

ETHNOPOLITICAL PROCESSES IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2001

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the 20th century, domestic policy in Afghanistan unfolded under the influence of the ethnic factor. In 1929, the mainly Tajik Habibullah Kalakani movement ended the rule of Amanullah Khan; the National Democratic Party of Afghanistan, which split along ethnic lines, was another factor that brought about his downfall.

In 1992, the mujahideen came to power; this ignited ethnic confrontation and the country's de facto division into ethnically ho-

mogenous parts. The Islamist Taliban movement, which relied on the Pashtoon majority, established an unprecedentedly cruel regime and made the country the world center of terrorism and extremism.

In 2001, the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Bonn could not ignore the role of the ethnic factor; it figured prominently while the Constitution was discussed and later adopted, as well as during the parliamentary and presidential elections.

KEYWORDS: *Afghanistan; ethnic groups, political system; election campaigns, representation of ethnic groups, unity of the state.*

Introduction

Throughout its history, Afghanistan has been and remains a multinational state; today, it unites over 30 ethnic groups, the largest of them being the Pashtoons, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Balochi, Nuristanis, and Pashayi.

The history of Afghanistan is a history of wars of independence; a history of the struggle of national minorities for their rights and freedoms; a history of tribal feuds, ethnic separatism, and never-ending confrontation between the Pashtoons and other peoples. In the 20th century, these trends became even more vehement.

The following factors were behind the emergence and regular eruptions of ethnic contradictions broiling for a long time within Afghanistan's borders:

- *Ethnic contradictions*: in 1747 Ahmad Shah Durrani founded the Afghan state and triggered the process of its centralization, which ended in the late 19th century. This meant that for a one-and-a-half centuries, the Afghan rulers remained bogged down in brutal wars for territorial expansion; they conquered vast areas in Northern and Western Afghanistan, Badakhshan, Hazarajat, Nuristan, etc. with ethnically alien populations.
- *The Durand Line*: this was the cause of the political disagreements between independent Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 1893, Emir of Afghanistan Abdur Rahman Khan, who came to power with British assistance, had to sign an unequal or even humiliating peace treaty on the borders with British India. The Line cut across the Pashtoon tribal territories, vast areas were joined to British India and later, in 1947, became part of Pakistan.
- The “divided peoples” issue: Pashtoons, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens, and the Balochi of Afghanistan are all “divided peoples”; they constitute ethnic majorities/minorities beyond Afghanistan's borders—in Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.
- *The “religious minorities” issue*: they include the Hazaras, who are Shi'a Muslims mostly from the Ja'farite and some from the Ismaili sects persecuted for ethnic and religious reasons.

The New “Old” Problem

The downfall of the Taliban, which opened a new stage in the country's history, did nothing to alleviate ethnic contradictions and their influence on domestic policy. They became even sharper, adding greater tension to local politics.

The International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn attended by representatives of the main ethnic groups was not free from the rivalry among them for places in the Interim Administration coalition and the post of head of the Afghan Interim Authority (head of state until the Loya Jirga scheduled for May 2002). Each of the ethnic groups was prepared to push forward its own candidate: the Pashtoons came up with Hamid Karzai and Seyyid Ahmad Gilani; the Mojadadis promoted head of their clan Sigbatulla Mojadadi; and the Uzbeks put forward Abdusattar Sirat.

The Western delegations joined in the race, albeit in their informal capacities. The large states, the U.S. and U.K. in particular, placed their stakes on the Pashtoons as the largest ethnic group that dominated in the past and continued to call the tune in Afghan politics. Hamid Karzai was leader of the influential Pashtoon Popalzai tribe of the Durrani tribal confederation.

The academic community basically agrees that more or less full ethnic representation in the newly established government would have been desirable but not obligatory. Viktor Korgun, promi-

ment authority on Afghanistan, objected: "This would have brought the Pashtoons, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others into a purely formal unity; each of them would have been fighting for the interests of their own national group."¹

Amid the raging civil war, the increased rivalry for and ethnic squabbles over posts would have most likely overshadowed the urgent national problems.

