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Working Paper no.67

**THE ETHNICISATION OF AN AFGHAN
FACTION: JUNBESH-I-MILLI FROM ITS
ORIGINS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS**

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September 2005

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Crisis States Programme
Working papers series no.1

ISSN 1740-5807 (print)
ISSN 1740-5815 (on-line)

Development
DESTIN
Studies Institute



Crisis States Research Centre

The ethnicisation of an Afghan faction: Junbesh-i Milli from its origins to the Presidential elections (2004)

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Ethnicism and a warlord's search for legitimisation

The issue of legitimacy is central to the understanding of warlordism. We can define a warlord as a military leader who has political power, but little or no political legitimacy, both internally and externally. Military leaders, of course, do not completely lack legitimacy, otherwise they would not be leaders. However, their legitimacy is of a military type: they are recognised as effective military commanders by their troops and most importantly by their officers or subordinate commanders. However history shows eloquently that holding political power without political legitimacy is a difficult task. The warlord, therefore, depending on his intelligence and skills, will have to develop a form of political legitimacy or perish.

Abdul Rashid Dostum, the leader of Junbesh-i Milli, one of the key factions in the Afghan civil wars of 1994-2001, could be described as a warlord in mid-1992. Through its militias and its administrators Junbesh still controlled at least ten percent of Afghanistan in 2004, including the whole province of Jowzjan, most of Faryab, Sar-i Pul and Samangan and parts of Balkh, Kunduz and Takhar. His source of power was largely military, although as it will be shown below, Junbesh was not just a loose coalition of military commanders, but also included political parties and groups. This paper means to show that throughout its history the issue of ethnicity has gradually risen as a key way to obtain political legitimisation among the population of northern Afghanistan, despite not having been on the original agenda. The aim is to show that warlord polities are not static entities, but can be capable of transforming and adapting under pressure and can raise the banner of ethnic or political causes.

Seeking legitimisation with the centre: from the Movement of the North to Junbesh

The Movement of the North effectively started as a reaction against re-centralisation, after the military and to a lesser extent political leaders of the region had won a considerable degree of informal autonomy due to their role in fighting the insurgency against the communist regime. Efforts at pooling together different forces in northern Afghanistan, in order to contrast what was perceived as an attempt by Pashtuns to re-establish their hegemony over the region, started as early as 1990, when Dostum began experiencing an increasingly difficult relationship with Pashtuns both in the army and in the Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq. He is reported to have stated, in July 1990 in Moscow, that Uzbeks and Turkmens in northern Afghanistan would not tolerate Pashtun command everything as in the past.¹ His later refusal to accept the Pashtun general sent by President Najibullah in January 1992 to rein in the military commanders of Northern Afghanistan is a well-known story. It led to the alliance of a number of formerly pro-government military leaders, of whom Dostum was just the most prominent, with the various *jihadi* factions. This alliance took the name of Harakat-e Shamal (the Movement of the North).

¹ Kh. Khashimbekov, *Uzbeki severnogo Afganistana*, Moscow: RAN (Institut Vostokovedeniya), 1994, p.38.

After the *jihadi* factions, and in particular Jamiat-i Islami, seized control of Kabul, the leadership of the Movement of the North started feeling that it was being explicitly discriminated in the early months of the post-Najibullah era. They were told in Kabul that the Movement was not a political party, and therefore was not entitled to join the political discussions in Kabul.² There were at least two real reasons for the cold reception in Kabul of the delegations sent by the Movement of the North. First of all, Kabul saw it as a temporary alliance which had no claim to a share of power as such. Second, the dominant force within it was the former military commanders of the communist regime, which made it unpalatable to the *jihadi* leaders. In other parts of the country many former officers of the communist regime were being incorporated in the militias of Jamiat-i Islami and other *jihadi* parties too, but in a subordinate role and after having been purged.

As a result of its lack of success in gaining acceptance as a permanent player in Kabul, the leadership of the Movement of the North, in particular the military leaders with the support of some but not all political factions, decided to set up something resembling a party. Junbesh-i Milli-ye Islami was established in the early months of 1992. The leadership was probably aware that creating a party would not have provided the legitimisation that the leadership sought in Kabul, but the new party was expected to enhance the collective bargaining power of the Movement, as well as serve the purpose of consolidating the coming together of all the political forces of the north.³ On 1 June 1992, the first congress formally established the party. Dostum was elected as the leader, but among the deputies we find Ustad Atta, the commander of Jamiat-i Islami in northern Afghanistan and future enemy in many battles. At its core were the regular forces and the militias of Najibullah's regime, which were particularly strong in the North,⁴ but the 31-strong membership of the Executive Council of the new formation included representatives of all the parties of Northern Afghanistan. Among them, ten were former members of the Hizb-e Demokratik-e Khalq Afghanistan (HDKA)/Watan and other allied leftist parties, two were members of the Ismaili minority who had supported Najibullah and five were officers of the armed forces, mainly militia commanders; but 14 were commanders and representatives of the *mujahidin* parties, such as Jamiat-i Islami, Hizb-i Islami, Ittehadiya Shamal, Hizb-i Wahdat, Harakat-e Enqelab and Harakat-Islami. Moreover, at least two of the militia commanders selected for membership were known for having maintained links to the *jihad* parties before the fall of President Najibullah.⁵ On the whole, one could say that representation in the council had been roughly divided on a 50-50 basis between former supporters of Najibullah and the former opposition. The difference, however, was that the leftist parties had a structure and a membership, while the *jihadi* component was mainly represented by guerrilla commanders, who had little or no organised structure behind them. Only Hizb-i Islami and Jamiat-i Islami could even pretend to have anything resembling an organisation, and even that was rudimentary at best.

In these early stages of the life of Junbesh, there were a number of obvious obstacles to the development of a solid party or organisational structure. The desire to develop such a structure was only half-hearted as far as the military leaders of the movement were

² A. Walwalji, *Dar shamal chi guzasht*, Peshawar, n.d., Book 2, Part 1, p. 66.

