ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Fragmented Identities: The Impact of Ethnic Divides on Afghanistan's Political Instability

Tayyab Ishtiaq[1*], Arslan Asghar[2], Saqib Raza[3], Naseer khan Achakzai[4]

[1]Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan

[2]University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy

[3]Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan

[4]Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences, Quetta, Pakistan

Abstract— This article is the examination of the relationship held between the disjointed identities of Afghanistan and its stability in politics. This dynamic would assist to regularize the complexities how etic differences between the two fueled terrorism and violence, and how the outsiders took advantages to enhance these divisions to motivate their agendas. The study employs a technique that entails multiple secondary data sources. Its analyses the indicator of political stability, the record of past and a thorough comprehension of different subtleties, however, inconsistency in Afghanistan politics is the main concern of this study. For country's national unity, both factors, the richness of culture and cultural diversity are challenges as well as strength. The richness in culture proves as a fabric for national unity though it challenges for political stability and cohesion. As per the conclusion of the article, the stability of Afghanistan held by on the approaches and thought the government has for the etic groups. Having good term with ethnic groups and to promote national unity, government can mitigate the conflict responsible for the stability of the nation. For addressing social inequalities and historical injustices, government can contribute of ethnic groups for its national unity. However, the external factor can play a significant role by supporting and encouraging inclusive thought and practices in Afghanistan, though it is also the duty of the international community to participate in Afghanistan's political stability. Ultimately, this article is a contribution to Afghanistan's journey towards stability, respecting the balance in identities and shared purposes.

Index Terms— Political stability in Afghanistan, Identity paradox, Ethnic diversity, Inclusive government, National unity
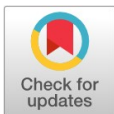
Introduction

Afghanistan became a sovereign state in 1747. Afghanistan was founded by Ahmad Shah Abdali. With a population of over 35.5 million people divided into over fifty ethnic groups, Afghanistan has two official languages: Pashto and Dari. Thirty different indigenous languages are spoken in Afghanistan due to the diversity of ethnic groups (Famin, 2021). Eastern and southern Afghanistan are home to Pashtun people, while across the Durand Line, Pakistan's side contains a similar percentage of Pashtun people. As Durrani resides between Herat and Kandahar, there are two Pashtun subdivisions. The Durrani tribe includes the ethnically Pashtun sub-tribe known as Abdali.

*Email: tayyabishtiaq321@gmail.com

Afghanistan was initially composed of areas that the Durrani tribe either controlled or occupied, and it was established during the Durrani tribes' era of domination: Ghilzai, halfway between Kandahar and Ghazni. These ethnic groups resided in the south of Afghanistan, and there was never a cease to their conflicts and hostilities. In the eastern hills were the Mohmand, Mehsuds, Wazirs, Khattaks, Afridi, and Shinwaris. The British army utilized them in clashes throughout the northwest frontier because of their reputation for hostility. One-fifth of the population lives in the Tajik regions of Kabul, Kohistan Herat, and Badakhshah.

They are vital to the state's management apparatus. Therefore, it was merely a tribal state, and the Northwest and Southeast did not have legally defined borders for it. Under amirs or beggars, Uzbek is somewhat self-sufficient. They were conquered by the Afghan Amir. The majority of these individuals are peasants who raise karakul sheep and horses for breeding. The Hazara people are descended from Genghis Khan and are of Mongol heritage. They arrived at the same time as thousands of other people. Many claimed to have relocated from Central Asia. Every major ethnic group is represented in the Afghan government; for instance, the Pashtuns hold the positions of president, finance minister, and foreign minister; Tajiks hold the positions of vice president and defense minister; Hazaras have the positions of second vice president; and Uzbeks hold the position of mine minister (Allen, Flournoy, & O'Hanlon, 2013). Understanding the events leading up to the Panjdeh agreement and the Durand Line treaty—which transformed Afghanistan from a tribal government into a national state—is essential to understanding the ethnic struggle in Afghanistan.

The Panijdeh Treaty, signed in 1887, marked the boundary between Tsarist Russia and Afghanistan's northwest region, which is now part of Central Asia. By virtue of the Durrand Road Treaty, Ameer Abdul Rehman, the Afghan king, established the border between Afghanistan and British India in 1893. Afghanistan's transition from a tribal state to a national state with clearly defined borders began under Ameer Abdul Rehman. But it wasn't a simple task. Afghanistan now included large portions of Tajik and Uzbek territory under the terms of the Panjdeh Agreement.

Several prominent Pashto ethnic groups, such as the Yusufzais, Khattaks, Mehsuds, and numerous Wazirs, Shinwaris, Mehmunds, and Achakzais, were part of the British India Durrandline Agreement. That being said, the Hazara tribes of Central Afghanistan were also Muslim, mainly Shiites and ethnic Mongols. As such, the process of transforming a Pashtun tribal state into a national state has not been very effective. It only covered up gaps and the multi-ethnic, multi-sectoral political reality. However, by adopting a strict neutrality policy, Afghan officials were able to bring about peace and create a delicate equilibrium between Pashtuns and the interethnic tribal groups (Pashtuns against Tajic, Uzbek, and Hazara tribals). This resulted in a regional balance of power. The 1973 military takeover of King Zahir Sha's throne by Sardar Daud shattered the tribal and cultural cohesiveness as well as the stability of the province inside Afghanistan. Five years later, General Abdul Qadir Dagarwal, Sardar (President), overthrew Daud's government as well. The Afghan army then took control of two obscure socialist parties, Khalq (predominately Pashtun) and Parcham (predominately Uzbek and Tajik).

