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About Tribal Analysis Center

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*“Planners presented the Helmand Project as applied science, as a rationalization of nature and social order, but they also trafficked in dreams.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Saint Peter, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go ... I owe my soul to the company store.”<sup>2</sup>*

American counterinsurgency efforts have been based on three basic principles since the 1960's – clear, hold, and build – and few experienced individuals would find fault with this general plan. Once an area is cleared of insurgents and is held by sufficient forces to prevent their return, development projects provided to the contested population demonstrates to them the value of dropping any residual support for the insurgency. Wise practitioners of the arcane art of counterinsurgency know that control of the population is the critical variable in combating insurgents and that within an insurgency the “Strategic Center of Gravity” is the same for both sides – *the population*. Once the population comes under the control of one side, defeat is near for the side that loses this crucial variable and the end can come at a dramatically accelerated rate. Excellent illustrations were provided by Mao's Communists in the collapse of China's Nationalist armies in 1949 and with Castro's abrupt victory over the Batista regime in Cuba in 1959.

Insurgencies that have resulted in positive results for the counterinsurgent often ended because of an unendurable shock for the insurgents. Examples of this include the loss of a key charismatic leader, such as the capture of Sendero Luminosa's Abimael Guzman, or a change in policy of an external sponsor, as demonstrated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resultant communist insurgency failures in Central America. These tend to have an extended failure period when compared to the collapse of a nation-state failing in an insurgency.

In Vietnam, American development projects, such as roads and airports, were completed to the benefit of the central government, but the realistic process of delivering projects to the countryside's population just was getting well underway within the promising Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, or CORDS, program as the political settlement gradually led to an end of hostilities – and a Communist victory soon afterward. As a result, actual experience in applying the rural development approach to current counterinsurgency doctrine was limited prior to the conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. Consequently, Americans tend to do what they have always done best: they build huge infrastructure projects – as is being done in the current counterinsurgency operations.

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1. Cullather, Nick, “From New Deal to New Frontier in Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State”, Working Paper: #6, August 2002, *The Cold War as Global Conflict*, International Center for Advanced Studies, New York University, pg. 5.

2. From Wikipedia: Tennessee Ernie Ford, a country singer, had an unexpected hit on the pop charts in 1955 with his rendition of Merle Travis' “Sixteen Tons,” a coal-miner's lament that Travis wrote in 1946, based on his own family's experience in the mines of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky. Its fatalistic tone explained the perpetual debt miners had with the coal companies, a situation not unlike Afghanistan's sharecropping agricultural serfs:

You load sixteen tons, what do you get?  
Another day older and deeper in debt.  
Saint Peter, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go;  
I owe my soul to the company store...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennessee\\_Ernie\\_Ford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennessee_Ernie_Ford) accessed 14 March 2010.

This impulse resulted in creation of the large projects in southern Afghanistan beginning in the 1950's that included the large Kajaki Dam on the Helmand River, canals, and land reclamation from the desert. One of the aspects of the land reclamation resulted in the creation of Marjah Farms where plots of land were soon being farmed by a variety of ethnic and tribal groups, most of whom were from outside the area's traditional Pashtun tribal structure and its controls.

And now Marjah is one of the most unstable areas in Afghanistan. This paper seeks to examine the probable connection between large development projects and instability in southern Afghanistan. While there are obviously multiple factors involved in the insurgency in Helmand Province, why are there apparent connections between these unstable areas and nearby development projects?

Describing Afghanistan's ethnic and tribal mixture as "complex" would be an understatement of essentially historic proportions. When viewed at every possible level of analysis<sup>3</sup>, these different ethnic groups are divided by deep animosities far in excess of any centripetal cultural and political forces that could draw these people together into a cohesive population capable of forging a national identity. One major factor involves the different way the ethnic groups tend to govern themselves. Most of the groups, such as the Baluch, Brahui, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras, accept rule from an all-powerful leader while the very egalitarian Pashtuns govern themselves from their lower ranks upward through councils composed of elders, the jirga. Because of this basic factor, the Pashtun tribes (especially those connected to rural areas) tend to reject centralized control by a ruling class, regardless of ideology, that tries to build a modern nation-state, a construct which is considered acceptable to the other ethnic groups. The non-Pashtuns also tend to support the concept of a national government that would help protect them from the potential depredations of the aggressive, often raiding, Pashtun tribes.

Throughout their history, there has been tension between the members of the tribes that settle into villages and towns and the migrating nomads of the same tribes. This basic animosity was first described by Ibn Khaldun, who described the split between nomads and villagers in the fourteenth century. He wrote:

“Bedouins are more disposed to courage than sedentary people.... They are sunk in well-being and luxury. They have entrusted the defense of their property and their lives to the governor and ruler who rules them, and to the militia which has the task of guarding them.... They are carefree and trusting, and have ceased to carry weapons.

“The Bedouins, on the other hand, live apart from the community. They are alone in the country and remote from the militias. They have no walls or gates. Therefore, they provide for their own defense and do not entrust it to, or rely on others for it. They always carry weapons.”

And Ibn Khaldun adds:

“The reliance of the sedentary people upon laws destroys their fortitude and power of resistance.”<sup>4</sup>

And he describes the root of the problem between nomads and sedentary people:

“These savage peoples, furthermore, have no homelands that they might use as a fertile (pasture), and no fixed

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3. In traditional levels of analysis in international relations, systems (global), countries (nation-state), and individual levels are typically studied. Forgotten or ignored, tribes fall in between the country and individual level and their internal dynamics remain poorly understood.

