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**THE FAILURE OF A CLERICAL PROTO-STATE:  
HAZARAJAT, 1979 - 1984**

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## **The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State: Hazarajat, 1979 - 1984**

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### **Introduction**

The April coup of 1978 in Kabul by the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was broadly greeted with optimism by Shiites, particularly the Hazaras. The coup overthrew Daoud Khan, the last of the Pashtun Muhammadzai dynasty that had for decades oppressed the predominantly Shiite Hazaras of the country. The new regime announced social and economic reforms programmes that heralded the promise of change for what had been the most disadvantaged and marginalised ethnic group in the country.<sup>1</sup>

However, this optimism soon faded as the reform programmes of the new regime were announced locally in the Hazarajat. The reforms were never implemented in reality, but Hazara *khans*, religious scholars, independent intellectuals and other notables were indiscriminately incarcerated, socially humiliated and effectively sidelined at the hands of inexperienced and arrogant party members in the region. This unleashed a spontaneous and popular rebellion in all parts of Hazarajat, that was directed against government institutions and in particular the public schools, which were seen as centres of Marxist indoctrination.

By June 1979 almost all parts of the region had been liberated from the government control.<sup>2</sup> In September of that year a grand assembly of the rebellion's leaders, or their representatives, from all parts of the region came together in the Waras district of Bamyan province where they announced the formation of the *Shura-ie Inqilab-i Ittifaq Islami Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Council for the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan, referred to as the Shura throughout this paper).

This paper focuses on a coalitional analysis to examine the Shura as an attempt to build a proto-state and the difficulties implicit in it within the contexts of Hazarajat and Afghanistan. If we define the key characteristics of the state as a polity having political legitimacy, an administrative system, military control over its territory, providing some services and enjoying official recognition as a state by external powers, then the *Shura* had most of these, at least to some extent or in an embryonic form. The author attempts to explain why it nonetheless ultimately collapsed after five years, resulting in civil war.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed accounts of the history of the Hazaras see Mousavi (1998), Canfield (2004) and Emadi (1997).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the rebellion in Hazarajat see: Harpviken (1995).

## The origins of the *Shura*: a state within a state

*Shura* is an Arabic term which translates as both ‘consultation’ or ‘council’ and historically referred to consultative decision-making mechanisms in the public affairs of the Muslim communities. In the current context the term is used for a resistance organisation that attempted to play the role of an interim state based on the consultation and inclusion of all Hazara and Shiite resistance groups under the leadership of Ulema, or religious scholars. The *Shura* came into being as a result of spontaneous local reactions in the Hazarajat against the premature and hasty modernisation policies of the PDPA regime in Kabul, but also a rebellion of the Hazara/Shiite community in opposition to the historically Pashtun-dominated/Sunni central state. This historical perception of injustice and deprivations under the central Afghan government was being reinforced by the harsh persecution of the Hazara Ulema and intellectuals under the Khalq faction of the PDPA, both in cities and rural areas, and this gave it its political legitimacy. The immediate goal of the uprisings was to liberate the region from the control of a central government that was seen as historically unfair and repressive towards the community and also un-Islamic due to its reform agendas. Once the goal was achieved, the rebel leaders concentrated their efforts on defending and securing control of the liberated areas of the Hazarajat until such time as the establishment of an ‘Islamic republic’ in the country.<sup>3</sup> Until that day, the *Shura* aimed to deal with all political, military and judicial affairs of the region and to prepare for collective struggle for the rights of the community in a future Afghanistan. This was, in fact, the main factor that united rival socio-political groups under the *Shura*, even if they never meant it to be an exclusively Shiite ‘state’ or to be hostile to the majority Sunni population of the country

The idea was to administer the region along the lines of Afghan governments. Various agencies were established to provide education, communication and health services to its citizens. It introduced taxation and identity cards and required citizens to perform military service. It demobilised independent armed groups in areas under its control. Outsiders and foreigners were required to obtain a letter stamped by *Shura* officials to travel through its territory.<sup>4</sup> The *Shura* armed forces were composed of ‘police’ groups, that would provide security to its citizens against internal threats, and of more organised military fronts that would defend the region against the central government. The latter were required to wear uniform.<sup>5</sup>

Although there was a great level of discontent and a strong sense of historical deprivation within the Hazara/Shiite community, it is important to highlight that the *Shura* was meant to be an interim arrangement. There was no ambition to build a permanent separate Shiite state. One can see in the *Shura* literature a high level of emphasis by the *Shura* leadership on the territorial integrity of the country and on solidarity with the other Sunni and Shiite resistance organisations. The first *Shura* declaration states that the organisation will administer the region, ‘in solidarity with the other Muslim brothers’, until the full establishment in the country of an Islamic

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<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Fakuri Beheshti, a son of Ayatollah Beheshti and current member of the Afghan Parliament, Kabul, 18 March 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Farr, (1988) p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> The Shura office in Iran,(n.d) p. 9.

Republic<sup>6</sup> that could guarantee ‘social justice’ and ‘equal rights’ for all Afghan Muslims.<sup>7</sup> Hence, there was no attempt to seek official recognition from any government.

The Shiite Ulema in the leadership prescribed Islamic social justice as the ultimate solution. The concept, which was not much articulated, implied that equality and mutual social responsibility for the believers would be delivered by the implementation of Islamic laws. According to the Ulema, these laws sufficed to regulate and balance all relationships and behaviour within the community, as well as with other ethnic communities at the national level. Accordingly, the Islamic character of the organisation was strongly emphasised internally by appointing the Ulema to all key and decision-making positions, and externally in its relations with the other resistance organisations. Historical grievances and demands for a better place for the Shiites in the future of the country were expressed in purely religious terms. Ethno-nationalism was deemed non-Islamic and divisive in a Muslim country. The discrimination and deprivation suffered by Shiites in the past were largely blamed on the previous regimes which, according to the Ulema, were not genuinely Islamic and were influenced by foreign powers. They claimed to represent millions of Afghan Shiites and were determined to renegotiate their rights. One of the main demands was the restructuring of the existing administrative structure of the country. It was strongly believed that the division of the region into seven different provinces by past regimes had been an attempt to politically marginalise the Shiite/Hazara population and to minimise their share of political power and national resources. As a first step, therefore, they produced their own administrative division of Hazara areas according to a more local logic, which resulted in the creation of seven provinces and forty two districts.<sup>8</sup>

### **Ideological and political components of the *Shura***

The participants in the first *Shura* meeting represented different socio-political groups of Hazara society with different and even conflicting ideologies and visions for the future of the region and that of the Hazaras. To many of them, the *Shura* was an interim arrangement that could serve as a power-sharing mechanism and temporarily fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the government in the region. In the long term, many of them were looking for different vehicles that could better serve their ideological and political objectives. These differences gradually surfaced as bitter internal rivalries and impeded the development of the *Shura* as an effective and cohesive organisation.

The agreement of the major political and ideological groups over the *Shura's* clerical leadership marked the ascension to power of the Shiite Ulema, who gradually sidelined the other groups and have since established a political monopoly over Hazara society. However, the Ulema also represented two very different lines of religious interpretation that influenced their political behaviour and leadership styles. By the late 1970s there were two dominant theories in the Shiite world in regard to the role of the Ulema in the public and political affairs of the *ummah*. Ayatollah Kho'i, one of the top Shiite *mujtahed* (jurists), strongly advocated and preached in

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<sup>6</sup> Beheshti does not appear to have had clear ideas about what the *Shura* meant by ‘Islamic republic’. When asked in an interview, he answered that he would explain that when the time would come (Danish’s interview with Beheshti).