Sardar Daud's hardline irredentist stance against Pakistan had threatened Afghanistan's fragile tribal balance and national harmony, but the Soviet Union's entry into the country on December 28, 1979, completely destroyed Afghanistan's unity and its status as an inconsistent neutral state. Afghanistan is home to a number of troops besides the transitional administration. Integration has been hampered by ethnic disputes between Pashtuns, who are primarily Taliban, and the minority Uzbeks and Tajiks from northern Afghanistan. The commerce in opium has also exacerbated this racial conflict. In order to exploit and control oil resources, outside parties have misinterpreted both this solidarity and racial issues. The Taliban's atrocities during its previous rule, as well as the ongoing insurgency, are unacceptable not only to central Afghanistan but also to neighboring nations and the global community at large.

After the U.S. withdrawal and Taliban takeover, the biggest challenge for Afghanistan is to emerge as a state whose population holds a single national identity; now it is on the Taliban elite to involved in politics of political inclusion from every ethnicity of Afghanistan so as to keep the state of Afghanistan stable.

During the initial thirty years of the Cold War, the Afghan government received significant amounts of economic and military support from the Soviet Union as well as the United States. This funding enabled the state to undertake a restricted number of industrialization, education, and communication modernization projects that called for tighter ties between the center and the periphery. The increase of the state's power of coercion protects such endeavors. The Soviet invasion in 1979, the removal of the Afghan monarchy in 1978, and the increasing Soviet army presence in the 1980s resulted in the United States, with assistance from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, militarizing the Afghan region. Large-scale arms and financial inflows exacerbated long-standing ethnic, linguistic, religious, and territorial conflicts in Afghanistan while also enabling alternative periphery social and political systems and local governance procedures.

A coalition of politicians has been actively working to increase awareness of the Sunni Hazaras in Afghanistan as an ethnic group in recent years. The movement, which is led by a group of people who are primarily young and educated, celebrates their allegiance to Sunni Islam and takes pride in their cultural heritage as Hazaras. To further the goals of Sunni Hazaras and the Hazara community as a whole, these activists established the National Council of the Sunni Hazaras in Afghanistan (NCSHA) in Kabul in May 2015.

Identity plays a very important role in the political stability of the state. If the government is controlled by one ethnic group, it gives rise to vengeance among other groups, and the peace and stability of the state would be challenged. This paper discusses the role of identity in the political stability of a state and how it creates a sense of recognition for the states in today's world and separates a state from all other states in international politics. This paper also discusses the history of political instability in the case of Afghanistan and relates it

to its diverse, multicultural ethnicities. It also discusses how a government with political inclusion of all ethnicities in power-sharing can make a difference in making a more stable Afghanistan.

Significance of the study

Afghanistan's ethnic diversity has impacted its political stability over a period of time in profound ways due to several reasons. The very first is that it highlights the sources of violence that have their root in historical grievances and competition among ethnic groups. Secondly, it explains the role of external powers in exploiting these internal divisions for their own strategic and political interests in the region. By addressing these issues, the study provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for building a cohesive national identity. The research also emphasizes the importance of the new government's push for inclusiveness. By promoting bridging ethnic gaps and equitable representation, these efforts can mitigate violence and foster stability in the long run for the state of Afghanistan. In addition to this, the government needs to have a source of national unity that keeps the population united on a single ideology. This study contributes to the broader discourse on nation-building and offers potential pathways for achieving a more stable and unified Afghanistan state.

Problem statement

Political instability has always been an issue, such as in Afghanistan; its political turmoil and complex ethnic landscape have been a challenge. The diversity in ethnic groups, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, is a major conflict that disturbs the state's stability and creates a hindrance to national unity. These ethnic fragmentations are a challenge for Afghanistan's government and contribute to political turmoil (Jam, Donia, Raja, & Ling, 2017). Some of the research focused on ethnic division and its contribution, such as Giustozzi (2021), which highlighted the tensions created by the diversity of ethnic groups, which are also exploited by external factors. Similarly, in another article, Johnson (2021) elaborated that ethnic diversity intensifies internal conflict, which leads to violence and instability. However, Biddle (2014) and Barfield (2022) conducted research on political instability, its causes, and its importance for equitable representation in the country, though the interference of external factors still needs to be examined. Despite these insights, there is still a gap regarding the diversity of ethnic groups applied to the implementation of political upheaval and instability in Afghanistan. This study aims to update the ethnic fragmentation and perspectives that influence political stability with the external actors' interferences. By exploring these insights, the study focuses on actionable discourses fostering social unity and political stability in Afghanistan.