4. Ibn Khaldun, *The Mugaddimah, An Introduction to History*, (translated by Franz Rosenthal), Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 94-95.

place to which they might repair. All regions and places are the same to them. Therefore, they do not restrict themselves to possession of their own and neighboring regions. They do not stop at the borders of their horizon. They swarm across distant zones and achieve superiority over far away nations....”<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Khaldun's explanation of the reasons for the animosity between migrating nomads and the sedentary populations were updated through the careful observations of Pashtun tribes by Akbar S. Ahmad. Generally, Ahmad defines “nang” – honor – tribes as an egalitarian society characterized by three critical variables not seen in other groups: a low material standard of living, an absence of political authority, and a rigid adherence to customary laws. “Qalang” groups are settled, pay taxes (“qalang”), and represent a hierarchical society differing from their nang cousins by having centralized political authority, a complex and prosperous economic life, and an impersonal legal system.<sup>6</sup> And the “nang” tribes do not stop “at the horizons of their borders” as described by Ibn Khaldun. When the nomad tribes ran short of resources (typically land, gold, and women) in their own traditions, they raided the settled communities for what was needed. Over time, these raiding nomads forced the settled Pashtuns into a situation through which they began to understand the value of centralized leadership, as described by Ibn Khaldun, and gradually began to ally themselves with the ethnic groups that accepted centralized governance. As a result, the Pashtuns began to divide into opposing groups as an urban-rural separation began to develop, with the urban Pashtuns becoming modernists generally inclined to support the creation of a modern nation-state. The rural Pashtuns opposed the centralization of political and military power that came at their expense and they began to view modernization as a zero-sum<sup>7</sup> game, one that they were gradually losing.

Geography and international politics added to the ethnic and tribal complexity of Afghanistan. According to George Curzon<sup>8</sup>, Britain's Viceroy in India from 1899-1905, Afghanistan was “a purely accidental geographic unit,” but the British developed two separate forms of imperial policy toward the most aggressive of the accidental unit's population, the Pashtuns that eventually made chronic instability into an endemic problem enduring across generations. The aggressive tribes on the eastern side of the newly created Durand Line were essentially co-opted with service offers in the British military while subsidies encouraged the eastern Pashtun tribes to control the “nang” tribes that frequently raided into the “qalang” settled areas<sup>9</sup> from their safe havens along the Afghanistan border.

Simultaneously, the British “Forward Policy” toward Afghanistan was intended to develop a strong buffer state to keep the Czarist Russians from gaining access to India. As a result, the British viceroy provided financial incentives to the Afghan monarchs in Kabul (when the British army wasn't losing their battles to the Pashtuns) to take action against the tribes while developing a modern nation-state, a continuing theme in Afghanistan's politics. Tom Barfield observed that while the British (or other foreign occupiers) were present in Afghanistan weak monarchs were maneuvered onto Kabul's throne, but as the British were leaving powerful kings were left in their wake. It was those powerful kings, Dost Mohammad, Abdur Rahman, and Nadir Shah, who saw that it was in their best interest to weaken the rural tribes in their efforts to create a strong central government. Their methods were much like those utilized by the British: divide and rule their aggressive, rebellious tribes and other ethnic groups.

5. *Ibid*, pg. 114.

6. See Ahmad, Akbar S., *Pukhtun Economy and Society: Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, London: Boston and Henley, 1980, for a full discussion of the Nang vs. Qalang concept.

7. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero-sum> accessed 13 March 2010.

8. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Curzon,\\_1st\\_Marquess\\_Curzon\\_of\\_Kedleston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Curzon,_1st_Marquess_Curzon_of_Kedleston) Accessed 13 March 2010. Curzon's quote is reported in Cuthbert Collin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier, 1880-1908*, Cambridge, 1932, pg. 153. The actual quote states, “Modern Afghanistan is indeed a purely accidental geographical unit, which has been carved out of the heart of Central Asia by the sword of conquerors or the genius of individual statesmen.”

9. The settled areas were inhabited by sedentary Pashtuns who are referred to today in Pakistan as “tame Pashtuns.” The raiding of the sedentary tribesmen followed Ibn Khaldun's observations precisely.

