspaper published in Kandahar insisted: "Since any Islamic state is based on ideological, rather than national-geographic, unity languages, races, genders, etc. can serve as the frameworks of such states."[18] The Taliban considered the Caliphate, an ideal theocratic state, to be the best possible form of Islamic statehood.

The state newspaper *Anis* familiarized its readers with the basic principles of an Islamic state:

- An elected head of the community (state);
- A government formed by the head of state;
- An elected Shura (parliament), which remains a consultative structure;
- A state ruled by the Shari'a, the only guarantor of human rights and freedoms.[19]

The Taliban insisted that any other type of state contradicts the spirit of Islam; the elected parliament should remain a consultative structure because every Muslim has "the eternal and unchangeable laws" of Allah, criteria going back to the times of the Prophet and the "righteous caliphs" as the guid-

[18] R. Sikoev, "Afghanistan. Shariatskoe zakonodateltvo v deystvii," *Azia i Afrika segodnia,* No. 3, 2000, p. 27.
[19] See: Ibidem.

ing light. Politics and religion were indivisible: this postulate, one of the key ones in the political philosophy of the Taliban, moved the clergy to the central point of state governance.

The Taliban, having failed to draw the traditional Pashtun elite to its side and left alone to deal with the strong resistance of the non-Pashtun peoples, had no choice but to restore the country's unity to seize control over its entire territory.

Continued fragmentation suggested that the country should be reunited and that the Pashtuns should regain their political domination. According to Sultan Akimbekov, the Taliban relied on the ethnic factor to deal with two main problems: first, to lure to its side those Pashtuns who remained loyal to its opponents and, second, to neutralize those military-political organizations that sided with the national and religious minorities.[20]

No matter how hard they tried, the Taliban could not draw any considerable number of non-Pashtuns to its side. The veneer of "pure Islam" was too thin to tempt the non-Afghan peoples to betray their ethnic solidarity and side with the Pashtun nationalists: the non-Afghan peoples remained firm in their opposition to the Taliban. After the 1998 Taliban offensive in the north, most of the Pashtun warlords finally moved away from their neutrality or even relative loyalty to the Northern Alliance.

In the northwest, north, and northeast of Afghanistan, the Taliban was confronted with the hostility of the local people and the mounting anti-Pashtun feelings exacerbated by the fact that the newly appointed governors and military commanders were all Pashtuns.

No matter how hard the Taliban tried to pass for an Islamic movement of all ethnic groups, it failed to win the trust of the non-Pashtuns, the young people and intelligentsia in particular.

New Confrontation

The Taliban was removed from the political scene of Afghanistan, but the idea of Pashtun domination remained on the agenda. The nationalist Afghan Mellat Party (the leaders of which emigrated to the West during the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan) was present at the Bonn Conference and figured prominently in the follow-up talks on a coalition government. In the interim government of Hamid Karzai, its leaders Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Anwar ul-Haq served as finance minister and head of the Central Bank of Afghanistan.

There were enough political parties and movements resolved to prevent restored Pashtun domination in the country and defend the rights of the non-Pashtun ethnicities. In December 2003-January 2004, when the future Constitution was discussed, the delegates who represented the non-Pashtun ethnicities in the Lloya Jirga insisted on a parliamentary form of governance. The Pashtuns, in turn, wanted the presidential form to be introduced and registered in the Fundamental Law.

The non-Pashtun peoples were fully aware of the dangers of restored Pashtun domination that would come along with a presidential republic and a Pashtun president with wide constitutional powers.

Today, when the country is gradually restoring peace and order—a process in which all ethnicities are involved—those political leaders who would like to see Pashtun domination restored prefer to keep a low profile; indeed, if pushed forward, the idea might damage the still precarious progress toward an extremely important goal: the country's unity.

The Pashtuns are working hard to fortify their position in the new government; in the future, however, the talks of revived Pashtun domination might add to political tension. The first signs of

[20] See: S. Akimbekov, op. cit.

unwelcome developments can be observed today. Some of the Oxford analysts are convinced that "political life in Afghanistan … will be determined in the future, very much as before, by the struggle between representatives of different ethnic and regional groups."[21]

This means that restoration of Pashtun dominance will depend on Afghanistan's unity and integrity. Prominent experts, including American analysts, do not exclude the possibility of the country's partition.

Robert D. Blackwill, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations and assistant to Henry Kissinger, has pointed out that if worst comes to worst and if the Taliban restores its might and power, the country might fall apart.

He has also written: "The time has come, therefore, to switch to the least bad alternative—acceptance of a de facto partition of the country" and further: "At the same time, however, Washington should accept that the Taliban will inevitably control most of the Pashtun south and east and that the price of forestalling that outcome is far too high for the United States to continue paying. To be sure, the administration should not invite the Taliban to dominate the Afghan Pashtun homeland, nor explicitly seek to break up Afghanistan. Rather, the United States and its partners should simply stop dying in the south and the east and let the local 'correlation of forces' there take its course—while deploying U.S. air power and Special Forces for the foreseeable future in support of the Afghan army and the government in Kabul, to ensure that the north and west of Afghanistan do not succumb to the Taliban as well."[22]

The situation in Afghanistan has changed radically: today restoration of Pashtun dominance is not only being countered by the extremely negative position of the non-Pashtun people, but also by international circumstances.

It has become absolutely clear that the stronger position of one nationality to the detriment of the interests of the other ethnicities (without which peace and harmony in Afghanistan are impossible) cannot be tolerated.

Conclusion

The history of the state of Afghanistan, which developed as a community of tribes, predetermined the great roles of the tribes in the country's politics, on the one hand, their more or less absolute autonomy from central power and the strong position of the tribal chiefs and khans in their territories, on the other. The traditionally weak central power relied on tribes (or unions of tribes), the leaders of which invariably filled all high posts in the country. This allowed the Pashtuns to monopolize all the high political posts and remain on top until 1978 when the Afghan Communists radically changed the country's political landscape.

The PDPA leaders were resolved to strengthen central power and draw all the ethnic groups into political and other activities. They tipped the traditional balance of power between the center and the tribal top crust; the resultant political instability, and certain other domestic and external factors, led to a civil war, which destroyed the state and made the Pashtun tribes (which derived their strength from their military component and which concentrated on defending their ethnic territories) practically independent.

Determined to restore the Pashtuns to their former domination, the Ghilzai Talibans started another round of struggle, which caused a deep-cutting political and ethnic crisis.

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[21] Sergey Andreev, Andreev Sergey, "Afghanskoe déjà vu," *Ekspert,* No. 13, 2003, p. 68.

[22] R.D. Blackwill, "Plan B in Afghanistan. Why a De Facto Partition Is the Least Bad Option," *Foreign Affairs,* January/February 2011.

After 2001, the country acquired all sorts of parties and movements that declared and, most importantly, defended the rights and interests of all ethnic groups. Candidates from eighteen political parties and movements and also non-party and independent candidates joined the first presidential race.

In the course of the presidential election and in the process of drafting and adopting the new Constitution by the Lloya Jirga, it became clear that the idea of Pashtun domination was very much alive in Afghanistan. Indeed, the new anthem is performed in Pashto even though a large number of deputies of other nations tried, in vain, to adopt its text in Dari.

During the presidential and parliamentary elections, the election law was warped so as to favor certain categories of voters in the country's east and south, that is, the Pashtun tribal areas, to bring more Pashtun deputies to the parliament.

Present, and possibly future, attempts to restore the political domination of the Pashtuns are fraught with stubborn resistance of the non-Afghan peoples, which might add vehemence to the already fierce armed confrontation among the country's ethnic groups.