<sup>7</sup>The *Shura* Office in Iran, (n.d) *Shura* Declaration, Article 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Danish’s interview with Beheshti. Under the previous state, Hazarajat consisted of one province (Bamian) and several surrounding districts, belonging to other provinces.

favour of a non-political role for the Ulema, who should instead only provide religious guidance through teaching and preaching. This does not mean that in times of trouble, the *mujtahed* cannot become more active in politics, although in principle still limiting himself to ‘advice, guidance, and the implication of sacred law in public life’.<sup>9</sup> In Afghanistan, this group was represented by Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Beheshti, the president of the *Shura*, and had only resorted to resistance activities as a way of escaping their indiscriminate arrests and persecutions by the regime in Kabul. In contrast, Ayatollah Khomeini, maintained that to enforce Islamic laws the Ulema needed to establish an Islamic state under their own leadership. Hence, he developed and proposed the doctrine of *Welayat-e Faqih*, which was the core philosophy of the Islamic revolution in Iran. His followers were revolutionary Islamists who, inspired by this ideology, were not only opposed to the Kabul regime but were also seeking to bring radical social, political and cultural changes in society.

The third group was the secular *khans* who had previously served as agents of the central government in the region. The final group was the Hazara intelligentsia which had acquired modern education both at home and abroad and which shared with the *khans* a secular approach, although being mostly attracted by nationalist and left-wing (Maoist) ideas. The election of Beheshti as the *Shura* leader was a compromise between these groups and their interests. A religious figure from Waras district, who had obtained prominence in religious education in Iraq, Beheshti was influential even if he did not command a binding religious authority over other key *Shura* leaders, many of whom were also senior Shiite Ulema. In addition to his religiously respectable character, he was believed to be militarily and politically weak and unable to pose a serious threat to the interests of other more powerful contending groups. Some powerful *khans* of the Hazaras, most notably Muhammad Hussain Khan Shahi of Waras, who hosted the first *Shura* assembly, strongly backed him in the meeting as their candidate for leadership. Hussain Khan Shahi believed that since Beheshti was from Waras district and had traditionally been dependant on his donations, he would be able to exercise influence over the organisation in the future.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The traditionalist non-political Ulema***

The followers of Kho'i had no desire or interest in engaging in politics. Nor they were trained for that. When they returned from traditional Shiite learning centres in Iraq in the 1960s, they had concentrated their activities on building centres of religious preaching and teaching in different parts of Afghanistan. They did not advocate social revolution and they developed close links to the Shiite upper classes, who served as their main source of funding. Moreover, like the Khans, many of the traditionalist Ulema supported the past governments or at least avoided protesting against their policies.<sup>11</sup>

The case of Ayatollah Beheshti, who followed the Kho'i line of interpretation, and his role before and after the April coup of 1978, clearly illustrates a traditionalist non-political approach to the role of the Ulema in an Islamic society. He was also a Sayed that had long enjoyed a privileged social and economic place in the Hazara society. The Sayeds, thanks to their religious status, were living primarily on religious donations from their followers and were closely tied to the

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<sup>9</sup> Rahimi (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Grant M. Farr (1988) p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Dawlatabadi et al. (1999), p. 90.

Hazara upper class, the *khans*. On his return from Iraq, Beheshti settled in Waras where in 1963 he built a house and a *madrasah* (a religious school) on plots of lands donated by Muhammad Hussain Khan Shahi. As with many members of this social group, he and other Kho'i students never publicly protested against the central government or its allies. Instead, they appreciated the religious donations of the upper class families and so avoided the risk of challenging and confronting the governments, despite the fact that they did not view the central government and its local administration supported by the *khans*, as either Islamic or respectful of the rights of the Shiite community in the country.<sup>12</sup>

It was the widespread arrests and persecution of the Ulema and the landlords as being 'reactionary' and 'feudal' elements that drove them towards opposition activities. Many prominent Ulema were arrested and persecuted, in cities as well as in rural areas. Sayed Waez, a senior representative of Ayatollah Kho'i in Afghanistan, was arrested and allegedly killed by the government in Kabul. This group of the Ulema was particularly targeted by the regime, since they were closely tied to the upper class families, such as the khans and urban businessmen. Once in opposition, they lacked an organisation and even minimal political or military leadership skills. Hence, they relied largely on religious and voluntary support from the population, particularly from the khans. They did not attempt to build military or political organisations and instead assumed that the popular and voluntary mobilisation that had brought them to power would continue to exist. It was this particular characteristic of the traditionalist Ulema that made them more acceptable to the khans and the radical Islamists, as temporary leaders of the *Shura*. Therefore, the paradox of the quietist Ulema conquering political power was in a sense more apparent than real.<sup>13</sup>

The longstanding friendly relations between Kho'i's followers and the khans resurfaced in an alliance between the two groups in the *Shura* as well. Beheshti, as leader of the shura, was strongly backed by Muhamad Hussain Khan, his traditional financial sponsor and ally, as well as by other khans. Hazara khans preferred to exercise indirect influence over the *Shura* leadership. Therefore, the khans rallied around Beheshti as his key allies and provided his basic financial backing and primary military personnel. Many of Beheshti's most loyal commanders were the sons and relatives of the khans who recruited their peasants as the soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The radical Islamist Ulema***

Since they started to return to Afghanistan in the 1960s, the radical Islamist Ulema had been engaging in Islamist political activities and in protests against the discriminatory policies of the monarchies towards the Shiite, and particularly the Hazara, community in Afghanistan. Their network of activists and small groups existed before the April coup of 1978. In the same way as the activists of the Afghan Muslim Brotherhood, they demanded an Islamic state, but one where the Sunni and Shiites would enjoy equal rights and privileges.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Personal interview with the Shiite Ulema, Kabul, December 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Personal interviews with participants of the Shura assembly, Kabul, December 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interviews with Hazara khans and former Shura commanders from Bamyan and Daikundi, Kabul November 2005.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed history of protests by Shiite Ulema against the Afghan state see Edwards (1986).

The Islamists were seeking a wide array of radical political, economic, cultural and social changes. They were offering and propagating a new vision for an Islamic society where social justice and equality would be upheld, where all believers both Shiite and Sunni would be similarly respected and where political power and economic resources would be equitably distributed. To achieve their goals, they were prepared to resort to violence and punish their adversaries. They did not oppose the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul because it persecuted them but rather because it was not an Islamic regime and many of its policies violated and undermined their fundamental ideological values and principles.

The leaders of this group of Ulema came mainly from the lower classes of Hazara society and believed that the internal structure of the Hazara community was unfair and needed to be shaken up in favour of the dispossessed. Long before the coup they were attempting to apply their reforms in the areas where they had settled. Following the collapse of the government in the region and in parallel to the struggle against the Soviets and the Kabul government, they vigorously started to apply their own social and political reforms in territories under their control. When the Hazarajat was fully liberated from government control and was no longer facing any large scale military threat from the government,<sup>16</sup> they stepped up their efforts locally.