In the end, two very different Pashtun regions emerged because of the different methods of rule by the central separate governments in India and Afghanistan. Funding from the British viceroy served to strengthen the Kabul government that soon ordered migrations of the Pashtuns into the territories of other ethnic groups. The fighting that soon developed left the individual tribes weakened and scattered, often into enclaves surrounded by hostile populations. The Pashtun areas of British India, however, maintained well-defined tribal boundaries and their leaders remained strong as their jirga system of self-governance was allowed to prosper. By way of contrast, the dispersed Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan were left without defined tribal areas and strong leadership which soon left them competing with – and fighting – one another. Repeated monarch calls for Pashtun invasions of “infidel” regions (such as the Shi’a Hazarajat and the animist regions of Nuristan) mobilized the more aggressive tribes, especially the nomadic Ghilzai, to attack neighboring regions in return for land and loot. After the invasions of neighboring territory were encouraged, if not ordered outright, by Abdur Rahman and Nadir Shah, the Pashtun tribes engaged in what is described today as “ethnic cleansing.” Entire Hazara tribes ceased to exist or survived only by evacuating to either Persia or British India, and the Kohistani tribes<sup>10</sup> either converted to Islam or were killed. As a result, the Pashtun tribes were scattered even more into territory where tribal enclaves surrounded by ethnic boundaries resulted in violent “fault lines” that were far more dangerous than those visualized by Samuel Huntington<sup>11</sup>. Some of these “monarchy-induced invasions” are relatively recent. For example, once Nadir Shah was fully in control in Kabul and had executed Tajik Habibullah Kalakani<sup>12</sup>, who had gained control of Afghanistan’s monarchy for nine months, he encouraged the essentially nang Ghilzai tribes from eastern Afghanistan to invade the Tajik-controlled territory, the Shomali Plains, in the early 1930’s to weaken Kalakani’s supporters even further. The animosity that resulted between the Tajiks and Pashtuns remains a factor in the nation’s political environment today. And this was only one of the incursions or invasions by Pashtuns into the traditional territory of the other ethnic groups, resulting in multiple nang Pashtun enclaves within the territory of the other ethnic groups. Because the enclaves (*see* map next page) were created through the force of arms, the only way to retain them was to stay prepared to defend them. The transition zones between the two opposing ethnic groups became suspicious armed camps as ethnic cleansing and forced conversions created long-lasting animosities of a nature that had not been seen before in Afghanistan.

The Panjpai branch of the Durrani Confederation suffered more than most of the other Pashtun tribes ordered to migrate by Abdur Rahman, the “Iron Amir.” Jonathan L. Lee describes the situation in Afghanistan during the 1880’s better than most:

“The secret history of what a senior British official termed the “Reign of Terror” contained within the India Office diaries reveal the extent to which Britain’s foreign policy ‘success’ was achieved only at the price of the blood of the peoples over whom the Amir wielded absolute and untrammled power. During the course of twenty-one years Abd al-Rahman Khan probably had as many as 100,000 persons judicially executed, whilst hundreds of thousands more perished from hunger, forced migrations, epidemics, or died as a result of the numerous campaigns which the Amir conducted against various ethnic, tribal and sectarian interests. The fear that the Amir’s atrocities engendered was a shadow which fell across the lives of everyone in Afghanistan. From the heir apparent to the water carrier no-one was exempt from what the Kabulis called the ‘Power that walks in darkness.’

“... for the people of Afghanistan, from the Ishaqzai tribesmen of Badghis Province, ... it is the atrocities which dominate the folk memories which have survived from this era.”<sup>13</sup>

10. [http://www.nps.edu/programs/CCS/Ethnic\\_identity.html](http://www.nps.edu/programs/CCS/Ethnic_identity.html) accessed 20 March 2010.

11. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations> accessed 20 March 2010. In this article, Huntington explains that “*The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.*”

12. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habibull%C4%81h\\_Kalak%C4%81ni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habibull%C4%81h_Kalak%C4%81ni) accessed 20 March 2010 for an overview of Kalakani and his short period of rule from Kabul.

13. Lee, Jonathan L., *The Ancient Supremacy: Bukhara, Afghanistan, and the Battle for Balkh, 1731-1901*, pg. xxiv.

### APPROXIMATE DISTRIBUTION OF PASHTUN TRIBES<sup>14</sup>

In the end, the settled Pashtuns gradually accepted governance in a form that had long been welcomed by Afghanistan's other ethnic groups as the urban-rural separation widened and the generally rural nang tribes became increasingly isolated. These highly egalitarian rural tribes continued with efforts to avoid – or outright reject – any attempt by Kabul's central government to create a modern nation-state out of the chaos Curzon described as a “purely accidental geographic unit.” This set up the wide gulf, far beyond Huntington's visualized fault lines, between the non-Pashtun ethnic groups allied with the urbanized, or qalang, Pashtuns on one side and the traditional migratory, or nang, rural Pashtuns on the other.



Adding to the complexity of the country, a similar separation emerged within the rural tribes, themselves. As the migrating – or invading – tribes occupied new territory, it was normally divided among the members of the tribe occupying the upper levels of the tribal hierarchy. These individuals generally became the hereditary landowners, the khans, whose extended family and “subjects”, the hamsaya<sup>15</sup>, lived in his close proximity in what was, and remains, essentially a feudal arrangement. Faced with periodic uprisings by some sharecroppers and the khan's paternal cousins as a result of Taborwali<sup>16</sup> (a Pashtun feud between male cousins having an equal inheritance claim to a shared grandfather's land) the khans frequently

14. The map is adapted from a Rand lecture.

15. <http://www.khyber.org/culture/pashtoonwalai/hamsaya.shtml> accessed 20 March 2010.

16. <http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Pashtun Tribal Dynamics.pdf> accessed 20 March 2010. This information was drawn from Beattie, Hugh, *Imperial Frontier: Tribe and State in Waziristan*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002, pg. 120.

turned to the protection of the powerful central government to offset personal enemies where in the past they relied upon the dependent classes of the Pashtun tribal society for protection.