³ The constitution of Junbesh states that "the Supreme Council of the Movement ... is composed of representatives, with equal rights, of all the Jihadi organisations..." See S. Fida Yunas, *Afghanistan: political parties, groups, movements and mujahidin alliances and governments (1978-1997)*, Peshawar, n.d., p.857.

⁴ For more details about the origins and development of these militias, see A. Giustozzi, *War, politics and society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*, Georgetown University Press, 2000, pp.198-231.

⁵ Walwalji (n.d.), Book 2, part 2, pp.4-6.

concerned. They wanted a tool which would legitimise them in the eyes of the international community and allow them access to political bargaining in Kabul. On the other hand, the single, rather tenuous unifying factor, that is northern interests, was hardly enough to offset tensions arising from the widely spread ideological spectrum which was present within Junbesh. Because of the prevalence of military leaders within it, ideological contrasts between leftist, Islamist and nationalist elements did not obviously surface during 1992-93, but they clearly stood in the way of any consolidation of an ideological and political identity of Junbesh, a fact that limited the credibility of Junbesh vis-à-vis Kabul. It appeared obvious that Junbesh would not last, at least not in its original form, and little urgency was felt in Kabul to accommodate the claim of its leadership to a fair share of power. In fact, such claim was seen with hostility by some key players in Kabul, including defence Minister Ahmad Shah Massud, who saw in it a threat to his attempt to establish hegemony over as large a part of Afghanistan as possible.⁶

As a result of these conflicting aims and of its heterogeneous composition, during the first year or two of its existence, Junbesh was shaken by the attempt of its military component, or part of it, to establish its full control over it in the first place and then to legitimise its rule within the movement. This is why in the early years of Junbesh the main divisive factor within it was not ideology, but rather the race for supremacy among the leading personalities. Rashid Dostum, who was later to emerge as the undisputed leader of Junbesh, was not such an obvious choice in the early days. Although he had established himself as the leading military leader in the north once he had been assigned the command of the newly formed 53rd Division in 1988, other military, militia and jihadi figures had the ambition to lead the Movement of the North. This also explains why the leadership of Junbesh had little time to think of legitimising Junbesh itself among the population.

Seeking legitimisation within Junbesh: Dostum's initial struggle against rival leaders

Among the jihadi commanders, the most stubborn challenge to Dostum's leadership came throughout the 1992-2004 period from Ustad Atta, regional leader of Jamiat-i Islami. After his party colleagues had taken Kabul, Atta probably stayed in the Harakat-e Shamal only to facilitate his fight for hegemony in the north. During 1993, the early manifestations of the conflict between the two leaders led to the northern branch of Jamiat effectively quitting Junbesh, even if quite a few Jamiati field commanders stayed behind and sided with Dostum. Jamiat had the support of half a dozen members of the Executive Council of Junbesh, and Atta himself had been appointed deputy, but Jamiat's leadership perceived itself as the essence of the *jihad* against the Soviets and many of its members hardly tolerated the idea of leaving northern Afghanistan largely under the control of their former enemies of the HDKA, who abounded in Junbesh.⁷ In this case ideology did play a role, together with the clash of personalities. One should add that Jamiat-i Islami was militarily in control of Kabul, and spent much of 1992 manoeuvring to establish a central government which it could dominate. Jamiat, therefore, could not have much interest in supporting an organisation like Junbesh, who aimed to collectively bargain for more power in running the affairs of northern Afghanistan vis-à-vis the central government. Even the northern branch of Jamiat was more likely to be tempted by exploiting privileged access to Kabul through its own party networks than relying on Junbesh as a northern lobby group. In any case, as Atta quit Junbesh, the

⁶ This is the image which emerges from Walwalji (n.d.).

⁷ Walwalji (n.d.), Book 1, p.61. See also A. Giustozzi, 'The demodernisation of an Army', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 15:1 (Spring 2004), p.15.

challenge to Junbesh's leadership from this quarter was over, although only to be replaced by a challenge to the existence of Junbesh itself. It is quite significant that the Jamiatis who stayed behind in Junbesh were all military commanders. Dostum had a strong appeal among military commanders, who appreciated his reputation as a fearless (and ruthless) military leader more than the politicians. Moreover, controlling the huge military stocks and supplies of Hairatan, he was in a position to reward his followers with plentiful patronage.

The other challenge that Dostum had to face in the early months of Junbesh came from Azad Beg, the leader of the Ittehadiya Islami-ye Wilayat-e Shamal-e Afghanistan.⁸ Azad Beg clearly had the ambition of emerging as the political leader of the Turkic populations of Northern Afghanistan, and from the start he made some attempts to confine Dostum to a more military role. His movement had been awarded a strong representation within the Executive Council of Junbesh, where it had half a dozen members and sympathisers; but of course in terms of military strength, Azad Beg was no match for Dostum. Azad Beg's strongest claim to legitimacy were his foreign contacts, especially in Pakistan and Turkey, but also Uzbekistan. In fact, his most noticeable activities were the lobbying of potential foreign supporters of Junbesh, mainly Turkey and to a far lesser extent Uzbekistan. When in 1992 Turkey allegedly supplied Junbesh with US\$10 million, US\$6 were reported to have gone to Dostum and US\$4 million to Azad Beg.⁹ Such foreign contacts, however useful, were not enough (quantitatively and qualitatively) to match Dostum's much bigger firepower. Few of the other political groups within Junbesh had much sympathy for Azad Beg, nor were they ready to endorse him as the leader of the movement. Azad Beg was not helped by his weak organisational structure either. That, together with Dostum's resources and military charisma, resulted in Dostum attracting the loyalty of most of Azad Beg's commanders. The few who resisted Dostum's call were eliminated.¹⁰ By the time he and Azad Beg finally broke their relationship in 1994, Azad Beg's claim to the political leadership of Junbesh had already been defeated.