During the parliamentary elections, ethnic contradictions acquired an even sharper edge. In June 2002, the Emergency Loya Jirga met in Kabul to elect an Interim Government headed by Hamid Karzai with 12 Pashtoons, 10 Tajiks, 5 Hazaras, 4 Uzbeks, 1 Turkmen, and 1 Nuristani as its members. Deputy chairmen represented the largest ethnic groups: Tajiks (Mohammad Fahim); Hazara (Mohammad Karim Halili); Uzbeks (Negmatulla Shahroni); and the Pashtoons (Hidayat Amin Arsala). The Pashtoons acquired the key posts: they became ministers of finance, internal affairs, and communications, Chairman of the Supreme Court, and Head of the Central Bank. Tajiks had to be satisfied with the posts of ministers of defense, foreign affairs, information and culture, education, etc.

This was the first time in the country's history that the idea of a multiethnic government was supported by parties and political groups. In the past, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Nuristani, and others were included in the government together with the Pashtoons by royal decrees or by decisions of the ruling party (the National Democratic Party of Afghanistan, to be more exact).

In December 2003-January 2004, 502 deputies of the Loya Jirga met in Kabul; on 4 January, they approved the country's new Constitution which brought together democratic ideas and traditional Islamic values: it declared the supremacy of law and stressed that the laws should not contradict the norms and principles of Islam.

According to Iranian academic M. Mazahiri, the ethnic factor strongly affected the Jirga's decisions on the future parliamentary vs. presidential form of government: "The non-Pashtoon peoples preferred the parliamentary form, while the Pashtoons insisted on the presidential form of government."²

The non-Pashtoon peoples feared that under a president with broad constitutional powers, the Pashtoons would dominate, very much as before, over the country's political system. The Constitution, however, did not impose any ethnic or confessional stipulations on potential presidents.

The deputies found it hard to agree on the powers of the executive bodies: the non-Pashtoon groups were opposed to strong presidential power. Former President Rabbani, supported by a large group of deputies who regarded him as their leader, objected to the constitutional provisions related to the president and his powers; he even tried to boycott voting.

The delegates disagreed on the state language and the text of the anthem. The Loya Jirga approved Pashto and Dari as the two official languages; some of the deputies insisted on the same status for the Uzbek language. After prolonged and heated debates, the Constitution was amended: Uzbek and Balochi were recognized as the official languages in regions where the corresponding peoples lived in compact groups.

While the 2004 Constitution was being discussed and finally adopted, academics and the leaders of the political parties suggested that the administrative-territorial division of the country be geared toward the historic, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural specifics of its peoples. Today, Afghanistan is divided into 34 administrative units (provinces) with multinational populations, the Bamyan and Nuristan provinces being the only exceptions.

On the other hand, many peoples are divided by administrative borders: the central mountainous region of Hazarajat, home of the Hazara people, was divided for a long time among the provinces of Bamyan, Sar-e Pol, Samangan, Baghlan, Urozgan, and Ghazni.

¹ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 8 December, 2001.

² M.M. Mazohiri, "Payam-ha wa umidho-e Konuni asasi-e Afghanistan dar marhila-e amali", *Wizhagi-e Afgoniston pas az Tolibon*, Ikra', Kabul, s.a., p. 98.

The country inherited the present administrative division from its monarchic past: the kings divided ethnic groups to slow down the development of ethnic awareness among the non-Afghan peoples and keep them divided into smaller ethnic groups with their own languages, cultures, etc.

This explains why the issue of administrative-territorial division surfaced during the discussions of the constitution draft. Dr. I. Shahroni, for example, at first suggested that Afghanistan be divided into seven territorial-administrative units (states); later he came up with another option: smaller administrative units, since, he argued: "States should be fairly large units."³

According to the decisions of the Bonn conference, as soon as the new Constitution was adopted, the country started moving toward a presidential election, first scheduled for July 2004 and later postponed until September because voter registration was dragging on far too long.

In the last twenty years, Afghanistan has remained divided ethnically and politically; this means that the candidates supported by ethnic groups and respected religious leaders and warlords stand a much better chance at presidential elections.

Peasant votes could strongly affect the results: political preferences in the countryside and those of the urban population are worlds apart. The urban people are better educated and are more politically aware; they are responsive to all sorts of influences and ideas.

The rural population is much more devoted to the traditional Islamic values; the urban people are divided into supporters of different political parties, while the rural people have strong ethnic preferences.