Review of the Literature

Barfield (2022) explains the historical and cultural roots of Afghanistan, showing how its diverse ethnic groups have shaped the nation's political landscape. He argues that ethnic fragmentation has played a dual role, both strengthening and destabilizing the country over time. Rubin (20) explores how the state is formed and collapsed in Afghanistan over time, highlighting how ethnic divisions have contributed to the fragmentation of the state. The author also points out that both internal leaders and external actors have often manipulated ethnic identities to their advantage, impacting the overall stability of the state. Coll (2005) explains the period leading up to September 10, 2001, focusing on the influence of external interventions. The piece further discusses how foreign powers exploited ethnic alliances and rivalries, deepening internal conflicts and undermining the country's political stability. Goodson (2001) analyzes the rise of the Taliban and the failure of the Afghan state, connecting these developments to deep-rooted ethnic tensions and the absence of a unified national identity. Saikal (2004) offers a historical perspective on Afghanistan's struggles for survival, emphasizing the relationship between ethnic diversity and political crisis. The author argues that the lack of inclusiveness and fair representation of all ethnic groups has fueled cycles of violence and instability. Giustozzi (2009) examines the role of warlords and local power brokers in Afghanistan, showing how they manipulate ethnic divisions for their own benefit. Bhatia and Sedra (2008) investigate the influence of armed groups and disarmament efforts in post-war Afghanistan. They argue how ethnic affiliations shape the makeup and actions of different groups, complicating efforts to create a cohesive and stable political stability of the state.

Identity is a very complex term. Different scholars have tried to make sense of identity, but so far, they are unable to come up with a comprehensive understanding of identity. The political actions of different groups are mostly derived from their collective or individual identity. Scholars have highlighted the material causes, and others have asserted cultural, religious, and linguistic factors. The most important debate about identity is how much it matters in society and necessarily state-building while emphasizing identity politics as the politics of recognition and politics of differences. Identity is lined with positive connotations as a political space that creates an agent of change against hegemonic dominations. It is criticized due to the negative use of identity, which further intensifies social exclusion and division within society.

Schetter (2016), represented research that ethnic groups are the actors of two-sword; on one side, enriching cultural heritage while, on the other, creating an environment of conflict and division. Rubin (2002) explored how external factors may influence and interfere

with a country's interests. However, the internal unity can mitigate the tensions.

Methodology

The aim of this research work is to enhance the approaches that outline the political stability of Afghanistan and the defined perspectives that are necessary for having an impact on ethnical groups while using secondary data from internet sources and research articles. The purpose of the study is to examine how widespread ethnic fragmentation in Afghani society has influenced Afghanistan's national unity and political stability. By applying the qualitative method, the article is a solution to the amalgamation of complex ethnic group relations with the government, the positive or negative interference of external factors, and the state's political stability.

The study emphasizes the ethnic groups in Afghanistan, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbek. The article will go through these groups' demographic reports, the indicators of their national unity, and the historical records they have. However, the reports issued by the government, academic studies, and research publications to enhance these factors are part of this article. The thematic concerns included in the analysis are ethnic fragmentation and national unity, which have covered the period from 1979 to the attack on the Soviets. Reliance on the analysis of secondary data is the limitation of the study, while some of the researcher's biasness can be part of concluding the analysis. The results are significant in the sense that they are helpful in promoting long-term stability in political stability and national unity of Afghanistan's government as well as for international policymakers.

Data sources and research design

Secondary data analysis design is employed in this study. A secondary data source was chosen due to the extensive existing research and data sets available on the political dynamics and ethnic tension in Afghanistan.

Data on political stability indicators, etc., were taken from government reports and other research organizations, such as the International Crisis Group, and the United States Institute of Peace.

For historical contexts and political analysis, diverse scholarly articles, books and historical record was analyzed as part of this study providing context on the shifts in Afghanistan governments, ethnic tensions and different political events.

Findings

Over the decades, Afghanistan's intricate ethnic diversity has been both a strength and a cause of significant internal instability and violence. Reconciling such a diverse society, which includes over 40% Pashtuns, 25% Tajiks, 10% Hazaras, and other significant ethnic groups, has proven to be extremely challenging. The different ethnic gatherings have, on occasion, framed affectionate networks with their own dialects and characters, which patriot developments have exploited to raise strains (Kanval, Ihsan, Irum, & Ambreen, 2024; Taye, 2021). During times of invasion and occupation, external actors have also actively exploited these fault lines by tampering with the power balances between ethnic groups. This occurred during the Soviet era and after 9/11, launching the nation into prolonged civil wars marked by alarming acts of ethnic cleansing and the rise of militias serving a narrow set of interests. Power-sharing agreements became nearly impossible as a result of the increasing ethnic disparity in political representation (Taye, 2021). This demonstrates how the Afghan people have repeatedly been harmed by security-focused interventions without a framework for reconciliatory governance. If long-term stability is to be achieved, the new Taliban government must carefully design an overall system of inclusive, participatory, and decentralized decision-making that accommodates all interests. They must acknowledge previous grievances, distance themselves from oppressive tendencies, and construct a unified national identity above ethnic divisions. When certain groups feel politically marginalized, then they begin to address Afghanistan's identity paradox of rich diversity, instability, and conflict. Instead of dominating through isolated military control, sustainable peace requires the creation of sensitive institutions to facilitate consensus.