From the point of view of Junbesh developing into a reasonably homogeneous and functional political organisation, the breakaway of Jamiat was probably beneficial, as it never had any intention of becoming fully integrated into Junbesh. Azad Beg's group was too small to affect Junbesh on a large scale. However, for a movement whose main claim to political legitimacy was based on its representation of northern interests, these two splits were quite damaging. In any case, the start of the civil war in January 1994 threw Junbesh into a completely different situation. Even if the purpose of the conflict had initially been to force Kabul to accommodate Junbesh's demands, a wholly new dynamic was set in motion.

A special place for the Uzbeks: the ethnicity issue in the early years of Junbesh

Junbesh has usually been described in Afghanistan and abroad as a Turkic or Uzbek party/faction and it has even been assumed that it claimed to represent the Turkic populations of Afghanistan. In this regard some qualifications are needed. As we have seen, Junbesh in its origins actually claimed to be the party of northern Afghanistan, rather than of just the

⁸ Ittehadiya had been formed in Pakistan, apparently under the auspices of the Pakistani intelligence (ISI). Originally led by Abdul Karim Makhdoom, it then split and the leadership of the main body was taken over by Azad Beg. It played a minor role in the *jihād* and its ultimate aim was to bring the war to Soviet Central Asia. Azad Beg appears to have been killed by the Taliban in 1997.

⁹ Walwalji (n.d.), Book 2, Part 2, p. 31.

¹⁰ See Walwalji (n.d.), Book 1 for details.

Uzbeks. This was quite obvious in 1992, given the way the organisation came into being. A look at the executive Council of Junbesh in 1992 shows how despite being the largest group within it, Uzbeks were not the majority. The 14 Uzbeks accounted for 39% of total membership in the Council, not too much more than the 30% accounted for by the population of the area controlled by Junbesh, that is the six provinces of Faryab, Jowzjan, Sar-i Pul, Balkh, Samangan and Baghlan (Table 1). In other words, Uzbeks were somewhat over-represented, but not overwhelmingly so. This was a reflection of Junbesh being a coalition of all northern groups and not of a conscious choice of the leadership, but there is other evidence of the absence of any intention of the leadership of moving towards any form of ethnic purity, even if Dostum himself and most of his closest advisers were Uzbeks. During 1992-1993 the leadership of Junbesh was very active in recruiting *jihadi* commanders to its ranks, and these commanders were from all ethnic groups (Table 1). Only 29% of them were Uzbek and another 17% were Turkmen. If there was an ethnic aspect in Junbesh's attitudes, it was hostility towards Pashtuns. There was not a single Pashtun sitting in the Executive Council, even if Pashtuns represented a significant share of the population of northern Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pashtuns commanders were still being recruited. Again this lack of Pashtun representation is not surprising, given that the Movement of the North had started in response of a perceived attempt to 'pashtunise' the higher ranks of the northern zone's military, and that most Pashtuns in positions of responsibility had been associated with that attempt.

Table 1: key members of Junbesh by ethnic background

	Shura-ye aali seferat-e Shomal (Executive Council)		Jihadi commanders recruited (92-93)	Key commanders (2002)
	1992	2002		
Uzbeks	14	9	20	9
Turkmens	4	1	12	1
Tajiks	8	0	19	3
Hazaras	6	1	2	1
Pashtuns	0	1	6	3
Arabs	3	3	2	1
Hazara-Ismaili	1	0	2	0
Unknown	0	1	6	0

Source: Junbesh-i Milli Islami Afghanistan, 'Asnaad wa modarak devvomin majmaa aamumy', Mazar-i Sharif, 2003; Walwalji (n.d.); Interviews.

If we fast forward and look at the composition of the Executive Council in 2002, at the time of Junbesh's second congress, we see a somewhat different picture. Certainly even at this date the claim of regional representivity held some truth, as apart from 9 Uzbeks we also find Arabs and others, but it is obvious that much had changed since 1992. Not only did Uzbeks now account now for 56% of the Council's membership, but Tajiks (who had eight members in 1992) had altogether disappeared and Turkmen were also no longer strongly represented. Hazaras had been reduced to a single member, although this was in part due to the fact that Baghlan province, the stronghold of Ismaili Hazaras, was no longer under the control of Junbesh. As usual, ethnic representation was more balanced among the commanders. Among his top field commanders, nine were Uzbeks, three Pashtuns, three Tajiks, one each Hazara, Arab and Turkmen, while one had a mixed Uzbek/Tajik background. In a sense it could be argued that Junbesh was moving from being a tool for representing different interests (with a

special place for Uzbeks) with little ability to act as a single entity, towards being a more effective political organisation, capable of carrying out tasks in a somewhat disciplined and coordinated way. In the process it was shedding several of its components and ceased to represent their interests, starting instead to transform into an ethnic party.

Within the Junbesh of mid-1992 there were already strong tendencies pushing towards ethnic issues. In particular, three of the initial components of Junbesh had an explicitly ethnic agenda. The component closest to the core of Junbesh was *Guruh-i Kar*, a splinter faction of the HDKA which had developed a pro-ethnic minorities agenda and recruited mainly Uzbeks. Its main stronghold was the province of Faryab. The membership of *Guruh-i Kar* played an important role in the 1992 uprising against President Najibullah and was active thereafter in trying to push Junbesh towards a 'pro-minority' agenda. Another similar group was SAZA (*Sazman-e Enqelabi-ye Zahmatkashanha-ye Afghanistan*). SAZA had originated from a 1970 split within the HDKA and was actually bigger than *Guruh-i Kar*. However, its main areas of activity were Badakhshan and Takhar in north-eastern Afghanistan and its presence in the five northern provinces was modest. It mainly recruited Tajiks. The third group, *Ittehadia Islami-ye Shamal-e Afghanistan*, had a completely different origin. It was formed in the early 1980s in Pakistan by Azad Beg and others, mainly *mujahirin* from Soviet Central Asia. It had a Pan-turkic agenda, but in fact it mainly recruited among Turkmen *jihadi* commanders of Faryab, Jowzjan and Balkh provinces. Its following was modest and rather than leftist it was composed of conservative Muslim or traditional leaders. These groups supported northern regionalism because they saw it as a vehicle for their ethnic agenda, contrary to Junbesh which was essentially pragmatic about it. *Guruh-i Kar* in particular counted three members in the Executive Council and SAZA another one, although in terms of organisational capabilities their contribution paled compared to that of the remnants of the HDKA.¹¹ During the period of the civil wars, these two groups remained associated with Junbesh, especially *Guruh-i Kar*, not least because like the HDKA they were potential targets of extremist *mujahidin* and employment opportunities in the North were not abundant outside Junbesh's structure.