For a significant period in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of a benign monarchy in Kabul acted as a general “keeper of the balance of power” between the nang and qalang portions of the Pashtun tribes in a loose confederation that allowed for some considerable autonomy within the tribal areas. This began to change as “modernists” began their attempts to change Afghanistan’s society. The first victim of modernization was King Amanullah and Queen Soraya whose plan to modernize the country along the lines of Ataturk’s success in Turkey fell afoul of the eastern Pashtuns, primarily the generally nang Shinwari tribe, that were soon in open rebellion.<sup>17</sup>

Nadir Shah, along with British influence and money, continued the divide-and-rule process started by Abdur Rahman and encouraged Pashtun tribal attacks against the other ethnic groups, primarily the Tajiks, until he was assassinated by a Hazara teenager in 1933.<sup>18</sup> During the relative chaos of this period, the mullahs began to assume leading roles within the nang tribes as they were able to convince their followers that the modernization efforts and increasing power of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups were combining to become a serious threat to their tribes. The mullahs also had an additional trump card used creatively – they lectured the tribesmen attending their mosques that an equal, if not larger, threat was developing against Islam, itself.

In a complex series of events, the split between the urban modernists and non-Pashtuns against the traditional tribes became even larger. The situation began to worsen as the Cold War brought Americans and Soviet attention to Afghanistan in a misguided “competition” that exacerbated the situation between the modernizing central government and the rural traditionalists. Both of the competitors in this chapter of the “Great Game” chose to deliver development aid to the backward, semi-feudal country, but unfortunately this assistance was delivered through the modernizers. Dams, irrigation, electricity, roads, and airports were developed that served to strengthen the urban modernists at the expense of the traditionalists, weakening the latter further in the face of the growing power of their ethnic and qalang enemies.

Nick Cullather’s exceptional 2002 paper, “From New Deal to New Frontier in Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State,” explains that the “planners of the Helmand Project ... also trafficked in dreams”<sup>19</sup> as they attempted to recreate the Tennessee Valley Authority in rural southern Afghanistan while the Soviets were also busy with their development programs. Dams on the Helmand and Arghandab rivers were soon built, irrigation canals dug, and desert land was reclaimed as nomadic shepherds from all of the country’s ethnic groups were soon provided land and taught to be farmers as Marjah Farms in Helmand Province and Tarnak Farms in adjacent Kandahar Province became large-scale social engineering experiments.

From Cullather:

“Aided by social science theory, development came into its own by the mid-1950s as both a policy ideology in the United States and as a global discourse for assigning obligations and entitlements among rich and poor nations. Nationalism and modernization held equal place in the postcolonial creed. As Edward Shils observed in 1960, nearly every state pressed for policies ‘that will bring them well within the circle of modernity.’ But nation-building schemes, even successful ones, rarely unfolded quietly. The struggles, often subtle and indirect, over dam projects, land reforms, and planned cities generally concerned the meaning of development, the persons, authorities, and ideals that would be

17. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanullah\\_Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanullah_Khan) accessed 21 March 2010 has an excellent overview of this period.

18. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nadir\\_Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nadir_Khan) accessed 21 March 2010.

19. Cullather, Nick, “From New Deal to New Frontier in Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State”, pg. 5.

associated with the spectacle of progress. To modernize was to lay claim to the future and the past, to define national identities and values that would survive and guide the nation on its journey forward.”<sup>20</sup>

And:

“Nation-building did not fail in Afghanistan for want of money, time, or imagination. In the Helmand Valley, the engines and dreams of modernization had run their full course, spooling out across the desert until they hit limits of physics, culture, and history.”<sup>21</sup>

“Each extension of the project required more land acquisitions, more displaced people. To remain flexible, the royal government and Morrison Knudsen kept the question of who actually owned the land in abeyance. No system of titles was instituted, and the bulk of the reclaimed land was farmed by tenants of Morrison Knudsen, the government, or contractors hired by the government.”<sup>22</sup>

“Waterlogging created a persistent weed problem. The storage dams removed silt that once rejuvenated fields downstream. Deposits of salt or gypsum would erupt into long distance canals and be carried off to deaden the soil of distant fields.... The reservoirs and large canals also lowered the water temperature, making plots that once held vineyards and orchards suitable only for growing grain.... As its engineering failures mounted ... symbolic weight in the cold war and Afghanistan's ethnic politics steadily grew.”<sup>23</sup>

And the political component entered the picture as the modernizers accepted assistance from any source while they experienced Pashtun revolts against the ruling family, Pashtuns from the Mohammadzai subtribe of the huge Barakzai tribe. The urban vs. rural divide was hardening significantly:

“Daoud's receptiveness to Soviet and Chinese aid was particularly troubling. As Dupree put it: “A nation does not accept technology without ideology. A machine or a dam is a product of a culture.” Daoud's regime made no effort to disguise its chauvinism. Controlling positions in government, the army, the police, and the educational system were held by Pashtuns to such a degree that the appellation Afghan commonly referred only to Pashtuns and not to the minorities who collectively comprised the majority. A U.S. diplomat described the kingdom as a Soviet-style “police state, where there is no free press, no political parties, and where ruthless suppression of minorities is the established pattern.” But despite their favored status, Pashtuns revolted against the Mohammedzai eight times between 1930 and 1960. Open violence between minorities was less common than conflict that pitted clan autonomy against central authority.”<sup>24</sup>

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20. Ibid, pg. 4.