Discussion

The fact that, despite being an essential component of Afghanistan's social fabric, the country's ethnic diversity has historically contributed to instability due to a lack of inclusive and power-sharing governance is one of this study's most significant findings. Ethnic divisions have frequently been exacerbated during periods of political transition and external interference as a result of the interaction between identity politics and weak institutions (Yawar, 2024). This affirms the idea that patriotism will, in general, strengthen along ethno-etymological lines in shaky and struggle-ridden states. Conflicts grew as a result of the Soviets' and Americans' massive military interventions, which tipped the balance of ethnic power and favored some groups over others. During the warlordism era, local identities were prioritized over national unity, and militias were narrowly organized along strict ethnic lines. This dug into divisions and made agreement hard to accomplish. The disappointment of succeeding organizations like the Karzaisystem in addressing minority protests and giving all

gatherings a job in administration sustained the pattern of shakiness. For enduring dependability to flourish, the examination contends comprehensive strategies are expected to accommodate different characters through images and designs of shared political investment (Yawar, 2024). A power-sharing model that accommodates all interests must replace the dominant model. This may be the most difficult but crucial lesson: meaningful representation and dispute resolution must address the underlying political causes of conflict before force alone can reunite a divided society. The Taliban must distance themselves from their previous oppressive tendencies toward minorities in the future. They should proactively integrate different gatherings into the dynamic cycle as co-proprietors of the state to encourage purchase and deflect feelings of disdain that foes can take advantage of. Afghanistan's paradox of diversity within unity can only be resolved on a sustainable basis by a system that strikes a balance between military might and an equitable national vision above individual identity.

Identity and political stability

Identity plays a very important role in keeping the state homogenous throughout the territory and making the state politically more stable. If the population of a state can relate to each other on the basis of one single identity, there are very few chances of communal conflicts, which makes the state more stable internally. There are so many ethnicities living in Afghanistan, which is a source of perpetual conflict in the state. Over the course of history, Afghanistan was never under the rule of a single government. Warlords controlled different parts of Afghanistan, hailing from different ethnicities; even after the Bonn agreement and formation of a democratic government under the supervision of NATO, more than one-fourth of the territory was under Taliban control. After the U.S. withdrawal, this is the first time in over a century that the whole of Afghanistan is under the control of one single entity. To keep the state of Afghanistan stable and intact, there is a need for a process of political inclusion and power sharing among different strata of Afghan society rather than enforcing the identity based on ethnic lines. This is what the Taliban are trying to do. Instead of taking pride in the Pashtun identity, the Taliban elite is pursuing the rhetoric of the Afghan identity, and this is also visible in their policy to include the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and people of other ethnicities as Commanders and members of the Shura. These steps by the Taliban enforce that identity plays a very important role in keeping the state politically stable, where different diverse ethnicities come together in the power structure to govern the state smoothly.

Ethnicity: A source of continuous instability in Afghanistan

The history of Afghanistan is full of events, with the regime collapsing and perpetual instability, mostly due to their decisions to exclude 'others.' In retrospect, the once defeated and excluded groups would return to power only to exclude 'others. With this vicious cycle of exclusion, the downfall of the government has continued throughout history. If this process of exclusion is continued by the Taliban, this will indicate that they would risk repeating history. The Panjshir resistance, the flag movements, and the public outcry of resistance just days after the U.S. withdrawal and Taliban takeover have already raised suspicion among different sectors that if the Taliban tends to exclude anyone, this will recreate history. Afghanistan emerged as an independent state during the rule of Ahmad Shah Abdali (1772). (Qeyam, 2012) This rule of Ahmad Shah Abdali from the Durrani tribe gave the Pashtuns dominance over all the other ethnic communities in the country. The relative proportion of the ethnic groups in Afghanistan Pashtuns around 44 percent of the population, while the Tajiks represent 25 percent, the Hazaras 10 percent, and the Uzbeks 8 percent (Simonsen, 2004). Most of these ethnic groups have cross-border cultural or religious ties with the neighboring states. Uzbeks, with other Turkic groups like Turkmen and Kazakhs, are regionally located in the northern part of Afghanistan, which is called Turkistan. Before the 1880s, Uzbeks were living in their own independent existence under their own rulers until they were conquered by the Pashtun Amirs, who later completely took control over Turkistan. The Uzbeks have very close cultural and linguistic relations with the Central Asian state Uzbekistan, and the Turkmen community of Afghanistan shares the same ethnic relations with Turkmenistan; however, the political instability and complex situation of Afghanistan have kept both countries away from having any links with people of their same ethnic identity living in Afghanistan. In the northeastern side of Afghanistan, the Tajiks are in the same situation due to their ethnic linkage with Tajikistan. The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, the Pashtuns, are divided on the eastern borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan. When the state of Afghanistan was created by the British, there was a lot of movement of the Pashtun community in Afghanistan in order to Pashtunize the country, which was part of their plan during 'the Great Game' with the Tsarist Russia (Siddique, 2009). The only community that resides within the borders of Afghanistan and not on the country's outskirts like other communities are the Hazaras; they are settled in the central highlands of the Bamyan and the area around it. This community also has very strong ties with the Shia regime of Iran. The country's population is mostly Sunni, with some population of Shiite Muslims. All of this population is segregated on the basis of complex fault lines based on ethnic, regional, and sectarian grounds. The geographical location of Afghanistan is also a reason for its diverse, multicultural ethnic states because, historically, it has been a link between the Indian sub-continent, Middle East, and Central Asia. It has also worked as a harbor for many ethnic groups for ages, and different groups controlled its different parts. historically, it has never been under one single rule due to the complex challenge of governing so many different communities that share none to very few things in common. The creation