A weak ideological drive towards ethnicisation

However, the main push towards ethnicising Junbesh did not come from these groups, even if they did exercise some influence. Indeed, such groups soon turned into an obstacle to the consolidation of Junbesh as an ethnic party, for a number of reasons. The increasingly disaffected intelligentsia, which belonged to the ethnic left parties, started drifting away from Junbesh, complaining that the military commanders were holding on to all the power and would not allow the educated elite to have a say in the running of things.¹² The leaders of these small leftists groups could only see with scorn Dostum's efforts to establish himself as the leading representative of the Turkic people of Afghanistan. The relationship improved somewhat under Taleban domination, as the urge to fight the common enemy was overwhelming, but even after the fall of the Taleban Dostum and the ethnic left could not come together again. Several of the historical leaders of *Guruh-i Kar* had not come back from exile in Central Asia by the end of 2004, a sign of mistrust towards Dostum. In fact some of them briefly turned up in northern Afghanistan to explore the possibility of re-establishing an

¹¹ Personal communication with Dr. Burna Asefi, London, 2 November 2002.

¹² Personal communication with Eng. Ahmad and Enyatollah Edoyat, Mazar-i Sharif, 8 June 2004. Edoyat also wrote his memoirs (unpublished), where he detailed the progressive disenchantment of the intelligentsia with Dostum.

autonomous party, but quickly abandoned the project and went back to Central Asia. Among the followers of Guruh-i Kar who had stayed in Afghanistan, the majority opted to form a new party in 2002, led by Eng. Ahmad and Enyatollah Edoyat and called Junbesh-i Hambastagi Milli. Hambastagi Milli began to compete for Junbesh's own constituency, and did well during the selection of candidates to the Constitutional Loya Jirga in late 2003, as four of its candidates won the race in Faryab and one in Jowzjan. Their main criticism of Junbesh was that the leadership was not serious about pushing forward the issue of minority rights and was rather busy compromising with opportunistic warlords and negotiating positions of power with the central government. From time to time Dostum would flirt with the ethnic left, for example when he proposed a merger to the leaders of Junbish-i Hambastagi Milli at the end of summer of 2004, who refused the offer.¹³ A few weeks earlier, Eng. Ahmad had been accusing Dostum of preventing his candidacy to the presidential elections, by instructing his followers to sabotage his collection of copies of voters' registration cards.¹⁴

It was clear to the leaders of the ethnic left that to the extent that the leadership of Junbesh was interested in ethnicism, it was not so much because it shared their ideology, but rather because it was opportunistically seeking some form of legitimisation. It is also likely that Junbesh was fearful of Guruh-i Kar becoming one day a powerful competitor for the allegiance of the Uzbeks, because of its relatively strong following in Fayab. The latter point is somewhat demonstrated by the greater ease with which Dostum and Junbesh seem to have cooperated with the other major 'ethnic left' group, SAZA, and maintained a better relationship with Junbesh than Guruh-i Kar. SAZA had left Junbesh quite early and from the beginning of 2002 was busy reorganising its ranks, but this was not seen as a problem insofar as SAZA was appealing to a mainly Tajik constituency, to which Dostum had little appeal anyway, and had only a limited following outside its strongholds in the north-east. Only a few members of SAZA had switched their allegiance to Dostum and they were not prominent ones.¹⁵ A further confirmation that Junbesh did not want ethnic ideologists to get too close to its core base of support is given by the fact that Junbesh maintained very good relations with Latif Pedram, leader of a small party called Kangare-ye Milli, who took part in the presidential elections of late 2004 and received 1.4% of the votes. Pedram had long been friendly to Dostum, who for a while considered supporting him in the presidential elections, until he finally decided to run himself. Given Pedram's largely Tajik constituency, an alliance with Dostum would be relatively trouble-free, as the two men do not compete over the same constituency. Moreover, Pedram's organisational weakness meant that there was little potential threat coming from him.¹⁶

Junbesh's resolve to prevent other groups from consolidating ethnic constituencies within what it considered its Turkic heartlands is also demonstrated by the Turkmen case. The main representatives of the community within Junbesh had originally been Nur Mohammad Qarqin, a former Khalqi who was among the founders of Junbesh, and Azad Beg. With Azad Beg gone, the following of Ittehadiya was dispersed, but due to the fact that Turkmen are mainly concentrated in Junbesh's strongholds of Greater Andkhoy and Jowzjan, Dostum was

¹³ UN source, Mazar-i Sharif, September 2004.

¹⁴ Personal communication with Asadullah Walwalji, Kabul, August 2004. According to electoral law, every presidential candidate had to present 10,000 copies of voters' card in order to be allowed to run.

¹⁵ Personal communications with members of SAZA, Maimana, May 2004; Mazar-i Sharif, August 2004; Maimana August 2004.