21. Ibid, pg. 5.

22. Ibid, pp. 19-20.

23. Ibid, pg. 20.

24. Ibid, pg. 22.

Within all of the development and rural revolts against Kabul's central authority, the Afghans also began to traffic in dreams as well. Reclaimed land, even with its problems of salt encrustation and water-logging, was being made available to the population in what was essentially a land reform program that created enhanced expectations among the landless sharecroppers. The lack of a system of titles to the land was going to create large problems later, however, as individual families and clans originating from regions well beyond the local tribal areas began to settle into reclaimed plots. Outside the traditional social controls of the local tribes, the new settlers would also become a problem as great as the lack of deeds to the land they claimed as resentment developed among the local tribes who were not allocated plots of land within their own traditional tribal lands.

But the expectations of the benefits of increased development were obviously widespread as accounts of newly reclaimed land being farmed for wheat were told along with reports of nomads being provided land and farming instruction circulated within the Afghan's story-telling culture. These heightened expectations changed dramatically in northwest Afghanistan when famine struck the region in 1971 and 1972. The Afghans trafficking in dreams had a rude awakening as large numbers of them began to starve while their khans and corrupt civil officials withheld stockpiled food for themselves or extorted large sums for it.<sup>25</sup> Afghan families were surviving by eating grass and selling their children – and it isn't completely a historical anomaly that Zahir Shah was deposed by his prime minister (and both cousin and brother-in-law), Mohammad Daoud, and the army in 1973, the year following the famine<sup>26</sup>. Daoud instituted additional modernizing policies during his tenure as president, but he was overthrown and assassinated along with most of his family members in a Communist coup in 1978 that led to a series of vicious attacks against the traditionalist tribes. The first Communist leader, Nur Muhammad Taraki<sup>27</sup>, followed even more progressive policies and his order to create an education program for women touched off a general rebellion in Herat. The first of the traditionalist rebels, Tajik Ismail Khan<sup>28</sup>, killed Soviet advisors as a civil war developed that led to Soviet intervention in 1979.

Among the Pashtun tribes suffering arrests and killings of their more prominent secular and religious leaders, they tended to align themselves along the generational urban-rural split with the urban Pashtuns generally supporting the central government, now with its new Communist ideology, while the rural traditionalists opposed them. Given the fact that many tribal khans allied themselves with the central government, they were soon the targets of attacks by the landless Pashtuns who were increasingly led by the mullah class that used their normal rallying strategy: The tribe was now in danger from an external threat and the Communists threatened Islam, itself. Given the realities that were patently obvious to the average rural Pashtun, they soon rallied to the mullahs, drove out or killed their khans, and the lower-status mullahs were able to move to the top of the tribal hierarchy they had long coveted.

The situation that emerged in the Helmand River Valley makes a first-rate case study by a careful look at the Alizai's subtribe, the Hasanzai, and the "Akhundzadas." Like the other mullahs, Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, his father and uncles, used their connections to religion to gain control of a broad region in Afghanistan's Helmand Province. The confusing term, Akhundzada (meaning son of a religious scholar)<sup>29</sup> is an honorific used essentially as a surname by these members of a religious family of the Hasanzai, an Alizai sub-tribe, as they rallied their rural supporters to take control of much of Helmand Province, along with its lucrative opium trade.

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25. See Michael Barry's excellent account of this period of Afghanistan's history in his "Western Afghanistan's Outback," September 1972. This is a paper prepared for the Agency for International Development.

26. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed\\_Daoud\\_Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Daoud_Khan) accessed 21 March 2010.

27. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur\\_Muhammad\\_Taraki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur_Muhammad_Taraki) accessed 21 March 2001.

28. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismail\\_Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismail_Khan) accessed 21 March 2010.

29. ; Edwards, David B., *Heroes of the Age*, pg. 134.

Coming from northern Helmand Province where traditional tribal influences – and the maliks<sup>30</sup> and khans – remained strong, Mullah Mohammad Nasim Akhundzada, Sher Mohammad's uncle, set the tone for Helmand's religious opportunists as he became a prominent commander in Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat-e-Inqilab-e Islami, a resistance group that opposed the Soviets and the Afghan communists. Anecdotal information suggests that he fought harder against other jihadi parties, particularly the guerrillas affiliated with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, than against the Soviets. But the opportunity to assert the power of the "Akhundzadas," his religious family descended from a notable Islamic scholar, an Akhund, came with the arrival of the first of the communists.

The communists began to pressure the traditional land-owning class in 1978 soon after the last of the Durrani rulers, Mohammad Daud Khan, was overthrown. Under communist pressure, many of the khans left the region and their role was gradually usurped by the Akhundzada family and their tribal allies. When the communist government began to lose control of the countryside, Mohammad Nasim Akhundzada's fighters assumed more and more control. The contending leaders' connection to their own subtribe and the status of each in the Alizai hierarchy were critical variables as subtribes took sides in the conflict within the Alizai tribe. Here is an example of excellent work – to a point:

"...Over the following years, three families from among the Alizais of northern Helmand led the *jihad*. Apart from the Akhundzadas, the two other families were that of Abdul Rahman Khan and of Abdul Wahid, with the one important survivor among the *khans* being Abdul Rahman, whose family of well-established traditional *khans* was locked in a conflict with the Akhundzadas leading Abdul Wahid and Abdul Rahman Khan to join forces against the rising star of the Akhundzadas..."<sup>31</sup>

At the basic foundation of this conflict were the subtribal differences within the Alizai tribe. The Akhundzadas were responsible for driving out the remaining khans, the traditional secular power within their particular subtribe, the Hasanzai, as this religious family took control of their subtribe and began to expand their "fiefdom" southward into parts of Helmand occupied by a wide variety of Afghan settlers with no local tribal affiliation. The growing power of this opportunist family began to threaten the position of two other northern subtribes as Akhundzada fighters attempted to undermine the subtribe of Abdul Rahman Khan and the Khalozai subtribe of Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghmani. Unfortunately, the available literature fails to list Abdul Rahman Khan's Alizai subtribe<sup>32</sup>, but it definitely was not Hasanzai or Khalozai. His power center was the town of Giriskh and his followers later made a final stand there against the powerful Akhundzadas following Mullah Nasim's assassination near Peshawar, Pakistan, as powerful forces contended for the wealth of the opium trade.