By mid-2004, all 18 presidential candidates, who represented different ethnic groups and regions, had been registered. With the Pashtoon and the world community, particularly the U.S., behind him, Hamid Karzai, leader of the Pashtoon Popalzai tribe, the native tribe of practically all Afghan emirs and kings, had the best chance. He also had vast financial resources, the state-controlled media, and political support from prominent political leaders on his side.

Karzai selected the right election tactics: he ran with M.K. Halili, prominent leader of the Hazaras and first vice premier of the interim cabinet, as his vice president and Tajik Ahmad Zia Massoud (younger brother of Ahmad Shah Massoud), Ambassador of Afghanistan to Russia, as first vice-president.

Mohammad Mohaqiq, prominent Hazara leader and head of the Hezbe Wahdat (Unity) Party, also ran for president; under the Taliban, he had been its irreconcilable enemy and vehement opponent. This meant that he could hardly count on the electorate of the Pashtoon-populated eastern and southern provinces; political disunity among the Hazaras was another negative factor.

An "old" player, leader of the Afghan Uzbeks and the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan General Abdul Rashid Dostum, joined the race.

According to Russian academic Roman Streshnev, "the majority of the voters still prefer candidates of closer national or ethnic affiliation"⁴; even though the central government was working hard to unite the country into a single whole.

On election day, Karzai received 55.4% of the votes; his closest rival Yunus Qanuni gained 16.3%; and General Dostum won 10%. According to the results, it became clear that the Uzbeks and Hazaras had cast their votes for members of their own ethnic groups. According to Russian expert Alexander Reutov, "there is not much sense in presidential elections in Afghanistan. It would have been enough to ascribe the voters of each tribe to each of the corresponding candidates."⁵

³ I. Shahroni, "Nizam-e ayandae Afganistan," available at [<http://www.ariaye.com/dari/qanooniasasi/shahrani/html>], 9 November, 2007.

⁴ R. Streshnev, "Afhantsy vybiraiut prezidenta", *Krasnaia zvezda*, 9 October, 2004, available at [http://old.redstar.ru/2004/10/09_10/4_03.html].

⁵ A. Reutov, "Hamid Karzai kontroliruet mence 10% territorii Afghanistana," available at [<http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/2951.html>], 4 December, 2007.

In September 2005, Afghanistan elected a new parliament; by that time there were over 80 registered political parties and movements, which could be conventionally described as traditionalists, moderates, and secularists.

The country elected 249 deputies, who represented different parties: the Islamic Society of Afghanistan (B. Rabbani) received 22 seats; the Unity Party and other Shi'a parties 30 seats; New Afghanistan (Y. Qanuni) 25 seats; the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan gained 20 seats; the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan 10 seats; and Afghan mellat 7 seats. The rest went to conservative fundamentalists, moderate traditionalists, and leftist liberals; independent deputies won over 90 seats.⁶

The ethnic composition of the lower chamber (Wulusi Jirga) was also highly varied: according to unofficial information there were 118 (47.4%) Pashtoons among the deputies; 53 (21.3%) Tajiks; 30 (12%) Hazaras; 20 (8%) Uzbeks; 11 (4.4%) non-Hazara Shi'a; 5 (2%) Turkmens; 5 (2%) Arabs; 3 (1.2%) Ismailis; 2 (0.8%) Pashayis; one Balochi (0.4%); and one Nuristani (0.4%).⁷

Viktor Korgun treats the non-Hazara Shi'a and Ismaili deputies as one group. In Afghanistan, Tajiks and Pashtoons also belong to the Shi'a branch; some of the Hazaras and Tajiks from Badakhshan profess Ismaili Shi'a.

This means that the religious affiliation of these deputies needed specification. It seems that the non-Hazara Shi'a deputies represented the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan founded by Ayatollah Asif Mohsini Qandahari (with Pashtoon, Tajik, and Aymak membership), while Ismailis belonged to the National Solidarity Party of Afghanistan (Hizb-e Paiwand Milli Afgoniston) of Sayed Mansur Naderi.