¹⁶ Personal communication with Vikram Parekh of International Crisis Group, Kabul, July and September 2004; personal communication with Mr. Kabul and Akbar Kargar, London, January 2004.

able to gain the upper hand and maintain military control over the community. Following the fall of the Taleban, weapons began to be replaced by politics, and Dostum made serious efforts to befriend the community, supporting the appointment of Qarqin as Minister of Social Affairs in Kabul and getting Azad Dodfar, formerly a supporter of Azad Beg, to join Junbesh at the Second Congress in 2002. Moreover, Dostum supported Qarqin request that Greater Andkhoy be transferred from Faryab province to Jowzjan, thereby consolidating the Turkmen majority in the latter province. He also tolerated the appointment of a Turkmen governor in Jowzjan, who was not aligned with Junbesh.¹⁷ Nonetheless, as the presidential elections approached, what had been Dostum's main pillar of support among the Turkmen community, that is the tiny educated elite, turned to a large extent against him. Qarqin enlisted as Karzai's campaign organiser in northern Afghanistan, while Dodfar came out publicly in support of Karzai.¹⁸ The most frequently stated source of grievance against Dostum were the abuses of his commanders against the population, who were particularly resented by Turkmens because Uzbek commanders preferred to target them rather than their fellow Uzbeks. However, a more likely source of trouble was Dostum's willingness to be seen as a leader of the Turkmens than as an ally, which was unacceptable to ambitious individuals like Dodfar and especially Qarqin, who saw himself as the natural leader of the Turkmens.¹⁹

Dostum's efforts to secure exclusive control over ethnic constituencies suggest that he and his entourage did think ethnically, but mainly in terms of analysing the political environment, rather than in terms of enhancing the status of their Uzbek and Turkmen kin, as was the case with ethnic parties like Guruh-i Kar, SAZA and Ittehadiya. Junbesh's main concern was to secure these constituencies as an exclusive source of support. As long as military means were sufficient to maintain control over the Turkic heartland, an openly ethnicist discourse was not needed to mobilise the population. Providing services and rewards was of course a concern, but mainly because Junbesh needed to legitimise itself in the eyes of the Uzbek and Turkmen population and earn their passive cooperation. The small ethnic parties were not the source of Junbesh's drift towards ethnicism, which was instead a response to a set of changing circumstances.

Ethnicity a result of conflict, rather than a cause

The first development which started setting Junbesh on an ethnic course was, as shown earlier, the conflict with President Najibullah in late 1991-early 1992 over the appointment of Pashtun commanders over the military units stationed in northern Afghanistan. In a sense, Junbesh was created with an inbuilt hostility towards Pashtuns, although this should not be interpreted too strictly. From the beginning there were quite a few Pashtuns in Junbesh, even if they did not occupy positions of political leadership. Most of them were security officers coming from other regions of Afghanistan who happened to be in northern Afghanistan at the time of the collapse of the Najibullah's regime and chose to join Junbesh as the lesser evil compared to the Islamist parties which dominated the rest of Afghanistan. Far from planning an ethnic cleansing, Junbesh started recruiting Pashtun *jihadi* commanders, who accounted in 1993 for 9% of total recruits into Junbesh, a percentage below the actual share of Pashtuns out of the total population of the region, but still not an insignificant one (see Table 1). Some

¹⁷ Personal communication with Nur M. Qarqin, Kabul, May 2003; personal communication with Roz Mohammad Nur, governor of Jowzjan, July 2004.

¹⁸ UN source, Mazar-i Sharif, July 2004.

¹⁹ Personal communication with Nur M. Qarqin, Kabul, May 2003.

of them occupied commanding positions, like Juma Khan Hamdard who played an important role in the conflicts of the mid-1990s, and Wali Mohammed Khel who commanded the 70th Division after the death of General Momin. The Taleban occupation of northern Afghanistan (and the massacres which followed it) renewed and greatly strengthened anti-Pashtun sentiment in the region. Dostum's opportunism does not appear to have been too shaken by the turmoil of 1998-2001, and in 2002 he was again quite generous in appointing Pashtuns to lead his militias. Among the leading commanders, Pashtuns then accounted for 17% of the total (Table 1). Moreover, during 2003 he developed a relationship with his former enemy, Bashir Baghlani, the disgraced former commander of Hizb-i Islami in Baghlan, who was Dostum's guest for a while. Baghlani even toyed with the idea of forcefully re-entering Baghlan province with Dostum's support, before opting to lobby President Karzai and try to be re-appointed to a position of responsibility.²⁰ Dostum also apparently tried to recruit Pashtuns to his side in Takhar province in 2002-2003.²¹ Perhaps even more significantly, during the summer of 2004 Pashtun representatives attended a meeting meant to choose the vice-presidential candidates to stand with Dostum, and tried to push for one of the two vice-presidents to be Pashtun. While the meeting ended in a stalemate, they succeeded in having the whole issue referred to Dostum himself. Finally, the choice fell on a Pashtun woman, Shafiqa Habibi, although she was probably not the candidate they had in mind. Pashtuns had earlier rarely played such an important role in contributing to Junbesh's policy choices, and significantly the stand of their representatives contributed to prevent the powerful Qataghan Uzbeks from imposing their own candidate.²² There does not seem to be evidence, therefore, that Dostum personally treated Pashtuns as enemies.

However, his commanders were a different matter. Following the fall of the Taleban regime, a massive wave of harassment and revenge attacks hit the Pashtun communities of northern Afghanistan over the December 2001-March 2002 period, with as many as 200,000 people being forced to flee to Pakistan or southern Afghanistan.²³ Dostum, or at least his entourage, must have been aware of the political cost of this exodus, both in terms of maintaining control over the region in the long term and in terms of maintaining good relations with Kabul. Indeed, in 2003 Dostum launched what he probably meant to be a major initiative in Mazar-i Sharif, inviting Pashtun notables from all around the region and offering them a peace deal. The initiative was welcomed initially,²⁴ but failed to be fully implemented because of lack of support among local commanders. Although harassment of Pashtun communities markedly decreased between 2002 and 2004, by the end of 2004 the majority of the northern Pashtuns still felt rather uneasy about living in territories controlled by Junbesh.²⁵ A typical example can be seen in the riots which led to the ejection of Governor Enoyat and commander Hashim Habibi from Faryab province in April 2004. Among other things, Enoyat was accused of favouring the local Pashtun community in administrative appointments. During the riots, however, attacks to Pashtuns were limited to verbal abuse and some minor physical aggressions. A crowd of angry Uzbeks marching on a Pashtun village near Maimana (the centre of Faryab) was held off by Pashtun villagers holding sticks and

²⁰ UN source, December 2003.

²¹ Personal communication with Mervyn Patterson, November 2003.