The control of most of the opium trade provided the funds Mullah Nasim needed to gain control much of Helmand Province while Mohammad Rasul, Sher Mohammad's father, provided the religious justification for the Akhundzada's participation in the opium trade:

"Islamic law forbids the taking of opium, but there is no prohibition against growing it. We must grow and sell opium to fight the war."<sup>33</sup>

Mullah Nasim is credited in the West with "industrializing" opium production in Helmand Province. Scholars describe his innovative methods that involved paying farmers at the time of planting for their crop at harvest, a method that assured that he would be the recipient of the harvest. Unfortunately, this has been the traditional method used by the land-owning khans with their sharecropping tenant farmers for generations, if not more. Land owners provide seeds, fertilizer, tools, and even tractors to the small farmers – as they tell them what crop to grow – and collect their

30. Maliks are generally viewed as a khan who has a formal connection to the central government.

31. Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, *Tribes and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980-2005*, Crisis States Research Centre, pg. 10.

32. A careful review of open source and classified materials revealed very little information regarding the subtribe affiliation for Abdul Rahman Khan. He was probably from Kajaki District and is reported to be either Ibrahimzai or Khalozai. This important factor has not been clearly determined during the last 20 years.

33. Orkand Corporation, *Afghanistan's Southern Provinces*, 1989, pg. 165.

share of the crop at harvest, an amount that may be as high as two-thirds of the entire crop. The farmer is usually left owing money to the land owner at the end of the year and the khan is only too glad to carry the debt over to the next growing season.

The khan and tenant farmer's dependent relationship are built on a system of continuous debt. The land-owning class is able to ensure control over its tenants through this system of perpetual debt – families that are little different than the serfs of medieval Europe. The tenant farmers of the drug producing families, such as the Mullah Nasim, probably face retribution from their land lords if they fail to produce an adequate harvest.

But others were also interested in obtaining the opium profits. Abdul Rahman Khan, in seeking external support, allied himself with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami (HIG) even though Hekmatyar had not previously supported traditional leaders, such as the land-owning khans. Fight after fight occurred over this "strategic material," opium, and Mullah Nasim was eventually assassinated, presumably by Hekmatyar's fighters. This resulted in a bitter battle between Akhundzada supporters and Abdul Rahman Khan's fighters at Girishk where Abdul Rahman Khan's forces were defeated. Abdul Rahman subsequently left Afghanistan for France where he lived in exile.

The conflict between the Akhundzada family and Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani is much like the feud they had with Abdul Rahman Khan. Both Abdul Rahman and Abdul Wahid were traditional subtribe leaders at the head of their loyal followers when the religious "opportunists" challenged yet another traditionalist who viewed himself as the "Rais," or "director" of Helmand's Baghran District. In this case, there was yet another, more important, tribal factor in operation as these two Alizai subtribes continued to fight. Abdul Wahid's Khalozai subtribe was the "Khan Khel" or leading subtribe of the Alizai tribe, and its traditional hierarchy status was being challenged by the Hasanzais under the Akhundzadas.

The "Khan Khel" is an important concept within the Durrani, if not all of the Pashtuns. In the case of the Barakzai, their Khan Khel, the Mohammadzai, provided Afghanistan's most recent kings. The Saddozai, the Khan Khel of the Popalzai, also provided kings in the country's earliest days. It was only natural for conflict to develop between Mullah Nasim Akhundzada's family that took control of the Hasanzai subtribe and Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani, the leader of the Alizai tribe's Khan Khel, the Khalozai, as the mullahs attempted to displace the last of the secular, traditional control over the entire Alizai tribe.

The "warlords" of the Alizai tribe were also divided in their selection of the jihadi parties they supported during the fighting against the Soviets. The Akhundzada family joined Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat and Abdul Rahman Khan allied his followers with HIG, but Abdul Wahid went in a third direction by entering the Jamiat-i Islami party of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, a party dominated by Tajiks. Their reasons for the choices made remain unknown, but it may be as simple as opposition to the selection made by the others as they joined separate parties because of their inter-tribal animosities – further splitting the Alizai tribe. But at the bottom of the animosities lay a single factor as religious "opportunists" challenged the secular dominance of the traditional khans, represented by both Abdul Rahman Khan and Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani.