To them, the khans and the traditionalist Ulema were reactionary forces and were part of the ruling propertied classes, opposed to social and political reforms. Beheshti, with the blatant backing of the khans, was not going to be an acceptable leader in the long term. More important to them than the differences in religious interpretation, was the fact that he was now serving the interests of the landlords who, according to the Islamists, had traditionally been the agents of repressive central governments and had taken undue control of the scarce resources of this impoverished region. He was also one of the sayeds, who according to the Islamists had used their alleged ancestral attribution to the Prophet Muhammad's family, to unfairly claim a privileged position in the Shiite community.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, the radical Islamists' participation in a *Shura* dominated by traditionalist Ulema and the khans was inevitably going to be only temporary. Many left the *Shura* at the beginning, in pursuit of establishing or joining organisations that were more to their liking. One of their key leaders, who had participated in the first *Shura* meeting, stated that he quit the *Shura* in the early days because: 'it was dominated by the traditionalists and khans and lacked a conscious political leadership'.<sup>18</sup>

Sadiqi Nili, a deputy head of the Jihad Commission,<sup>19</sup> is a typical example. In 1963 he established a *madrasah* in his home district which was a school of religious training as well as a centre of political activities. Unlike Beheshti's *madrasah*, Sadiqi used his *madrasah* to train a generation of motivated Islamists with a radical political ideology and a religious worldview. In 1971, he was designated as *Wakil*, or a representative of Ayatollah Khomeini in the country.<sup>20</sup> He

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<sup>16</sup> Personal interviews with former commanders of the Shura and other Hazara Mujahedin groups, Kabul February 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Ali Jan Zahidi, a former leader of the Pasdaran Jihad-e Islami, Ghazni, January 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with a former leader of Pasdaran, Ghazni, January 2005.

<sup>19</sup> See further down.

<sup>20</sup> Every Shiite Mujtahed designates Wakil or representatives in each part of the Shiite world who, collect the religious donations and explains religious affairs according to their respective mujtahed.

preached against the central government as discriminatory, corrupt and most importantly un-Islamic. As far as local politics were concerned, he protested against the role of the khans, as agents of the central government as well as an exploitative upper class that mistreated the local population. He further undermined the khans and the local administrations by resolving and settling social conflicts and land disputes according to the *Shariat*.<sup>21</sup>

The early liberation of the Daikundi district from government control allowed Sadiqi and his like-minded supporters to consolidate their control over the territory and pursue their social reform agendas. They vehemently turned against the khans and applied the harshest methods to punish them for their past and also their continued resistance to the reform programmes. Most khans were jailed or killed and their lands and properties were distributed among the poorer families.<sup>22</sup>

### ***The Secular Khans***

The region today known as Hazarajat was forcefully incorporated into the Afghan state in the early 1890s by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, the iron-handed Afghan monarch. Hazara resistance to incorporation of the region into the Afghan state was led by their khans and brutally repressed. Eventually, the Hazaras were defeated and the khans and other resistance leaders were either killed or forced to move to Kabul or other provinces, or even exiled outside the country. Where previously the khans had led Hazara resistance against external threats, including that of the Afghan central government, under Abdur Rahman and his successors a new generation of the Hazara khans emerged, largely co-opted by the central government in Kabul, which in return recognised their privileged status and local influence within the state structure. Their new influence was, however, strictly limited within district boundaries and was subject to the endorsement of the local administrations. Since most parts of the mountainous region were inaccessible for several months of the year, the government often used the khans to collect taxes and ensure stability and order in those areas.<sup>23</sup>

Ordinary Hazaras had an entirely different experience under the Afghan state. They remained excluded from economic and social development opportunities within the state and were discriminated against throughout the century. The seizure and distribution of most of the fertile parts of the region by the new Pashtun settlers exacerbated the living conditions of the predominantly peasant Hazaras. The affiliation and collaboration of the khans with central governments that were seen by most Hazaras as inclined to discriminate and repress, left them with quite a negative reputation within the community. By 1978 the Hazara khans were identified with their wealth, privileged access to the government administrations and betrayal of the long denied rights and grievances of the Hazaras within the Afghan state.<sup>24</sup>

By refusing to recognise the privileged role of the khans, while at the same time failing to attract new socio-political groups, the PDPA regime opted for a less inclusive regime than the previous one and undermined the only support base of the central government in the region. Declared to be a reactionary force and a symbol of Afghan feudalism by the new regime, the Hazara khans

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<sup>21</sup> Daikundi, (1993) p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Personal interviews with Hazara khans and former Shura leaders, Kabul, November 2005.

<sup>23</sup> For detailed analysis of the role of Hazara khans and their relationship with the Afghan state before 1978 see: Canfield (1971).

<sup>24</sup> For more on khans clientele system within the Hazara society before the war see: Grevemeyer (1988).



retreated to their past role of leaders of opposition to the central government. In many parts of the Hazarajat, the Hazara khans played an instrumental role in igniting and mobilising anti-government uprisings. They provided the basic resources and arms for the fighters, since they were the only people in possession of some quantities of arms.<sup>25</sup> The khans were secular in their world views and did not share the Islamic radicalism of other Hazara resistance leaders. Many of their children had obtained modern education and most of these were attracted to different Maoist factions, which I will describe in more detail later in the paper.

Opposition to the government, although probably inevitable, posed new challenges to the continued influence of the khans in the Hazara community. They lost their long-standing connection to the state, which was the main external guarantor of their privileged position although at the same time a liability to their image internally. Their influence was limited to their districts of origin and personal rivalries also impeded their role as regional leaders. Hence, they lacked the necessary legitimacy to emerge as public political leaders and had to rely on “softer” clerical figures such as Beheshti, who were traditionally their allies. The election of Beheshti as leader of the *Shura* was nonetheless a matter of concern for some of the khans. At the first *Shura* meeting, Muhammad Ali Khan and Muhammad Amir Khan, of Panjab and Laal districts respectively, expressed their concern that the rise of the Ulema to political leadership within the resistance might threaten the future role of the khans. However, their failure to agree on a single khan as a regional leader and the persistent backing of Beheshti as a moderate cleric by Hussain Khan resulted in the rise of the Ulema as leaders of the Shiite and Hazara resistance organisations and marked the beginning of the marginalisation of the khans.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Intelligentsia*

Most of the modern, educated Hazaras in Afghanistan did not support the pro-Soviet PDPA regime in Kabul. Instead, they were mostly affiliated to the Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutaraqqi (Progressive Youth Organization, PYO) led by Akram Yari, a Hazara who was the leading pro-Beijing theorist of the country. The PYO was a splinter group of the Afghan Maoist movement known as *Shula-e Javid* and a long-standing rival of the PDPA in student movements since the mid 1960s. During its first months in power, the Khalq faction of the PDPA arrested Akram Yari and hundreds of other Hazara members of the organisation, who mostly disappeared in the prisons of the regime. As a result, the organisation lost its leadership and only small groups of its members survived and took up arms alongside the other rebel leaders to fight against the PDPA.<sup>27</sup> Many PYO and other independent and educated Hazaras had played a role in the overthrow of government administrations in many districts in the region. Some of them participated in the first *Shura* assembly where it was decided that one intellectual from each district would serve as a member of the *Shura*'s central committee.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Personal interviews with the Hazara Mujahedin leaders from Bamyan and Daikudi, Kabul, December 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Personal interviews with Hazara khans, Kabul, December 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Ali Awhadi Jalal, a Hazara intellectual and former member of Ittehadiah, Kabul, March 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Personal notes provided by Ustad Babah, a Hazara Intellectual from Qarabagh District of Ghazni and former head of the Finance Commission of the Shura, Ghazni, December 2005.