When writing about the impact of ethnic affiliation on the parliament and its decisions, Viktor Korgun says: "Since none of the ethnic groups have a majority of over 50% in the parliament, all attempts to push through purely nationalist programs will be checked."⁸

There is a fairly widespread opinion that the parliament will ultimately be divided into ethnic groups on the strength of the fact that the discussions about native language, which went on in the Loya Jirga between 14 December, 2003 and 4 January, 2004 (when the Constitution was adopted), divided the deputies into Pashtoons and non-Pashtoons.

The influential military-political groups that represent national minorities reject the idea of a united Afghan state with the Pashtoons as a dominant political force.

In the past, the ethnic minorities (lumped together, they constitute over half of the country's population) living to the north of Hindu Kush were tired of the Pashtoon political domination. These sentiments, very much alive today, are fanned by the Tajik and Uzbek bourgeoisie, which wants a much greater share of political power and which, due to certain historical conditions, has developed into the country's decisive economic and financial power. Geo-economic factors also contribute to the anti-Pashtoon and separatist sentiments: over 60% of the country's grain- and vegetable-growing areas, 46% of the fruit-growing areas, and over 80% of the areas on which industrial crops are grown are found in the country's north.⁹ Over 70% of the total herd of small cattle and nearly the entire herd of karakul sheep (5-6 million) are raised in the north.

In the last 10 years, these sentiments have intensified; indeed, the civil war unfolded mainly between the Pashtoons and non-Pashtoons; the defeat of the Pashtoon Taliban convinced the ethnic minorities of their military power and moral superiority and made them determined to insist on broad autonomy.

⁶ See: V.G. Korgun, "Sostav afghanskogo parlamenta," available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2005/30-12-05.htm>].

⁷ See: *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ See: M.F. Slinkin, "Afghanistan: problemy voyny, mira i bezopasnosti v strane i regione," available at [<http://www.nbuv.gov.ua>], 25 December, 2012.

“External Factor” at Play

With the Taliban out of the way, the civil war in Afghanistan became extremely complicated and unpredictable; after a short “respite,” it resumed in a qualitatively new dimension. Russian academic Mikhail Slinkin has pointed out: “...at first, starting in the mid-1970s, the civil war unfolded as an ideological and political confrontation; later, with the collapse in 1992 of the leftist regime, it developed into ethnic and confessional bloodshed. Today, the ethnic and confessional conflict is rapidly developing into a national-liberation movement against the foreign military presence.”¹⁰

In April 2007, a new political structure—the National Front of Afghanistan (NFA)—was set up with Burhanuddin Rabbani as its leader and popular politicians, warlords, and even royals among its members.

Some analysts think that, to a certain extent, it resembled the former Northern Alliance because of the great number of Ahmad Shah Massoud’s former supporters among its members: Tajiks B. Rabbani, Ahmad Zia Massoud, Yu. Qanuni, Ismail Han, and M. Fahim (the Islamic Society of Afghanistan); leader of the Uzbeks A.R. Dostum (NIMA), as well as Hazaras Mustafa Kazemi (the Islamic Society of Afghanistan), Sayed Mansoor Naderi, and Muhammad Akbari (the People’s Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan); Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoy, former leader of the Afghan Communists and Minister of Internal Affairs (1980-1989), General Noorul-haq Ulumi, a prominent military leader, and Mustafa Zahir, grandson of Zahir Shah.

As a new political force, the NFA formulated three major tasks: a parliamentary rather than presidential republic; elections of provincial governors; and voting by party lists. Elected governors were a striking novelty, even if the governors (wali) had been elected under Zahir Shah.

According to the widely shared expert opinion, a federative state (suggested by the NFA) harmonized with the idea of a parliamentary republic and elections of governors. Waheed Mujda, for example, writes that there is nothing new in the idea of a federative state, “yet it has preserved its urgency. The recent events have shown that the dependence of 34 provinces on a weak Center does nothing good for the country’s development.”¹¹ He pointed out that a federative state might make the non-Afghan peoples independent of the Pashtoon rulers.

The new political force was set up to stand opposed to the Taliban, which although ousted, was still popular in the country’s east and south and among the Pashtoon tribes on the other side of the Durand Line.

The political elite, however, headed by President Karzai and supported by the U.S., NATO, and the U.N. wants to include moderate members of the Taliban in the government. This cannot but cause deep concern among the leaders of the former Northern Alliance who represent the non-Pashto ethnic groups.