of an Afghan identity is also a very difficult phenomenon that the Taliban are rhetorically doing and calling themselves Afghans and not Pashtun. Afghanistan is a country that has people from different communities who have their own language, and members of any ethnic group can be recognized easily through their language. Pashto and Dari are the two official languages; Pashto is difficult to pronounce and read, so the non-Pashtun population mostly sticks to the Dari language, which is why it is considered the lingua franca of the region in educational and administrative institutions. The language barrier is also a source of non-interaction among different communities and has created an 'in-group' vs. 'out-group' debate among the people. The history of the political instability of Afghanistan is deeply rooted in its ethnic divisions as no group in power tried to incentivize the other group; instead, the victorious groups manipulated the other groups and kept a sense of vengeance among the defeated. This was the reason every time one group got victorious the resistance groups started to emerge immediately after, the Panjshir resistance after the recent Taliban takeover was one of the very good examples although the Taliban forces took control of the Panjshir after small fights but the Taliban leaders have to include all the groups in the Afghan society in order to prevent any future resistance and source of instability for the state of Afghanistan.

Ethnic links of population outside Afghanistan: source of ethnic exploitation

The regional context and bad neighborhood is also very important to mention in the exploitation of Afghanistan's ethnic lines by the other countries. This exploitation is also a source of internal instability with exploitation from external countries for example Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Tajikistan have always intervened in internal politics of Afghanistan based on ethnic linkages thus playing a role in the instability of the country. All of the above-mentioned countries have tried to manipulate ethnic, religious, linguistic and tribal issues of Afghanistan suiting their geopolitical interests. For example, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the Moscow backed regime killed then President Daoud Khan and seized power but the resistance force was built on ethnic lines and a large fraction of the Pashtun community with help from different countries established political parties in Pakistan and started the guerilla war against the Soviet forces. After realizing that the war of Afghanistan was unwinnable the Soviets engineered a civil war based on ethnic fault lines to mitigate the embarrassment of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. The manipulation of the ethnic fault lines has led to a civil war which has made so many drastic events to happen. For example the ethnic cleansing during the years of 1992-1994 in Kabul and in 1996-2001 in the Shomali plains, and in 1998-2001 in Northern Afghanistan particularly Mazar-i-sharif during the Taliban regime. This civil war has changed the traditional balance of power structure in Afghan society and its ethnic groups. Because the non-Pashtun ethnic groups are so much more powerful today than they were 20 years ago. With help from the external countries the non-Pashtun groups created their own political parties and they managed to gain the same level in the political arena of Afghanistan as the Pashtuns (United Institute of Peace, 2014). They have made themselves capable enough to demand their linguistic and political recognition and most importantly recognition of their ethnic identities such as Hazara, Turkmen, Tajiks and Uzbeks. The ethnic linkages outside the Afghanistan states have contributed so much to internal conflicts as the help from the neighbors to the members of their own ethnic community induced the conflicts and led the state towards ethnic violence.

The 'Afghan Identity' paradox

The name Afghanistan roughly translates to 'the land of the Afghan', this is a very complex and challenging phenomena because the non-Pashtun community of the Afghanistan state don't consider themselves as Afghan, this is a serious identity crisis which strongly challenges the national unity of Afghanistan and can may lead to the Balkanization of the region. This was evident when the government in the year 2018 decided to digitalize the identity cards. The nationality in this card to be written was proposed to be 'Afghan' this sparked anger among many non-Pashtun ethnic communities who according to them were not Afghans hence this should not be approved to be written on the cards. Many proponents of the idea argued that to mitigate the differences all the communities of Afghanistan should come under one single identity as Afghans which is taken from the name of the state but non-Pashtun communities called the government decision discriminatory, divisive and archaic (Raofi, 2018). The name Afghanistan comes from two centuries ago when a Pashtun from Kandahar province Ahmad Khan Abdali named his new kingdom Afghanistan. Although the term Afghan is referred to Pashtun other non-Pashtun groups also accepted it as their national identity but there was some resentment among the non-Pashtun groups as they consider them as non-Afghans and consider that Afghan identity does not apply to them. As historically Afghanistan was just a city state composed of different independently governed areas where every territory was controlled by the ethnic community living in it loosely attached to the center. After the Soviet invasion the multi-ethnic Afghans started to forge alliances and indulged in wars with each other for their share in the power structure and for social justice these groups continuously controlled one territory or other while fighting alongside governing. (Sahar & Kaunert, 2022) To govern during war is very easy as you use coercive force to make the population comply as the population is polarized during the conflict so it is very easy to assert control over the population. After the U.S. invasion and installation of a new government due to the Bonn agreement there was a search for identity among the population of Afghanistan the Pashtun community soon accepted themselves as Afghan but the non-Pashtun groups started to rethink about their national identity, should they accept themselves

as Afghans or choose to be someone else. With citizens divided the government was not very sure about crafting a new identity as Afghan due to differences among the top government officials for example Abdullah Abdullah the CEO of then government also opposed the idea of writing Afghan as national identity of the population members on electronic cards the powerful governor of Mazar-i-Sharif Atta Mohammed Noor also strongly opposed this idea. The government was so confused that they were reluctant to give President Ashraf Ghani his electronic card although it was planned that he would be the first one to get this card. The opposition from the higher officials of the government was in order to stop the polarization of an already very polarized society. After the Taliban take over who are dominantly Pashtun there is confusion among different circles that will there be a single identity of the multicultural ethnic groups in Afghanistan or the things will again go in previous circle where the dominant group will exclude others until they are defeated and the next victorious group will continue the vicious circle. This depends on the Taliban leadership if they are willing to sacrifice all they have gained through a tough prolonged war or will they change the scenarios and indulge in an inclusive government with members from all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan.