A smaller group of the Hazara intelligentsia espoused a more ethno-nationalistic ideology. On the basis of the attribution of the Hazara's ancestry to the army of Chengiz Khan, this group attempted to promote a secular ethnic identity in order to enhance their social status. They called for an end to the exclusion and humiliation of the Hazaras under the Afghan state and the recovery of their lands which had been occupied by Pashtun settlers in southern parts of the pre-Abdur Rahman Hazarajat. To them, Hazarajat was actually 'Hazaristan' - the land of the Hazaras - which had been marginalised and broken up under the Afghan state.<sup>29</sup>

The *Tanzim-e Nasle Naw-e Hazara Moghul* (Organization of the New Generation of the Moghul Hazaras), based in Quetta (Pakistan), was the main proponent of this ideology. Since its establishment in Quetta in the late 1960s, the *Tanzim* had consistently attempted to promote a secular ethnic identity and had developed contacts with Hazaras in other countries and regions, including many in Kabul. Haji Ghulam Rasul, the head of the delegation that called for the *Shura* assembly, was for example a businessman in Kabul, where during the 1970s he would receive and distribute the magazines of the *Tanzim* among educated Hazaras in the city.<sup>30</sup> The collapse of the government in the Hazarajat and the subsequent migration of local resistance leaders to Quetta allowed the *Tanzim* to actively engage in ethnic politics in Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the delegation that called for the *Shura* assembly in Waras represented the views and aspirations of the Hazara intelligentsia based in Quetta. It was organised by the *Tanzim* in order to seize the opportunity to unite and organise the whole ethnic group under a single leadership, after the collapse of the government in the region. This was aimed at promoting their interests and bargaining for their rights and roles in the future line-up of the country.<sup>32</sup> However, the assembly environment dominated by the Ulema was not receptive to the leftists and ethno-nationalists and to their secular opinions.<sup>33</sup>

Establishment of the *Shura* with its conservative clerical leadership was certainly not a favourable outcome for the mainly secular ethno-nationalists and leftists. Haji Rasul did not join the *Shura* as he thought it was going to be an Islamic organisation that could not serve the interests of the Hazaras. Instead, he returned to Quetta where he became the deputy leader of the nationalist *Ittehadiah Islami-e Mujahedin Afghanistan* (Islamic Association of the Mujahedin of Afghanistan). The *Ittehadiah* leadership included key members of *Tanzim* as well as many Hazara resistance leaders who had fled from Afghanistan. The *Tanzim* members of the *Ittehadiah* chose to take low profile positions in the organisation and served as its central committee members and advisors.<sup>34</sup>

The educated Hazaras of Afghanistan, who shared the *Tanzim* style of ethno-nationalism, were a minority. For the leaders of *Tanzim* and *Ittehadiah* all Hazaras, regardless of their social and ideological affiliations, were the same. On the other hand, both leftists and Islamists mostly

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<sup>29</sup> Mr. Ali Awhadi Jalal March 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Ghulam Ali Haidari, founder and leader of *Tanzim*, Quetta, November 2005

<sup>31</sup> There is a sizeable Hazara community in Quetta. Following the defeat of Hazaras by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in the early 1890s a significant number of Hazaras that had fled from Hazarajat settled in the city where they were welcomed by the British India. As a result of subsequent labour migration and refugee settlement during the war in Afghanistan the community has significantly increased in size.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interviews with Mr. Jawad Easar, former Secretary-General of *Tanzim* and Member of *Ittehadiah* Central Committee, Quetta, November 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Mr. Fakuri Beheshti, 18 March 2006.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* and Gharjistani (1987) p. 1-2.

viewed ethno-nationalism with contempt. In principle, the leftists were dedicated to multi-ethnic peasant revolution while the Islamists viewed ethno-nationalism as against the principles of unity and solidarity of the *Ummah*. Shaikh Aman Fasihi, a cleric from Jaghori district, who had been chosen as the first leader of the *Ittehadiah*, soon resigned from his position and left for Iran in search of organisations with more Islamic leanings.<sup>35</sup> He was replaced by Abdul Hussain Maqсуди, a former parliamentarian in the 1960s from the Nawur district of Ghazni province.

Persecuted by both the Kabul regime and the Islamists in Hazarajat, many Hazara leftists joined the *Ittehadiah*, apparently sympathising with the ethno-nationalist agendas of leaders of the organisation and downplaying or concealing their leftist affiliation. They had infiltrated the cultural and administrative offices of the organisation and were clandestinely directing some of its resources towards their own small underground factions in Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> The penetration of the *Ittehadiah* by the leftists and its secular and ethnic character provoked reactions by the *Shura* as well as the Islamists organisations that were gaining ground in the Hazarajat. *Ittehadiah*'s relationship with the *Shura* was already sour due to disagreements over methods of distributing foreign assistance and also its insistence on maintaining sole control of the *Shura*'s foreign relations. In the eyes of the Ulema, its secular and ethnic agendas, coupled with the leftists' influence, labelled it a Maoist organisation supported by China. In the winter of 1980 *Ittehadiah* activities were officially banned by the *Shura* leadership. *Fatwas* were issued denouncing the organisation as a *Maoist* and *Mogholist* organisation trying to undermine the Islamic revolution. Its only military and major support base in Jaghori district was attacked. Various Islamist organisations in cooperation with Sayed Arif, the *Shura*'s provincial governor of Jaghori, united their forces to attack and take the only base of *Ittehadiah* in the district.

### **The Civil and Military Structure of the *Shura***

Formation of the *Shura* was the first attempt to organise local resistance activities under a regional clerical leadership with a regional scope and organisational structure. Prior to that, local leaders of the anti-government uprisings had set up district or sub-district committees for the purpose of dealing with judicial matters and for defence of the liberated areas against possible government retaliations. These committees were local in nature and lacked the necessary vision and leadership for coordinating the *mujahedin* beyond the district level.<sup>37</sup>

The *Shura* was meant to replace or incorporate these local organisations and their leaders into its interim Islamic administration. For this purpose, the *Shura* established a Jihadi Commission in its central committee, as well as a Judicial Commission, a Finance Commission and a Cultural and Public Relations Commission. The Jihad Commission was tasked with coordinating military activities; these would be financially supported by the Finance Commission which would collect religious dues and taxes. Meanwhile, the cultural commission, predominantly run by those Ulema trusted by the *Shura* leadership, was given the task of providing education, communication services and religious training. The Judicial Commission, led exclusively by the Ulema, was supposed to deal with judicial matters and resolve local disputes. It was planned that these commissions would open offices at all provincial and district levels.<sup>38</sup> However, the obvious lack

<sup>35</sup> Personal interview with Haji Fasihi, Jaghori, 26 December 2005.