We should bear in mind that Russia, Iran, and Uzbekistan supported the NFA. Before the new bloc appeared, Russia supported Rabbani and his allies, as well as Gulabzoy and Ulumi, former NDPA members; Iran backed Hazara leaders Kazemi, Naderi, and Akbari, while Uzbekistan was on Dostum’s side. This meant that if President Karzai weakened its grip on power, the United States would lose much of its impact, while Russia, Iran, and Uzbekistan would strengthen their positions.

The National Front of Afghanistan clarified the balance of power inside the country: if it continues to gain in strength this could have a negative effect on the country’s further existence as an independent state.

¹⁰ M.F. Slinkin, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Asia-Plus*, 25 April, 2007.

The Pashtoon and pro-Pashtoon ruling circles will never support the ideas of federalism—this much is absolutely clear. R. Momun of Afghanistan wrote that “if a Pashtoon ruler accepts the idea of federalism it will signify that he has accepted the Durand Line and agreed to the end of Pashtoon rule in Afghanistan.”¹²

Mikhail Slinkin asserts that the separatist sentiments among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Afghanistan are not only home-grown, they are also initiated outside the country. He had in mind certain Turkic-speaking countries and their cherished dream—the Great Turan stretching from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea to Eastern Turkestan.¹³

Iran has his own far-reaching plans: it is seeking greater influence in Afghanistan on a pan-Islamist and ethnic basis. A. Boguslavskiy, a Russian researcher, believes that Tehran has in view several objective and subjective factors in its Afghan policy: “First, for the sake of national security and in the dangerous context of the use of force by the United States, Iran prefers, if not a friendly, at least a neutral and loyal neighbor with no political, economic, or border claims against Iran. Second, the country’s geographic location makes it a potentially advantageous trade and economic partner of Tehran, as well as a very much needed intermediary in transporting hydrocarbon resources (oil, natural gas, etc.) and all sorts of other cargoes along the North-South and East-West lines. Third, common historical roots, close languages, religion, culture, and customs create favorable conditions in which Iran can promote its national interests in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.”¹⁴

The Hazaras, who live in the central part of Afghanistan (according to certain sources they comprise about 19% of the country’s total population) and follow Shi’a Islam, could always count on Tehran’s understanding, compassion, and support in their confrontation with the country’s Sunni majority. Iran is very popular with the Tajiks and Uzbeks living in the central and northern parts of Afghanistan; likewise, Iran’s influence is very strong in the Herat Province as a whole. Not long ago Iran had certain claims on the region.

This means that the idea of maximum autonomy of some of the ethnic groups for the sake of continued political stability in the country’s north meets the geopolitical interests of the western and northern neighbors of Afghanistan, including Russia.

The political preferences of the Pashtoon population of Afghanistan are strongly affected by Pakistan, where the Pashtoons are the second largest ethnic group (over 15% of the total population or about 15 million)¹⁵; they live in the northwestern part of Balochistan and the Sindh province and are in the majority in the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan and the tribal zone. Traditionally, the Pashtoons figure prominently among the middle- and top-level commanders of the Pakistan army.

Since the 1950s, the influential military circles of Pakistan have been toying with the idea of an Afghan-Pakistani confederation as the best possible method of settling interstate contradictions. At the same time, the rulers of Pakistan are ready to accept the idea of a single Afghan state if the idea of Pashtunistan is not placed on the agenda of their bilateral relations. In fact, Pakistan would rather see a united Afghanistan for the simple reason that otherwise the Pakistani Pashtoons might start thinking about an independent state.

The political sentiments of the Afghan Balochi (over 0.2 million) are strongly affected by the Balochi of Pakistan and Iran. In Pakistan, the Balochi constitute about 3% of the total population

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ See: M.F. Slinkin, “Etnicheskaia problema v Afghanistane (istoriko-politichesky analiz),” available at [http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/Articles/Kulnar/knp66/knp66_46-60.pdf], 6 February, 2013.

¹⁴ A. Ya. Boguslavskiy, “Irano-afganskii otnosheniia na sovremennom etape,” 8 August, 2009, available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat>], 5 February, 2013.

¹⁵ See: “Natsional’no-etnicheskii sostav naseleniia Pakistana,” available at [<http://kraff.narod.ru/samudai/pak/pakpeople.htm>], 5 February, 2013.