This same process appears to be associated with the opportunist mullahs, or the self-ordained unscrupulous men, who became leaders of the rural Pashtuns in the Taliban Movement. These processes left the rural landless Pashtun even more isolated and in near perpetual poverty, historically leaving him prone to raid into settlements to gain access to what was needed to support his family. Ghani Khan, the son of Abdul Ghaffar Khan<sup>34</sup> who led the Red Shirt Pashtun pacifists, explained the motivation of the poverty-stricken highland Pashtuns succinctly: "The Pathan loves to steal because he hates to beg."<sup>35</sup>

34. [Eknath Easwaran](#), *Non-violent soldier of Islam: Ghaffar Khan: a man to match his mountains*. [Nilgiri Press](#), Tomales, CA, 199.

35. Khan, Ghani, *The Pathans*, Peshawar, 1947. This small book is filled with excellent descriptions of the individual Pashtun tribesman and factors that created his behavior patterns.

Rural Pashtuns viewing themselves to be the majority population in Afghanistan found themselves opposed by Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Hazaras, Pashai, the settled Pashtuns from their own tribes, frequently their own khans, and their central government. Given their history of being forced into migrations, enticed into invading their neighboring ethnic groups by Kabul's kings, and divided again and again by a determined central government that wanted the tribal system to fail in order to reduce its potential threat to the monarchs, these tribesmen were quick to ally themselves with their mullahs in an effort to gain needed resources for themselves, primarily land of their own. The natural divide between the nang and qalang components of the Pashtun tribes had become a part of a larger political system that remained in varying degrees of conflict in a periodically violent process that began in 1747.

Into this volatile mix of constantly shifting alliances and coalitions, the Western nations arrived with their typical offers of material assistance in return for opportunities for influencing the outcome of the conflict. Both large and small projects were – and are – underway, but after falling into the rabbit hole<sup>36</sup> leading into complexity of Afghanistan, careful planning is needed to ensure that more harm than good is not being done. When viewed through an analysis that takes the urban-rural split into consideration, it becomes obvious that nearly all development projects completed or projected clearly benefit the population supporting the creation of an all-powerful central government. Normally, this would be a desired outcome, but in the case of the Afghan civil war, some of the development efforts serve to drive the rural tribes even further from the central government as project after project strengthen the khans, settled Pashtuns, and the non-Pashtun ethnic groups while also bringing education and modernization that the traditionalist rural inhabitants believe will threaten Islam – a process that reinforces the insurgency.

Examples from the Helmand River projects include:

“As originally envisioned, HAVA [the Helmand River project] would irrigate enough new fertile land to settle 18-20,000 families on 15-acre farms. Together with Afghan officials, U.S. advisers launched a program to sedentarize the nomadic Pashtuns whose migrations were a source of friction with Pakistan. To American and royal government officials, this floating population and its disregard for laws, taxes, and borders, symbolized the country's backwardness. Settling Pashtun nomads in a belt from Kabul to Kandahar would create a secure political base for the government and bring them within reach of modernization programs. Diminishing the transborder flows would eliminate smuggling and the periodic incidents that enflamed the Pushtunistan issue. A complementary dam development project in the Indus Valley, also funded by the United States, settled Pashtun nomads on the other side of the Durand Line.”<sup>37</sup>

“In the late 1950s, HAVA began constructing whole communities for transplanted pastoralists in the Shamalan, Marja and Nad-i-Ali, while simultaneously trying to break the authority of leaders of nomadic clans, known as maliks. Maliks would lead their people ‘Moses-like, to the promised land,’ according to a U.S. report. HAVA ‘always informed the new settlers that they could choose new village leaders, to be called wakil, if they so desired. None did.’”<sup>38</sup>

“But even with the closing of the border and the attraction of subsidies and well-watered homesteads, it proved difficult to entice Ghilzai Pashtun to become ordinary farmers. Freer and wealthier than the peasants whose lands they crossed, the nomads regarded their new Tajik and Hazara neighbors with contempt. This may have served Kabul's purposes, too. The government ... planned to ‘use these new settlers as a death squad to crush the uprisings of the non-Pashtun people of the west, southwest, and central part of the country.’”<sup>39</sup>

36. This is not a connection to or endorsement of the article comparing the Marja Farms operation to the new film that was used creatively in [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/01/down\\_the\\_afpak\\_rabbit\\_hole](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/03/01/down_the_afpak_rabbit_hole) assessed 28 March 2010.

37. Cullather, pg. 24.

38. Ibid, pg. 24.

39. Ibid, pp. 24-25.

“The Helmand project symbolized Pashtun power, and the royal government resisted efforts to attach alternate meanings to it”.<sup>40</sup>

“Evidence for the efficiency of American techniques was scarce in the Helmand Valley. The burden of American loans for the project, and the absence of tangible returns was creating, according to the New York Times, ‘a dangerous strain on the both the Afghan economy and the nation’s morale’ which ‘may have unwittingly and indirectly contributed to driving Afghanistan into Russian arms.’”<sup>41</sup>

“Waterlogging had advanced in the Shamalan to the point that structural foundations were giving way; mosques and houses were crumbling into the growing bog. In the artificial oases, the problem was worse. An impermeable crust of conglomerate underlay the Marja and Nad-i-Ali tracts, intensifying both waterlogging and salinization.”<sup>42</sup>