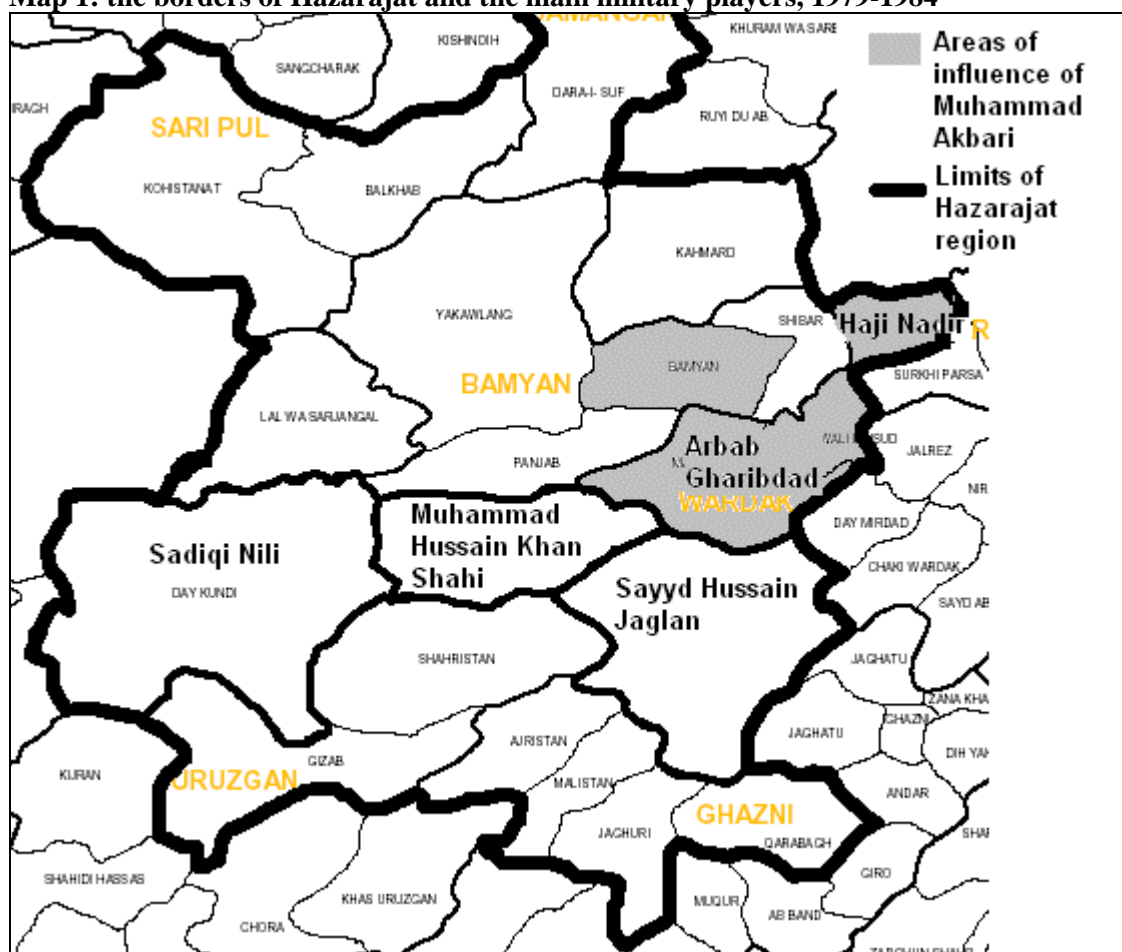
<sup>36</sup> Personal interviews with former Tanzim leaders, Quetta Pakistan, November 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Personal interviews with the Hazara resistance leaders, Kabul and Ghazni, November-December 2005.

<sup>38</sup> The Shura Declaration, Internal Structure of the Shura, the Shura office in Iran (n.d).

of resources and professional cadres, compounded by internal rivalries, impeded the delivery of efficient services by these agencies. Furthermore, the clerics appointed to key positions in all the agencies were unfamiliar with the functions of a modern state and with methods of providing efficient services. The state apparatus, which was overthrown by the founders and leaders of the *Shura* was chosen as a model for future administration. The region was divided into seven provinces administered by a provincial governor who was appointed by the organisation's headquarters and each province was divided into seven districts. The provincial governors were responsible for coordinating all judicial, educational, financial and cultural institutions in their designated areas whilst a military commander would deal with the military affairs.<sup>39</sup> However, the actual implementation of the plans and consolidation of the Islamic state proved to be too ambitious. Militarily and religiously, the *Shura* leadership encountered major challenges once it began to expand and integrate the local leaders and committees into a unified organisation. Beheshti's actual influence was limited to Waras and surrounding areas where he was backed by the powerful khan of Waras, Hussain Khan Shahi. Sayed Hussain Jaglan, his deputy and long-standing chief military commander, also failed to develop a unified military structure beyond Nawur, his home district in Ghazni province.<sup>40</sup>

**Map 1: the borders of Hazarajat and the main military players, 1979-1984**



<sup>39</sup> Grevemeyer (1988), p. 214.

<sup>40</sup> Personal Interviews with the Shura and other Hazara resistance leaders, Ghazni, January 2006.

Some important Shiite Ulema were also competing to limit Beheshti's influence. Most notable among these was Sadiqi Nili, deputy head of the Jihad commission, who controlled most of the Daikundi district with a significant number of armed forces under his command. Another such religious figure was Muhammad Akbari, the first chief military commander of the *Shura*, who like Beheshti was from Waras. In spring 1980 he was replaced as the chief military commander by Sayed Hussain Ali from Nawur district, known as Sayed Jaglan, and was instead appointed as provincial administrator in the *Shura's* Behsud and Turkman valley province. Akbari commanded small organised groups of fighters in Bamyan, the Behsud districts of Wardak and the Turkmen Valley in Parwan.<sup>41</sup>

The military structure of the *Shura* was a loose alliance of several local strongmen who had established themselves in their areas by demonstrating leadership and organisational skills in the overthrow of government district administrations prior to the formation of the *Shura*. Each controlled a different part of the region and had independently set up his own local military and administrative structure. Some of the key military commanders were not included in the original *Shura* assembly and had announced their accession after it was formed. Sayed Hussain, the deputy chief military commander of the *Shura*, is a case in point. Local leaders of the Ghazni Front choose him as their chief commander in spring 1979 well before formation of the *Shura*. His forces were primarily composed of one volunteer from every so many households, who would rotate every 15 days. These forces were mobilised and controlled by 16 subordinate commanders, who also represented particular localities or tribes. However, despite the widespread popular support of the early months, this system could not work for long. The rotation of the fighters made it difficult for Hussain to build a cohesive disciplined force and the local population soon lost interest and enthusiasm in volunteering the necessary support.<sup>42</sup>

In reality, the *Shura's* high demands on its citizens and local leaders did not match the leadership vision and strategy and the services it could offer in return. There were few economic and political incentives for the local commanders to integrate into the *Shura* as an organisation. The failure to attract significant foreign assistance forced it into depending increasingly on the collection of religious taxes from its citizens, who were among the most impoverished communities in the country. Forced conscription of farmers and the requisition of supplies from local residents soon alienated most of its citizens. *Shura* forces deployed outside their districts of origin often coerced the local population to pay for their food, accommodation and other expenses. This gradually created local resentment towards the troops. For instance, *Shura* military forces deployed from other districts to Jaghato district in Ghazni and to the Turkman valley of Parwan province were increasingly unpopular locally. Local commanders of these two strategically important districts used this to justify their own hold over the districts and to call for the withdrawal of *Shura* forces.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Personal interviews with former *Shura* and Pasdaran leaders, Kabul and Ghazni November-December 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Personal interview with Muallem Khadim Nadir, a Hazara intellectual and former commander of the *Shura* in Ghazni, Kabul, 10 April 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Personal interview with former Hazara Jihadi commander, Ghazni, December 2005 and interview with an intellectual from the Turkman Valley, Kabul, February 2006.