(about 3.5 million); they are scattered across Balochistan (nearly 70%), Punjab, and Sindh. Over one million Balochi live in Iran.

Some of the trends of the Balochi national movement are waging a guerilla war under the slogans of a united or Greater Balochistan. The main political parties, which side with the national interests of the Balochi of Pakistan and Afghanistan, demand broad autonomy for Balochistan.

The position of the United States and its NATO allies should be taken into account for a correct assessment of the situation inside and around Afghanistan.

Since early 2009, the United States has been implementing its new plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan; Washington is determined to liquidate terrorist networks by strengthening the regional security forces, building up democratic efforts, and promoting international cooperation. Barack Obama revealed certain details: "Today, I'm announcing a comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan... A campaign against extremism will not succeed with bullets or bombs alone."¹⁶ The president went on to say that the U.S. would rely on agricultural specialists, doctors, and engineers not only to set up an environment in which people would realize that they were more interested in cooperating with the United States and international community than in supporting extremist ideologies. The American president firmly stated: "This is just one part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent Afghanistan from becoming the al-Qa'eda safe haven."

Today American politicians and analysts are fond of saying that ethnic imbalance in the Kabul corridors of power cost Washington its strategy. After the Taliban was defeated by the coalition forces in 2001, the Northern Alliance commanders, who represented ethnic minorities, acquired a lot of power; Tajik commanders who belonged to the so-called Panjshir group that controlled the defense and security structures had even more power than other ethnic groups.

The Americans decided that since the majority of the Pashtoon tribal leaders who had been ruling the country for centuries had been removed from power, Washington should revise its policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

According to Michael Whitney, "the Pentagon has settled on a new counterinsurgency doctrine (COIN) which it intends to implement in Afghanistan. The program will integrate psyops, special forces, NGOs, psychologists, media, anthropologists, humanitarian agencies, public relations, reconstruction, and conventional forces to rout the Taliban, assert control over the South and the tribal areas, and to quash any indigenous resistance. Clandestine activity and unmanned drone attacks will increase, while a 'civilian surge' will be launched to try to win hearts and minds in the densely populated areas. Militarily, the goal is to pit one ethnicity against the other, to incite civil war, and to split the country in smaller units that can be controlled by warlords working with Washington."¹⁷

Conclusion

The Afghan crisis, which has been going on for decades and which NATO interference has failed to stop, has far-reaching social-economic, ideological, ethnic, and national roots. The developments in Afghanistan of the last third of the 20th century show that neither military force nor foreign interference alone can bring peace.

On the other hand, discussion and adoption of the new Constitution and the parliamentary elections showed that popular sentiments and the political climate in Afghanistan are still strongly af-

¹⁶ [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan].

¹⁷ [<https://deeppoliticsforum.com/forums/showthread.php?2738-The-Audacity-of-Ethnic-Cleansing-Obama-s-plan-for-Afghanistan>].

fect by ethnic contradictions: the text of the national anthem was approved only in Pashto, despite the frantic efforts of deputies of other ethnic groups to approve the Dari text as well.

Moreover, during the presidential election of 2004 some of the demands and provisions of the election law were attenuated, without legal reasons, for certain categories of voters in eastern and southern provinces, that is, the tribal zone.

The following events can be described as evidence of another bout of South-North confrontation:

- (1) removal of Mohammed Mohaqiq, one of the leaders of the People's Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan, from his post.
- (2) Attempted assassination of former governor of Herat Province Ismail Khan and murder of his son Mirwais Sadiq.
- (3) Allegations against leader of the Uzbek community General Dostum.
- (4) Assassination of former president and prominent leader of the Tajiks B. Rabbani.
- (5) Attempts of the authorities to kindle confrontation between the military-political groups and their leaders.
- (6) The increased tension in the northern and western regions and in Hazarajad.

The contradictions in Afghanistan cannot be resolved in favor of one ethnic group alone. The multinational state, which in the past assumed the name of Afghanistan, is the homeland of the Pash-toons, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Balochi, Nuristani, and other ethnic groups. They share a history, varied culture, and common religion.

If this reality is ignored much longer, negative consequences and a threat to the state's unity cannot be excluded.