²² Personal communication with Afghan intellectual, July 2004, Shiberghan.

²³ See Human Rights Watch, *On the Precipice: insecurity in northern Afghanistan*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002.

²⁴ Personal communication with Farouq Azam, London, July 2003.

²⁵ Based on personal communications with Pashtun intellectuals and notables, northern and north-eastern Afghanistan, October 2003-September 2004.

stones. No firearms were used, except from the governor's own guards.²⁶ While these events were hardly welcomed by the local Pashtuns, they were still a far cry from the ethnic cleansing of 2001-2002, when tens of thousands lost their lives, others were injured or raped and tens of thousands had to flee. It appears clear that Dostum was putting some effort in bringing order to northern Afghanistan and that he had achieved some success, but it is also clear that his achievements were far from being enough to produce any political support for Junbesh among Pashtuns, if that was indeed possible at all. Indeed, in the more liberal political climate created by the presidential campaign of 2004, whatever support Dostum had appeared to have among Pashtuns quickly evaporated. Juma Khan Hamdard, who until the summer of 2004 had been commander of Junbesh's 8th Corps, despite having sent his representatives to the meeting convened to choose Dostum's vice-presidential candidates,²⁷ publicly declared his support for President Karzai.²⁸ Judging from the statements of Pashtun notables from the region, few Pashtuns voted for Dostum.²⁹

Unable to attract a large Pashtun constituency because of its own nature, Junbesh also had few chances of gathering long-term support from the Hazara community of northern Afghanistan, despite the warm support that it received in its early days from the leaders of Hizb-i Wahdat, by far the predominant party among the Hazaras. Indeed, of all the *jihadi* parties Hizb-i Wahdat was the one that maintained the best relations with Junbesh throughout the existence of the latter and its leaders, especially Mazari, played a key role in the early days in pushing Dostum towards shaping Junbesh into a political party.³⁰ On the other hand, Mohammad Mohaqqueq, who was to emerge as the foremost Hazara politician in the 2004 presidential elections, acquired his stature as the leader of Wahdat in northern Afghanistan thanks to Dostum's generous support in 1992-1997. He always maintained good relations with Dostum, if not with Junbesh as a whole. In part because of this, the northern branch of Wahdat was strongly influenced by Junbesh, especially with regard to the organisation of its militias.

However, there was never any doubt in the mind of Wahdat's leaders that their agenda was different from Junbesh's. Wahdat did get involved in Junbesh's internecine conflicts after Malik staged his coup against Dostum in 1997. Occasional clashes occurred between Wahdat and Junbesh at the local level, while at the national level, relations between Junbesh and Wahdat deteriorated somewhat after Mazari's death. The clerical component of Wahdat always looked at Junbesh with suspicion, because of its secular makeup,³¹ although in political terms this secularism quite suited them, at least when compared to the Sunni fundamentalism of the *jihadi* parties. Seen in a long-term perspective, however, these were not serious problems, certainly not serious enough to outweigh the fact that no other parties in the Afghan civil wars had been as close as Junbesh and Wahdat. The real issue was that the attraction of Wahdat's main body in Hazarajat and Kabul was too strong for Wahdat's northern branch to resist it and be effectively incorporated in Junbesh. Moreover, if any party or faction had an ideology-driven ethnic agenda in early 1990s' Afghanistan, that was Wahdat, a fact that translated into a strong identity and a hostility to merging with other factions. Those groups of Hazaras who stayed within Junbesh, such as Ali Sarwar's regiment

²⁶ Personal communication with leader of the Pashtun community, Maimana, August 2004; UN source, Maimana, August 2004.

²⁷ Personal communication with Afghan intellectual, July 2004, Shiberghan.

²⁸ IWPR, *Afghan Recovery Report*, 14 September 2004.

²⁹ Personal communications with intellectuals and Pashtun notables, June-September 2004.

³⁰ Walwalji (n.d.), Book 1, pp.33 ff.

³¹ Personal communication with Homayoun Fourkhabi, London, October 2002.

in Balkh, had roots in Najibullah's militias and not from groups associated with Wahdat. The success of the latter in attracting the northern Hazaras to its fold prevented Junbesh from developing a large constituency there, isolating the party from another key source of support in the north.³²

In practice, Junbesh never had serious chances of integrating large Pashtun and Hazara constituencies in its fold. This was not the case of the Tajiks, who were part of Junbesh's core at the beginning and did not have obvious alternatives. For this reason, the failure to attract long-term Tajik support was a much bigger blow to Junbesh. While there might have been several reasons for this failure, the most important one is clearly the conflict with Jamiat-i Islami.

Junbesh initially counted on a large number of Tajik regular army officers, civilian functionaries and personalities, among whom the leading figure was general Momen, commander of the 70th Division in Hairatan. On the other hand, in northern Afghanistan Jamiat was, in 1992, a mixed Tajik, Uzbek, Arab and Turkmen party, with a few Pashtuns in its ranks too. When its leader Ustad Atta (a Tajik himself) separated from Junbesh in 1993, however, it was mainly Tajik commanders who followed him. Many of the Uzbek commanders, especially in Samangan province, stayed with Dostum. Ahmad Khan, leading commander of Jamiat in Samangan, was to become one of Junbesh's foremost field commanders and sworn enemy of Jamiat. It is tempting to see an early manifestation of an ethnic split in this development, but in reality local factors were at play. Most *jihadi* commanders of northern Afghanistan were permanently involved in some form of conflict with their neighbours. When Atta asked to *jihadi* commanders to choose sides, those who followed him were often involved in feuds with other commanders within Junbesh, who happened to be mostly Uzbeks. Uzbek commanders tended to have stronger links with Junbesh's leadership, not least because they often occupied easily accessible areas around the towns, whereas Tajiks were mostly settled in more remote regions. Among the important Uzbek commanders aligned with Junbesh who had feuds with Tajik Jamiatis the most important ones were:

- the Hizb-i Islami Uzbek group of Nassim Mehdi in Jowzjan, which like most Hizbis had been pursuing its own anti-Jamiat agenda throughout northern Afghanistan, dictated by an ideological split within the Islamist movement;
- another Hizb-i Islami group, this time of Pashtuns, around Juma Khan Hamdard, which pushed Tajik commanders in the Balkh district into Atta's arms;
- in Samangan province, the strong group of Jamiati Uzbeks around Ahmad Khan, which was competing with Tajik commanders of Jamiat.³³

There were exceptions to this rule. For example in Faryab, a feud had long opposed two coalitions of Uzbek commanders, one linked to Harakat-i Enqelab and another to Jamiat. Here, because the Harakat coalition was well entrenched in Junbesh already, most Uzbek commanders of Jamiat did not side with Dostum, but went for Atta. On the whole, however, Atta's call found a much keener audience among Tajiks, not because Dostum and his circle

³² My own estimate of the ethnic breakdown of the five northern provinces (based on a district by district analysis) is the following: Uzbeks 33%, Tajiks 24%, Turkmen 14.5%, Pashtuns 13%, Hazaras 10%, Arabs 3.5%, others 2%.

³³ Walwalji (n.d.), Book 1, pp.33 ff.

had any hostility to Tajiks, but because the privileged relationship that they had granted to Uzbek commanders had often alienated their local rivals.

To the extent that ethnicity mattered in determining the alignments in northern Afghanistan in 1993-1994, it was mainly in an indirect way. Recruitment took place at the local level through personal networks and the chances were that recruiters and recruited belonged to the same ethnic group, although this was not a prerequisite, especially in the early stages of the ethnicisation of Junbesh and Jamiat. Local commanders gathered support among their own kin and solidarity group, which tended therefore to belong to the same ethnic group. Alliances among commanders and links between commanders and party/faction leaders were also based on personal networks, thus favouring the formation of relatively homogeneous ethnic clusters. By the early 1980s, Jamiat had already become a '*jihadi* party with a special place for Tajiks', and during 1992-1993 Junbesh rapidly established itself as a 'northern Afghan coalition with a special place for Uzbeks'. However, despite their local causes, the effect of these realignments was going to be decisive in determining the long-term ethnic character of both Junbesh and Jamiat. The growing Uzbek or Tajik majorities within Junbesh and Jamiat had a catalysing effect, drawing greater and greater numbers of commanders towards their respective ethnic groups. Although this had also happened to the *jihadi* parties in 1980-1992, now Jamiat and Junbesh were directly exposed to the ethnic discourse, which had some popularity among the intelligentsia and officers corps, from which the *jihadis* had been isolated until 1992. Even if neither the leadership of Jamiat or that of Junbesh had any intention of consciously absorbing ethnic ideologies, among their members ethnic categories started being used to rationalise a conflict which had originated in the competition for regional leadership between ambitious individuals, as well as a cultural and political split along Islamist/leftist lines. By late 1993, following a spate of local clashes, many were already starting to believe that an incipient conflict was about to divide Uzbeks and Tajiks. As a result, when General Momin died at the beginning of 2004, Dostum was immediately accused of having eliminated him, and most of Momin's closest circle and of the staff of 70th Division, who were Tajiks, opted to join Jamiat.³⁴

There is evidence that if the membership of Jamiat and Junbesh increasingly interpreted the conflict in ethnic terms, the leaderships of the two parties had not adopted an ethnic agenda. As late as 2003 Dostum was still trying to recruit Tajik commanders in key areas, such as Baghlan province, where he approached commanders Mustafa and Khalil of Shura-i Nezar.³⁵ In 2004, Junbesh appointed Tajik commanders to dominating positions in mixed Uzbek/Tajik districts such as Bilchiragh and Gurziwan in order to oppose the long-time dominant commander in those districts, Uzbek Hashim Habibi, who had broken with Junbesh in early 2004.³⁶ Similarly, in 2004 the population of Gosfandi district (Sar-i Pul) still did not perceive the long-standing local feud between Junbesh and Jamiat as an ethnic matter and the two parties had mixed ethnic membership in that district.³⁷ On the Jamiat side, during 2003 a lot of effort was spent trying to recruit Uzbeks in Faryab province, and the establishment of a new division (24th) had already been authorised in 2002 just for that purpose.³⁸ This trend was strengthened by the fact that even if some of the Uzbek commanders involved in pushing Tajiks out of Junbesh (like Nassim Mehdi) in the end quit Junbesh themselves, the long years of conflict with Jamiat had strengthened anti-Tajik feelings among Junbesh rank-and-file. For

³⁴ Walwalji (n.d.), Book 1, pp.33 ff.

³⁵ Personal communication with former member of a jihadi party, Pul-i Khumri, December 2003.

³⁶ Interview with UN source, August 2004.

³⁷ Personal communication with member of Jamiat from Gosfandi, August 2004.

³⁸ UN sources, June 2004.

example, at the time of discussing electoral options in the run up to the presidential elections of 2004, some members of Junbesh proposed an alliance with the Tajiks, but other influential members, including commander Lal, vetoed the idea.³⁹