Given the significance of military strength in the resistance activities, many of the commanders had already begun to play political roles as well. The majority of these leaders already enjoyed legitimacy deriving from the endorsement of committees representing local and tribal identities.<sup>44</sup>

In many ways, the *Shura* leadership underestimated, or failed to acknowledge, its internal limitations and the imminent ideological and political splits in the region as well as in Iran, where factional splits within the Islamic movement would soon begin to be reflected in Afghanistan. Attempts at expansion and consolidation of the *Shura* beyond its headquarters resulted in tensions and conflicts with local leaders who were not prepared to compromise their autonomy by genuinely integrating into the organisation. The *Shura* leadership could only appoint governors for five out of its seven provinces and most of those appointed faced opposition and were challenged by local leaders.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, domestic and foreign political dynamics were undergoing changes which resulted in serious implications for resistance organisations such as the *Shura*, which did not have obvious foreign sponsors and ideological alignments. The foreign ideological and material assistance was increasingly channelled into new and more radical groups that were emerging onto the Afghan political stage and that were prepared to fight the regime in Kabul and its Soviet sponsor.

The idea of building an Islamic state was highly ambitious given the limitations and weakness of Beheshti as a leader and the obvious lack of military and financial resources to exercise the key functions of the state. Beheshti was a religious figure only and his chief military commander Sayed Jaglan lacked the necessary strength to force other commanders to comply with the *Shura's* orders. He was only one of several strong military commanders of the *Shura* who were competing for territorial control and political leadership at the local level and his predecessor, Muhammad Akbari, continued to run his own small organised groups in various parts of the region independently.<sup>46</sup>

Generally speaking, the *Shura's* military commanders limited their activities to the Hazarajat region and did not pursue a proactive and aggressive strategy in their relations with the government in Kabul. Their main mission, the collapse of the structures of an undesirable state in the region, had already been achieved. There were just three main military *Shura* fronts that were directly in contact with government and Soviet forces in the strategically more important parts of the region. The first front was in Ghazni and was directly commanded by the *Shura's* chief military commander, Sayed Hussain Jaglan. Arbab Gharibdad, newly emerged as a significant field commander, commanded another front in the Behsud districts of Wardak province. The other major military front was in the Turkmen valley of Parwan province and was commanded by Haji Nadir, a former Hazara businessman and parliamentarian. The internal rivalries, which were soon to turn into violent conflicts, also forced many of the *Shura's* front line commanders to divert their resources to counter the emerging Khomeinist groups. For example, all three main

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<sup>44</sup> Before formation of the *Shura*, local committees including rebellion leaders were set up in many districts or sub-districts. For example, after the collapse of the government administration in Jaghori district, a committee was set up that included representatives from all major tribes of the district and clerics who were given the role of dealing with disputes according to the Sharia laws (personal interview with Haji Mirzaye, a religious scholar and former Jihadi commander in the district, 28 December 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Personal interviews with former *Shura* leaders, Kabul, March 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Personal interviews with former *Shura* leaders and Pasdaran Activists from the Turkman Valley Kabul February 2005.

frontline commanders Haji Nadir Allayar, Arbab Gharibdad and Sayed Hussain soon had to cease their anti-government activities in order to fight the internal challenges to their authority.<sup>47</sup> By limiting their activities within the Hazarajat region, the *Shura*'s commanders also did not pose a threat to the areas controlled by the government in other regions. As a result, the government of Kabul largely disengaged from the Hazarajat.

### **The *Shura*'s diplomacy**

Although the *Shura* never aspired to full recognition as an independent state, it did develop surrogate diplomatic relations in the form of unofficial links with Iran and Pakistan. Nonetheless, the leadership of the *Shura* failed completely in this field. It did not attract any significant and sustainable amounts of either the foreign material assistance or the political backing it needed to further its goals. The newly established Islamic Republic of Iran was expected to be the main foreign supporter, since despite the substantial differences between the clerical leadership of the *Shura* and that of the Iranian Islamic Republic in matters of religious Islamic interpretation, the former chose to follow Iran in international affairs by adopting the Iranian slogan "neither West nor East".<sup>48</sup> Moreover, despite the continued refusal of the *Shura* leadership to recognise Khomeini as the supreme religious leader, the official slogan of the *Shura* was: *Allah Akbar, Khomeini Rahbar, Beheshti Rahbar*, (God is Great, Khomeini Leader and Beheshti Leader.)<sup>49</sup> There were pragmatic reasons for doing so. For the first few years the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its internationalist revolutionary agenda, was seen as the major potential foreign sponsor for Shiite resistance organisations in Afghanistan. Many Islamist Shiite resistance leaders in Afghanistan were expecting significant Iranian ideological guidance and material assistance. However, the Iranians refused to meet the expectations of the *Shura* leadership. Although the *Shura* was officially listed as the major channel of Iranian assistance by Sayed Mahdi Hashimi, a radical Khomeinist and the coordinator of the assistance of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to Afghanistan, in reality only a little of what was expected materialised during the early 1980s.<sup>50</sup> Iran, the only country in the world run by Shiites, did not see the *Shura* as favourable to its interests and policy goals in Afghanistan. Despite the *Shura*'s desperate need for Iranian assistance, Beheshti refused to recognise Khomeini as the supreme religious leader and acted as an independent follower of Kho'i's line of thinking.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Beheshti's self-assertion as Khomeini's equivalent in terms of religious prominence in Afghanistan had serious implications for Iran's relationship with the *Shura*. It was particularly important in the context of the ongoing internal power struggle between moderate and hard-line Ulema in post-revolution Iran, which resulted in the effective sidelining of the Kho'i followers and other moderate scholars. Beheshti was not an ideal choice for the hardliners of the Islamic regime who were trying to export their style of revolution towards Muslim countries such as Afghanistan. Most of Ulema in the *Shura*

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<sup>47</sup> Personal interviews with former Hazara mujahedin leaders and intellectuals from the Ghazni, Wardak and Parwan provinces, Kabul, February and March 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Personal interviews with former Hazara Jihadi leaders and Danish interview with Beheshti (n.d)Beheshti

<sup>49</sup> Fakuri Beheshti, 18 March 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Personal Interview with a former leader of the Shura, Kabul December 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Personal interview with a former Shura representative to Iran, Kabul, February 2006.

leadership were Kho'i students and followers and as a result most of the ordinary Hazaras were also his followers.<sup>52</sup>

The *Shura* hardly did better on the Pakistani side. With the arrival of the new *mujahedin* groups, based in Pakistan and Iran, the *jihad* lost its popular and spontaneous character and began to experience a process of radicalisation that was polarising the fighters along ideological, political and ethnic lines. This process was further intensified by the Soviet invasion of the country on 25 December 1979 that prolonged and escalated the conflict by adding to the legitimacy of the resistance. Subsequently, more western and Arab assistance was then channelled through Pakistan to a number of resistance organisations that were judged to be ideologically suitable, motivated and prepared for a long-term fight against the Kabul regime and its Soviet sponsor. This had serious consequences for the poorly organised *Shura*, which had weak international connections. As a result, sectarian divisions were further deepened and the Shiites were largely excluded from international aid.<sup>53</sup>

The *Ittehadiah* remained, therefore, the largest channel of foreign military assistance to the *Shura* but the badly needed assistance they distributed, was not substantial enough to help *Shura* achieve its goals. Moreover, this very assistance turned out to be a major impediment for the development of the *Shura* as a unified organisation. The assistance was provided on a quota basis directly to every district or sub-district commander, strengthening them locally vis-à-vis the *Shura's* central leadership. Sayed Jaglan was only one of several commanders listed by the *Ittehadiah* for assistance.<sup>54</sup> This method of distribution turned out to be a major source of contention between the two organisations. The *Shura* leaders wanted to take control of the distribution of assistance, which would give the *Shura* more bargaining power in its relations with the field commanders, but the *Ittehadiah* leaders insisted on a direct supply of arms to every individual commander, giving them no incentive to comply with the directives of the *Shura's* leadership.<sup>55</sup> Neither was there any clearly defined relationship between the two organisations. The *Ittehadiah* leadership in Quetta was determined to take sole control of the *Shura's* foreign relations. In the words of one of its leaders, the organisation was created to serve as the 'foreign affairs agency' of the *Shura*.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand many of the *Shura* leaders did not recognise this role for an organisation which they increasingly viewed as ethno-nationalist and leftist and therefore as unsuitable for close cooperation.<sup>57</sup>

In an attempt to attract Iran's confidence, the *Shura* leaders progressively banned the distribution of western assistance through the *Ittehadiah*. Foreign aid was viewed with suspicion and as in pursuit of goals that might undermine the Islamic nature of the resistance.<sup>58</sup> A number of *Shura* delegations travelled to Iran to present a more favourable image to the Iranian authorities and to solicit a higher level of assistance. The delegation opened offices in Qom and Tehran and launched publications, which lobbied for Iranian assistance and defended themselves against the

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<sup>52</sup> For more explanation of the Iranian role in the Shiite resistance organization see: Dr. Grant M. Farr and Dr. John Lorentz (n.d.).