A new push for inclusiveness

Historically, when there is change of regime in Afghanistan, it has indicated a change in conditions for the other groups who are not in power: the control of the Kabul has been an opportunity for the victorious groups to have control of the most resources while having control all over Afghanistan has never been witnessed in history until recently by the Taliban in 2021. After the Taliban were pushed outside of Kabul the Pashtuns were no longer dominating the state institutions the Panjsheris in Shura-e-Nazar who were victorious after the Taliban fall with help of NATO forces and U.S. power were ready to exploit situation in their interests as there have been a tradition in Afghanistan's domestic politics (Akrami, 2018). They were in control of all the important Ministries including the Defense, Interior and Foreign ones. All of them were in very good and top positions. The U.S. and the Western powers in trying to pursue all the ethnic groups in Afghanistan in their favor tried to make an inclusive government with the help of Bonn agreement, this agreement was based on inclusiveness and power sharing from all the major ethnic groups but most of the Pashtun leadership from the rural areas of Afghanistan did not take part in this inclusive government although the plan proposed by the Bonn agreement the victorious groups and the ones in alliance with the U.S. were in fairly good positions and these groups were dominant in policy formulation and implementation still the post-Bonn reality had a dimension of inclusiveness in the politics of Afghanistan that was never seen before. The institutions built through the Bonn agreement were in contrast with the political traditions of Afghanistan, but they were very much according to recommendations given by the United Nations and other agencies (Holden, 2006). The institutions created in Bonn were uniquely diverse, with representation from many important ethnic groups in Afghanistan. As it is done by the international administration for peacebuilding in other areas of the world, the post-conflict period in Afghanistan is also characterized by efforts to include all the segments of the society in the political force so that everyone gets representation. The Bonn agreement pushed for inclusiveness in order to give representation in all the institutions of Afghanistan, but in the political elite, it failed to take the representation of the important leadership, which was supported by the general population of Afghanistan. The Bonn agreement changed the outcomes of the post-conflict scenario, which is very different from 'winner takes all', thus providing a potentially better opportunity for peace as it can help avoid the deadlocks among different groups and provide more interaction with cooperation so that a peaceful environment of co-existence is created for all the communities. The great powers, as they were involved in the institution building through Bonn in Afghanistan, had little interest in the building of Afghanistan. They were just trying to make it easy to govern as they were already involved in conflict, so they were trying to lessen the problems they were having during their war in Afghanistan. The Bonn agreement helped them to incentivize the general population and get their helpers and supporters at top positions regardless of their ethnicity, which was a blessing in disguise for Afghanistan as, in this way, the ethnic conflicts among communities were not widened if not finished politically. The biggest flaw in the Bonn agreement was that the Taliban, who was the biggest stakeholder in power-sharing, was not involved in the agreement. If they had been included in that conference, there was a chance that they would have started to behave in the system. Now, as the Taliban are in power, they have an opportunity to get all the different communities on board, and they have an interest in the political stability of Afghanistan as a whole. They have an already made plan on the basis of the Bonn agreement, and if they politically include all the ethnic groups in the political elite alongside them, they can have a greater tendency to keep this fragile and weak state stable. One possibility is to identify the traits by which the population was divided and make sure that these groups are represented in new state organs. The outlook of Taliban leadership seems like they have learned from past mistakes, as they have commanders and top elite with members from different ethnic groups in Afghanistan and peaceful co-existence with other groups. As they have just taken control, how far their inclusiveness goes needs to be seen with time because it is possible all of this is only done in order to gain legitimacy. After the interim government ends its tenure and a new government is formed in Afghanistan, Afghanistan's commitment to include all the groups will be evident in its actions and policies.

From asserting military control to governing the Afghan society: Challenge for taliban