“As the wheat improvement program got underway, a team of U.S. Department of Agriculture advisers proposed that HAVA remove all of the resettled families, ‘level the whole area with bulldozers’ and then redistribute property ‘in large, uniform, smooth land plots.’ HAVA adopted the land preparation scheme but implementation proved difficult. Farmers objected to the removal of trees, which had economic value and prevented wind erosion, but they objected chiefly to vagueness of HAVA’s assurances. HAVA itself acknowledged, as bulldozing proceeded, that questions of what to do with the population while the land was being prepared, how to redistribute the land after completion, and whether to charge landowners for improvements were ‘yet to be worked out.’ When farmers ‘met the bulldozers with rifles,’ according to a USAID report, it presented a ‘very real constraint’ that ‘consumed most of the time of the American and Afghan staffs in the Valley throughout the 1960s.’”<sup>43</sup>

In the minds of the central government in Kabul, this large development project was not much different than the efforts of Abdur Rahman to centralize power within a national government with Americans providing the funds instead of the Viceroy of India. The nang nomadic clans were to be resettled as the power of the their traditional leaders, the maliks, was undercut with the goal of placing them into qalang settlements, destroying the traditional, stabilizing controls of tribal elders and their jirgas. Interestingly, the Americans of the Helmand River Valley Authority were setting a pattern that would eventually be completed by the Akhundzada family as the small farmers on their 15-acre plots were convinced that opium was the best crop for them to grow – *or else*.

Heightened expectations of having better lives resulting from development can also build resentment if the projects fail to meet those expectations or appear to benefit one population group more than another. And unfortunately unscrupulous individuals are always prepared to point out the shortcomings of a project or the benefits that go to others as they work to rally their own supporters in efforts to enhance their personal power and prestige. This was an obvious factor resulting from this development project as a relatively stable agricultural region with farmers and herdsman became increasingly unstable. Worse, farmers lacked appropriate deeds for the land they occupied and as subsequent conflict and drought forced many of them to become refugees, new “squatters” moved into the abandoned farm plots. Today, returning refugees find their land occupied by others, neither of whom have actual deeds to the land, and Taliban courts settle disputes – usually in favor of their supporters – in places like the now violent Marjah Farms that was so proudly created in a major development project.

The foundation of the basic problem related to development within the complex Afghan insurgency tends to lie in the nang vs. qalang relationship that is represented in the enormous split between the nation-builders, the non-Pashtun ethnic groups and the “settled” Pashtuns, and the rural tribes that retain their traditional egalitarian self-rule processes through elders. Large development projects benefit the nation-builders at the

40. Ibid, pg. 25.

41. Ibid, pp. 28-29.

42. Ibid, pg. 29.

43. Ibid, pg. 31.

expense of the tribes – and the tribes know this to be true. It isn't an accident of history that the Taliban, representing the best interests of the rural tribes, attack schools, clinics, roads, and those projects that tend to strengthen the nation-builders.

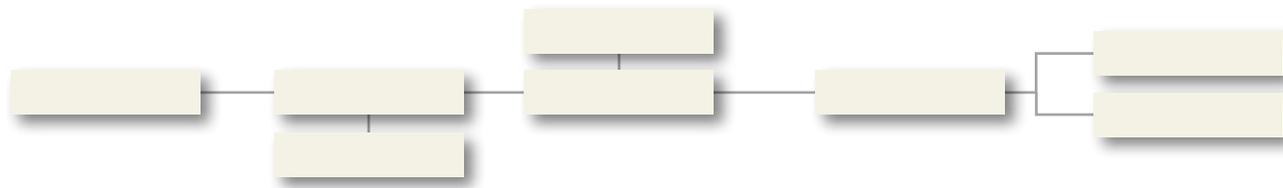
And what has been learned in the past five decades of development projects in Afghanistan? There are still plans underway to construct major dams, highways, industrial parks, and even a railroad in Nangahar Province, all of which will serve to strengthen the qalang at the expense of the nang tribes. It is entirely possible that development and urbanization in Afghanistan will gradually erode the tribal system, but if the past is an indicator of the future the process will continue to be quite violent.

Essentially, development activities will stabilize an area only if it is integrated locally and culturally. In order to be successful, a full understanding of cultural geography is critical and projects that simultaneously benefit both sides of the nang-qalang divide may be the best short term solution. Development planners, many of whom sit in “task forces” far from Afghanistan, fail to understand that these very real problems exist and have no way to plan to minimize them. As a result, more large projects that are relatively easy to fund through contracting corporations are probably in the future for Afghanistan that will favor the nation-building qalang at the expense of the rural nang – and will either prolong the current insurgency or set the stage for the next one.

# TRIBAL ANALYSIS CENTER

Traditional anthropological research conducted among tribes inhabiting remote areas where insurgents and criminals operate has become increasingly difficult to implement. Studies carried out among people living in small-scale societies now are nearly impossible due to the physical dangers associated with the civil and religious unrest found in those areas. Swat, for example, has become so dangerous that Frederick Barth's studies only could be repeated at the risk of the investigator's life. Similar research is not feasible among Burma's Rohingya tribes located on both sides of the border with Bangladesh, as well as with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan's interior and within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where even Pakistan's army enters with reluctance.

Given the difficulties of conducting direct fieldwork in conflictive areas, the Tribal Analysis Center utilizes an indirect approach. Using multidisciplinary research, we seek to collect and analyze data obtained from a wide variety of sources, both current and historical. In the absence of new ethnographic fieldwork to update our base of knowledge, the Tribal Analysis Center compiles and summarizes existing research and documents on tribal societies, combining this material with contemporary press reports and articles. We assume that much can be gleaned from well-informed observers who are not anthropologists, ranging from journalists and travelers to government officials.



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