<sup>53</sup> Harpviken (1998), p. 185.

<sup>54</sup> Personal Interviews with former leaders of *Ittehadiah*, Quetta, November 2005.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Danish's interview with Beheshti.



propaganda of radical groups that were labelling the *Shura* as a reactionary, khan-dominated and corrupt organisation. Nonetheless, Iran's disregard and indifference towards the *Shura* was stated even more explicitly by the authorities. It was implied that provision of Iranian assistance was conditional to the *Shura* leadership switching from Kho'i's to Khomeini's line of thinking.<sup>59</sup>

Dismayed by Iran, the *Shura* leaders concentrated their efforts on lobbying Pakistan for assistance. Abul Samad Akbari was appointed as *Shura's* minister of foreign affairs in Pakistan and attempted to wrest the control of the *Shura's* relations with the authorities away from the *Ittehadiah*. However, the *Shura's* request for western help through the Pakistani government was not very successful. For a short period, what had been the *Ittehadiah's* share of foreign assistance was evenly divided between the two organisations. Yet this happened at a time when the Pakistani government was already scaling down their assistance to the *Ittehadiah*, the only Hazara/Shiite organisation entitled to receive western aid. It is widely believed that the leaders of the Sunni resistance organisations based in Peshawar, most of whom were Pashtuns, strongly lobbied the Pakistani officials to stop aiding the *Ittehadiah*, due to its vocal Hazara nationalism.

The rising Iranian influence in the Hazarajat led to suspicion and distrust of the Shiite organisations by Pakistan and its western allies. It was feared that provision of assistance to resistance organisations in the region might result in the strengthening of the pro-Iranian elements in the country. In early 1983, the Pakistani authorities removed both *Ittehadiah* and the *Shura* from the list of resistance organisations endorsed for assistance. Future aid was conditional depending on the approval of one of the seven major Sunni organisations based in Peshawar. The radical Sunni organisations, which were attracting the largest share of foreign resources, were not friendly towards the *Shura* and refused to endorse it, with the result that only moderate Sunni organisations agreed to endorse the *Shura* representatives in Pakistan for assistance.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Challenge of the Radical Islamists and the Collapse of the *Shura***

The combination of incoherent ideological and political ideas within the *Shura* soon developed into internal fractures and conflicts that, over time, caused it to fail as a quasi-state. These internal fractures and conflicts arose as a result both of personal rivalries and of deep ideological differences among its clerical leadership. The conflicts surfaced in quite different ways and between different groups, both internal and external to the *Shura*. Firstly, Beheshti, as the senior leader, faced challenges and disobedience from Sadiqi Nili who soon became a key member of the radical Khomeinist *Pasdaran-e Jihad Islami*. Secondly, the *Shura's* provincial administrators faced resistance from local strongmen who refused to recognise the clerics as senior authorities. Thirdly, the radical Islamist elements within the *Shura* began to apply their revolutionary programmes, purging and persecuting the hostile elements such as the khans from the resistance organisations.<sup>61</sup>

The main challenge came from the radical Islamists, among whom the *Pasdaran-e Jihad-e Islami of Afghanistan* (Guardians of the Islamic Jihad of Afghanistan) and the *Sazaman-e Nasr Inqilab-e Islami Afghanistan* (Victory organisation for Islamic revolution in Afghanistan) were

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<sup>59</sup> Personal interview with Shaikh Nadir Ali Mahdawi, former *Shura* representative to Iran, Kabul, March 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Personal interview with a former *Shura* representative in Pakistan, Kabul, March 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Personal interviews with *Shura* leaders and other Hazara mujahedin commanders, Kabul December 2005 and March 2006.

the two main organisations. Sadiqi and Akbari, the two Khomeinist leaders of the *Shura*, both strongly challenged the existing leadership when they joined the *Pasdaran*. Contrary to the traditionalist religious leaders of the *Shura*, who relied on a popular mobilisation of fighters as required, the *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* started to build sophisticated organisations. They recruited fighters and provided them with military and ideological training. Their style of organisation and activities were a major source of concern for the leaders of the *Shura* and for the commanders who had to compete for recruitment with the Khomeinists, since they could no longer rely on popularly accepted conscription of fighters.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, this undermined the very basis of the *Shura*'s claim to Hazarajat being its territory and to its residents being citizens who were supposed to defend it as their religious obligation. The citizens were now gaining increased exposure to new political ideas and were developing higher expectations. Compared to the *Shura*, *Nasr* and *Pasdaran* were offering Iranian financial and military support and more importantly assistance and services for the refugees in Iran.

There is a widespread perception that Iranian authorities deliberately encouraged the radical groups to fight against the *Shura*, its pro-Kho'i leadership and its 'reactionary' khan supporters. What is obvious is that the radical Shiite Ulema of Afghanistan were highly inspired by the Iranian Khomeinists' attempt to marginalise and sideline Kho'i's followers and other moderate religious scholars after the victory of the Islamic revolution in the country. *Pasdaran* and *Nasr* were explicitly favoured by the Iranian authorities and were militarily and financially sponsored by the Movement of the Islamic Liberation Office, which was created by the Iranian *Sepah-e Pasdaran* to export Iranian-style revolution to other Muslim countries. Both organisations were strongly committed to Khomeini's political Islam. The major difference to emerge was *Nasr*'s development of an element of Hazara-nationalism as part of its ideology, gradually distancing itself from Iranian policy objectives in Afghanistan.<sup>63</sup>

Sadiqi Nili began to challenge the central authority of the *Shura* when he returned from a trip to Iran in 1982. During the trip, as an official representative of the *Shura*, he established personal contacts with internationalist Khomeinist officials of the Revolutionary Guards, who provided him with significant military assistance which he refused to share with the *Shura* central leadership once back in Afghanistan. Subsequently, he engaged in conflict with the Pashtuns of Khalaj district and refused to accept Beheshti's intervention to resolve the conflict. In the face of persistent pressure, he declared himself independent of the *Shura* and killed an envoy of Beheshti in his district. In retaliation, Beheshti declared a *jihad* against Sadiqi and hoping to force him to abide by his directives, he mobilised his forces, ordering every family in Waras and the surrounding areas which were directly under his control, to provide one fighter with a gun. He also called on Akbari to mobilise his forces from different districts to take part in the fight against Sadiqi.<sup>64</sup>

Muhammad Akbari, in his role of governor of Behsud and the Turkmen valley province, experienced tensions in his relations with Arbab Gharibdad and Haji Nadir Allayar, two *Shura* strongmen who controlled much of Behsud and the Turkmen valley respectively. Arbab Gharibdad, an ordinary Hazara who had newly emerged as a strong and respectable military

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<sup>62</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Kazim Wahidi, a Hazara intellectual and former Jihadi activist, Kabul, December 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Dr. Grant M. Farr and Dr. John Lorentz [n.d.] p. 44-50.