Taliban have come to power yet again after the U.S. withdrawal, this time with more authority and control over the whole of Afghanistan. Previously, they were controlling only some of the territory. But this time, due to their military might, they have taken control of Afghanistan at its full capacity. Although during the war, the Taliban had a framework to govern the territories under their control, now full state resources under their control governing the Afghan society with stability and on a long-term basis is one of the biggest challenges for the Taliban. Controlling societies during military conflicts is easy as the society is polarized, and through coercive forces, one can assert control over large fractions of the population. Now, times have changed for the Taliban; governing and making different policy decisions during wartime was done on an ad hoc basis, and most decisions are taken in emergency situations. Governing societies in peacetime is a very difficult phenomenon, and the difficulties are increased when these are done after a long conflict because the main focus is on many important agendas, from reconstruction to institutional building and economic revival, etc. Governing such a diversified region like Afghanistan is the biggest challenge. With so much troubled history based on ethnic fault lines and the previous history of the Taliban rule, there is so much that is expected from the Taliban to be changed in this rule. As Afghanistan has a brief history of democracy and the Taliban have come to power after two decades of fighting a war, they are experts in asserting military rule and governing the state of Afghanistan as a whole will be a huge challenge for them. The transition from asserting military rule to governing a society is a very time-consuming process. The international community should give the Taliban some space as they have just come to power and they have taken lessons from their past. Their leadership has shown a change as they are taking measures for peaceful co-existence with a proper plan. The Taliban commanders attending the Muharram processions with the Hazara community is one of the examples. Also, the Uzbek, Tajik, and Baluch commanders in Taliban Shura show that they are here to rule Afghanistan with stability and for a long time as they are taking each step carefully and are not willing to take risks. The most important things along with structural changes are political devolution and the allowance of political parties for the minority groups so that there is an open playing field for the power-sharing phenomena that will offer the best possibility of creating a more legitimate and stable Afghan government. If the Taliban excludes the other ethnic communities in crafting the government, this will question the legitimacy of the government, and the stability of the state will remain challenged. It is a historical tradition in Afghanistan that ethnic groups mobilize themselves and assert forceful means when their interests are threatened (ICG, 2022). If the Taliban do the same, this can lead Afghanistan into a civil war, so to prevent this from happening, the Taliban have to include all the ethnic communities of the Afghanistan society. The best way to avoid a conflict is to prevent it from starting, and this can be done by Taliban leadership if they share the political power with different stakeholders in Afghan politics.

Taliban and 'Nation-Building': Blurring the ethnic faultlines

As the Taliban are moving towards 'state-building' for Afghanistan after their takeover of the country, with state-building building, the most important process is 'nation-building.' State building is a phenomenon that is related to the reconstruction of state institutions and the relocation of the population after conflicts with other materialistic reconstructions. Nation-building, on the other hand, is a very time-consuming process that creates a sense of identity and belongingness for the population of a state. Taliban are using religion as a source to connect and build a national identity for Afghanistan and its population. Taliban are using religious nationalism to blur the ethnic Faultline and the ethnonationalism among the population of Afghanistan. Since the majority of the population is from the religion of Islam, the Taliban are using it for the 'nation building' of the Afghan society and neglecting all the other identities. This religious nationalism is evident as the Taliban are giving more importance to the Sharia, which is Islamic law, than the long-established Afghan customary law known as 'Pashtunwali' (Sajjadpour & Salimifar, 2019). These moves by the Taliban are very important and intelligent moves to create a sense of belongingness among diverse Afghan society. This reaffirmation of the theological foundation can work as a reason for the Afghan society to unite as a single nation based on religious nationalism rather than ethnonationalism and can work in mitigating the ethnic differences and, consequently, ethnic violence in the Afghan society. (Wafayezada, 2023) The use of religious nationalism is very important for the nation-building of Afghan society as religion is one of the very few things on which most of the population shares a sense of belonging. The neglect of all the other identities is very necessary to keep the population under the umbrella of one identity, which is their religion, and this theological foundation is very necessary, especially after the emergence of serious rivals like Islamic State Khorasan. For the Afghanistan state to be stable enough and then fight terrorist outfits like ISK, there should be unity domestically, and that can be achieved by uniting the population on the basis of religious lines. This process of 'nation building' is a time-consuming process, but the Taliban leadership should stick to it with their political rhetoric and actions to include all the ethnic communities under a common flag of religion. A comprehensive framework to manage diverse ethnic societies in Afghanistan

The Taliban needs comprehensive frameworks along with nation-building of the state is an important step and, for this purpose, a structural system that helps to manage the divided societies like Afghanistan. The electoral system is considered a powerful tool for shaping the practice of politics in divided societies like Afghanistan. The challenge for the Taliban is to transform the war-torn state into a competent, peaceful state in the international arena. The interim government of the Taliban, although fragile, but an improved

security environment of the state represents a step forward towards democracy. (Rizapoor, 2023) Yet electoral mechanisms and equal representation from every ethnic community are necessary for power sharing, but they are insufficient for the introduction of a proper system without a constitution for the population and officials to follow. The legitimacy of the government formed by the Taliban will rest upon the government's progress in giving out good performance, such as disarming the private militia of powerful commanders who are from sizable ethnic minorities and then stopping the poppy cultivation and fighting the fractions left of ISK in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Identity is an important element of a state's cohesiveness; it binds the population together and creates an environment of peace and stability. Afghanistan's ethnic divides have been a reason for its instability historically, and the whole of the state has rarely been under a single rule; one of the reasons is the diverse Afghan multicultural society. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan will now determine that it remains under their control where all the other ethnic communities are excluded, like in the past, or the Taliban become successful in uniting the Afghan society on the basis of one identity. The Taliban are using a strong sense of religious nationalism for the Afghan identity rather than using the ethno-nationalism links. This is because they have learned from their past mistakes and don't want to risk what they have gained through prolonged wars. However, how far will it go, or will the Taliban succeed in keeping their regime stable through politics of inclusion and uniting the population based on a common identity? Only time will tell.