<sup>64</sup> Personal interviews with former Hazara Mujahedin leaders from Daikundi, Kabul November-December 2005.

commander in Wardak province, refused to share his power with the *Shura*-appointed provincial administrator Akbari. In the Turkmen valley, Haji Nadir who was well respected among the population because of his consistent struggle for Hazara rights, resisted the ongoing influence and promotion of radical Islamists by *Pasdarán*'s Akbari and Taqadusi and *Nasr*'s Sadiq Turkmani.<sup>65</sup> In a similar way to Sadiq Nili, Akbari publicly announced his independence from the *Shura* and became one of the key leaders of the *Pasdarán* following his trip to Iran in 1982.

Thus, the *Nasr* and *Pasdarán* were rapidly building up their organisations all over the region and were sidelining the poorly organised local commanders of the *Shura*. Many Iranian-trained cadres were imbedded into their local structures. By 1984 the *Shura* had effectively lost its control over most of its territories. Many of its commanders had either openly joined the new radical Khomeinist organisations or were collaborating with them. In the autumn of that year *Pasdarán* and *Nasr* jointly mobilised forces to attack the *Shura*'s bases and commanders in Laal, Panjab, Yakawlang and Waras districts. Unable to successfully resist the new organisations, the *Shura* was defeated and was forced to retreat to Nawur, the last district still primarily controlled by Sayed Jaglan, the *Shura*'s chief military commander.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

As has been shown, the *Shura* exhibited weaknesses with regard to several elements that characterise a state, as defined in the introduction. Its provision of services, for example, was limited and not very efficient. Its control over territory was indirect and rested on the allegiance of local strongmen. Its military was weak and dependent on the charisma of two or three semi-independent warlords. Yet it somehow managed to function even in the absence of substantial external support, which had been a key historical feature of the Afghan state since the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901).<sup>67</sup> The *Shura* might well have survived much longer had it not been for its most important shortcoming, the failure of its diplomacy. The lack of international recognition was the main reason why it did not manage to graduate past the condition of proto-state, but the *Shura* was also unsuccessful in the vital task of securing enough unofficial external support with the result that it was badly outclassed by its radical challengers. Iranian aid to the radicals and the lack thereof for the *Shura* was probably by far the most important single cause of its collapse. The *Shura* ended up having to rely on the collection of religious taxes, which further weakened its legitimacy.

The diplomatic incompetence of the *Shura* was in turn the result of the weak political formation of its leaders, who as traditionalist Ulema had never previously cultivated their political skills. Their determination to marginalise the intelligentsia only compounded the political and diplomatic naïvety of the *Shura* leadership, a fact that highlights the role of the secular educated class in modern state-making. A concurrent cause of the collapse was the weak and ambiguous ideology which supported the *Shura*. Paradoxically, the non-political followers of Kho'i's line found themselves running this proto-state, without any clear idea of how to instil change. The historical grievances of the Hazaras under the Afghan state were widely shared by all the socio-

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<sup>65</sup> Personal interviews with former Hazara Mjahedin leaders and intellectuals from Turkman valley and Behsud, Kabul, February and March 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Personal interviews with former leaders of the Shura and Pasdarán Jihad-e Islami, Kabul, December 2005 and March 2006.

<sup>67</sup> The argument is developed in detail in Rubin (1995).

political groups and functioned as a unifying factor. However, the politically clumsy Ulema proved unable to convincingly answer the crucial question of how this interim Shiite/Hazara state would define itself in the larger context of the predominantly Sunni/Afghan state, or develop a widely attractive ideology as its core. While the Ulema provided the ideological justification for continuing the resistance and benefited from a region-wide network of students and supporters, their idea of leading Hazarajat towards an enhanced role in a future Islamic Republic of Afghanistan turned out to be self-defeating, given the hostility of the strongest Sunni insurgent factions. An obvious option, given the situation, would have been the adoption of an ethno-nationalist ideology to mobilise the population in the longer term, but this was precluded by the Ulema's hostility towards the nationalist intelligentsia. Moreover, the *Shura's* leadership inflicted serious harm on itself by banning *Ittehadiah* activities in the Hazarajat, losing its main source of external assistance for no real advantage. Instead, it relied on the khans, who thanks to their past role as government agents and their personal rivalries, had to allow the Ulema to exercise a leadership role, but never fully supported them in the consolidation of the proto-state, possibly aspiring to recover their old role in a future post-war Afghanistan. At the same time, they soon became a major liability for the relationship of the *Shura* with the Iranians.

Weak political leadership and inconsistent ideology conspired with the existing social tensions to fragment the political landscape into different socio-political groups, despite the defeat of the secular intelligentsia. Indeed, after the intelligentsia been removed from the scene, the terrain was free for the radical clergy to mobilise support. Several organisations were created, mainly by the Shiite clerics who had gone into exile in Iran at the outset of the war or who were undergoing training in the *howzahs* (centres of religious training) in Iran. Each of the new groups was backed and inspired by a particular religious, political or ideological faction in Iran. Of the two largest and most radical organisations, the *Sepah-e Pasdaran* (Revolutionary Guard) was sponsored by the homonymous Iranian organisation and the *Sazman-e Nasr* (Victory Organisation) by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The new groups were advocating Khomeini's internationalist political Islam and refused to recognise the monopoly on political leadership of the Shiite resistance in Afghanistan which was held by the traditionalist and Iraq-educated *Shura* leadership. Like-minded *Shura* leaders such as Sadiqi Nili and Muhamad Akbari joined *Pasdaran* and began to undermine the *Shura* leadership from within. Moreover, the traditionalist Ulema proved unable to give the *Shura* an effective organisational structure, leaving space for the rapid expansion of the Khomeinist groups which were importing modern organisational techniques from Iran.

The *Shura's* withdrawal from its headquarters in Waras in autumn 1984, marked the collapse of the *Shura* as an Interim Islamic state, the marginalisation of the traditionalist pro-Kho'i Ulema and khans, and the rise of the Khomeinist groups to power. The destabilisation which followed resulted in a protracted civil war, which was partly ideologically motivated and partly ignited merely for the purpose of political and territorial control and which would only effectively come to an end in 2001.

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## Glossary

*Fatwa*: religious decree issued by *Ulema*.

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

*Hazaristan*: the land of Hazaras. This term was used mostly by the nationalists to refer to the historical territory of Hazaras including southern parts of the region, occupied by the Pashtuns under and after Amir Abdur Rahman in the 1890s.

*Hazaras*: the third largest of Afghanistan's ethnic groups, it is mostly Shiite in terms of religion.

*Khan*: big local notable, often a large landlord, controlling many villages.

*Madrakah*: Islamic high school.

*Mogholist*: supporter of the idea of the unifying role of the racial origins of the Hazaras.

*Mujahid*: holy fighter, the one who fights in the jihad.

*Sayed*: alleged descendant of Prophet Mohammad and his family.

*Ulema*: plural of 'alim, these are the doctors of the law, the custodians of Islamic knowledge and tradition.

*Ummah*: The Muslim community of believers.

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

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