Recommendations

- Create a flexible framework that combines representation of each ethnic group and power-sharing. The system says that minorities ought to have a voice in national and local politics and government.
- Establish consultative bodies, such as a constitutional Loya Jirga, that are accessible to individuals from various regions, ethnicities, and faiths. These groups can help to reach a consensus.
- Instead of emphasizing ethnicity, give Afghanistan a national identity centered on a single, common idea. Promote national symbols and values that cut across boundaries while embracing regional variety.
- Respond to legitimate grievances by offering an apology for prior abuse, acknowledging the costs of hardships for civilian employees, and providing compensation for displaced groups where practical. Initiate a truth-and-reconciliation procedure.
- Assign more power and resources to the province to allow local communities to take charge of their own issues. More devolution can accommodate a range of interests.
- Promote interethnic engagement through collaborating with local peace chambers across networks, sharing administrative oversight, and combining security forces. Encourage social trade and bilingual education.
- Minority groups should be represented in cabinet positions and high-level decision-making forums based on their demographic weight. Incorporate regional, religious, and ethnic viewpoints while drafting policies.
- Enforce the new Afghan constitution's strict provisions protecting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, penalize provocation, and make sure security forces don't use violence against these communities.
- Encourage regional countries to oppose identity division and in favour of a single national Afghan identity, as well as to refrain from meddling in internal ethnic affairs.

References

Akrami, R. (2018). *The role of ethnic inclusion on regime stability (master's thesis)*. Unpublished master's thesis, Ohio, US: Wright State University.

Allen, J. R., Flournoy, M., & O'Hanlon, M. (2013). *Toward a successful outcome in afghanistan*. Michigan, MI: JSTOR.

Barfield, T. J. (2022). *Afghanistan: A cultural and political history*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bhatia, M. V., & Sedra, M. (2008). *Afghanistan, arms and conflict: Armed groups, disarmament and security in a post-war society*. England, UK: Routledge.

Biddle, S. (2014). Afghanistan's legacy: Emerging lessons of an ongoing war. *The Washington Quarterly*, *37*(2), 73-86.

Coll, S. (2005). *Ghost wars: The secret history of the cia, afghanistan and bin laden*. Westminster, UK: Penguin.

Giustozzi, A. (2009). *Empires of mud: Wars and warlords in afghanistan*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Giustozzi, A. (2021). Afghanistan after the us withdrawal. *asia policy*, *16*(3), 57-74.

Goodson, L. P. (2001). *Afghanistan's endless war: State failure, regional politics, and the rise of the taliban*. Seattle,WA: University of Washington Press.

Holden, K. (2006). *Ethno-political exclusion and regime stability. (Master's Thesis)*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway.

ICG. (2022). *Afghanistan's security challenges under the taliban.* Retrieved from `https://shorturl.at/s9V7H`

Jam, F. A., Donia, M. B., Raja, U., & Ling, C. H. (2017). A time-lagged study on the moderating role of overall satisfaction in perceived politics: Job outcomes relationships. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *23*(3), 321-336.

Johnson, T. (2021). The 2019 afghan presidential election: An assessment of problematic processes and results. *Afghanistan*, *4*(1), 19-46.

Kanval, N., Ihsan, H., Irum, S., & Ambreen, I. (2024). Human capital formation, foreign direct investment inflows, and economic growth: A way forward to achieve sustainable development. *Journal of Management Practices, Humanities and Social Sciences*, *8*(3), 48-61.

Qeyam, H. (2012). *Ethnicization of politics in afghanistan (master's thesis)*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas.

Raofi, W. (2018). *National identity crisis threatens afghan peace.* Retrieved from `https://shorturl.at/4C2j0`

Rizapoor, H. (2023). Pancasila as a framework for unity: Assessing applicability in culturally diverse nations, acase study of afghanistan. *Al-Tatawur: International journal of Social Science*, *1*(4), 1-20.

Rubin, B. R. (2002). *The fragmentation of afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system*. Yale, NH: Yale University Press.

Sahar, A., & Kaunert, C. (2022). Desecuritisation, deradicalisation, and national identity in Afghanistan: Higher education and desecuritisation processes. *European Journal of International Security*, *7*(2), 189-206.

Saikal, A. (2004). *Modern afghanistan: A history of struggle and survival*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sajjadpour, M. K., & Salimifar, F. (2019). Neo-taliban and religious nationalism in afghanistan. *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, *10*(29), 73-98.

Schetter, C. (2016). Playing the ethnic card: On the ethnicization of afghan politics. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, *16*(3), 460-477.

Siddique, A. (2009). *Afghanistan's ethnic divides* (Tech. Rep.). Barcelona, ES: CIDOB Policy Research Project.

Simonsen, S. G. (2004). Ethnicising afghanistan?: inclusion and exclusion in post-bonn institution building. *Third World Quarterly*, *25*(4), 707-729.

Taye, S. (2021). Afghanistan's political settlement puzzle: The impact of the breakdown of afghan political parties to an elite polity system (2001–2021). *Middle East Critique*, *30*(4), 333-352.

Wafayezada, M. Q. (2023). Hybrid extremism: Ethnonationalism and territorialized islamic fundamentalism in afghanistan. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, *21*(3), 7-21.

Yawar, M. E. (2024). Factors affecting the failure of the government in afghanistan taliban under the guidance of regional security group theory. *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, *10*(6), 2720-2741.