A good example of how the early, spontaneous ethnicisation process was motivated by local patterns is Takhar province in 2001-2004. Here Uzbek commanders, mostly formerly members of Hizb-i Islami, had joined Shura-i Nezar after the Taleban had taken Kabul and northern Afghanistan. They were the strongest force in the province and contributed decisively to Shura-i Nezar holding out against the Taleban in 1998-2001. However, the patronage-based politics of Jamiat/Shura-i Nezar led to appointments at the top of the military structure of the organisation which were very heavily biased towards the Tajiks. By the summer of 2001 the Uzbek commanders of Takhar had grown tired of playing the role of Massud's cannon fodder, as one of them put it, without being rewarded with status appointments. They agreed then to form a 'lobby' group, called the Qataghan Shura, meant to help their cause by collectively bargaining for a better deal within Shura-i Nezar.⁴⁰ However, Jamiat's politics were so deeply constrained by patronage commitments to an ever expanding clientele, that little was left for the Uzbeks of Takhar even after the establishment of the first post-Taleban government. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the local Uzbeks started looking around for alternatives and developing an ethnic explanation of their grievances. Earlier attempts by Dostum to recruit in Takhar had had little success and had been limited to a few former militia commanders of the Najibullah regime, who joined him in 1992-1993.⁴¹ Due to logistical and geographical constraints, Dostum did not have the opportunity to insist in his efforts throughout the 1994-2000 period, but he resumed his approaches in 2001, when he was allowed to send his representatives to the region within the framework of the United Front, the anti-Taleban alliance with Jamiat. The contacts with the local Uzbek commanders continued to develop under the surface. During 2002 a 'Peace Shura of the North Eastern Zone' operated in Takhar province, under the leadership of Mahmood Hassan, a former commander of Hizb-i Islami who would later become Junbesh's leader in the region. The Shura was widely rumoured to be supported by Dostum, but its open campaigning was focused on the monopolisation of local power structures by Tajik commanders belonging to Jamiat. Interestingly, at the June 2002 Congress four places were left vacant in the Executive Council, to be occupied by Junbesh's representatives from the north-eastern provinces, presumably Uzbeks. No seats were left reserved for representatives from other regions of Afghanistan, even if Junbesh claimed to be expanding its structure there too. This went on until at the end of the summer of 2003, when the majority of the Uzbek commanders of Takhar openly switched sides and joined Junbesh. After that these commanders acted as a catalyst, and throughout the rest of 2003 and 2004 more commanders joined Junbesh in Takhar. By the end of 2004, the only significant alternative Uzbek-based force in Takhar was Qazi Qabir with his Shura-i Adolat, who had succeeded, by virtue of his ruthlessness, in creating his own pole of attraction in the northern districts of Yangi Qala and Darqad. An important aspect of this shift is that it was not just commanders who switched sides. The population of Takhar had earlier been considered to be pro-Karzai, but in the 2004 presidential elections it offered considerable support to Dostum.⁴²

³⁹ Personal communication with Afghan intellectual, July 2004, Shiberghan.

⁴⁰ Personal communication with Mervyn Patterson, November 2003.

⁴¹ Walwalji (n.d.) p.166, Book 2, Part 2, p.34.

⁴² Personal communication with Mervyn Patterson, November 2003.

Seeking legitimacy among the electorate: Junbesh after the fall of the Taliban

Until 2001, Junbesh had been working as a transmission belt between the leadership and the local structures of power, and if its incorporation of various (ethnic and non-ethnic) lobbies cannot be said to have worked extremely well, at least it did not prevent Junbesh from functioning. After 2001, the Afghan political landscape changed dramatically. Two Loya Jirgah were planned to be selected by ‘grand electors’, one in 2002 and another in 2003, while universal suffrage elections were scheduled to follow. In other words, the purpose of existence of Junbesh was changing. It was going to need to appeal to ‘masses’ of small communities and individual voters. The shift towards electoral and political campaigning accelerated the process of ethnic consolidation of the factions. Faced with masses of potential voters, it became more difficult to argue for a ‘special place’ for Uzbeks within a northern regional movement. Prospective and aspiring politicians, targeting the urban population as the most responsive to political propaganda, were unwilling to alienate large chunks of their potential electorate by allying with factions seen as hostile to a particular ethnic group. Fayz Mehr Roen, for example, formerly a leading Ismaili Tajik member of Junbesh, was offered by Dostum one of the vice-presidential posts, but despite having endorsed Dostum’s candidacy just a few weeks earlier, he declined the offer and opted instead to run as the deputy of Mohaqqueq.⁴³

Junbesh did make an effort to re-launch the idea of northern regionalism in the period up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga (end of 2003), and put the idea of a federal state at the forefront of its project. Federalism appeared well suited as a vehicle to ensure a solid power base to Junbesh after the disarmament of the militias and was also probably meant as a tool to attract consensus throughout the ethnic spectrum of northern Afghanistan. However, the concept of northern Afghanistan as a political entity had worn out during the years of the civil war and was no longer suited to strengthen Junbesh’s appeal. In a number of cases, inter-ethnic conflict within the region was the paramount concern of local communities, rather than relations with Kabul. Furthermore, national elections offered an opportunity to gather support well beyond Junbesh’s area of military control, that is beyond northern Afghanistan. Finding an effective glue to hold together a movement mainly created on the basis of Dostum’s military charisma, and at the same time appealing to the electorate, became an obvious problem for Junbesh. Leftist ideas were discredited and brandishing them would have been counterproductive, not least within Junbesh itself, given the presence of many former *mujahidin* in its ranks. Equal rights for women worked well to win some support abroad, but generated little interest within Afghanistan, outside restricted circles of educated women and those women who had been mobilised by the HDKA during the 1980s. Secularism was genuinely appreciated by the intelligentsia and some urban strata, but proved insufficient to build a viable party and compete successfully in elections. Even if the ‘northern region’ rhetoric was never completely abandoned and public statements about the Turkic character of Junbesh were never issued, the opportunism of the leadership was pushing Junbesh towards playing the card of ethnic nationalism, attempting to mobilise Turkic feelings among the population. During the 1990s the ‘special place’ attributed to the Uzbeks had produced some examples of seeking legitimisation on an ethnic basis, such as changing the name of streets or the strengthening of the teaching of Uzbek and Turkmen in the schools, at the expense of Pashto.⁴⁴ During 2002-2004, however, it became common practice for the national and local leaders of Junbesh to present themselves in public and private discussions as defenders of the

⁴³ Personal communication with Fayz Mehr Roen, Mazar-i Sharif, August 2004.

⁴⁴ G. Dorronsoro, *La Révolution Afghane*, Karthala, 2000, p.289.

rights of the Uzbeks and Turkmen of Afghanistan.⁴⁵ The campaign escalated after the Constitutional Loya Jirgah at the end of 2003 and the old regionalist rhetoric appeared to have been forgotten, replaced by a more realistic attempt to build alliances with other ethnically based groups. While the demand for a federal system failed to achieve a widespread appeal, the demand made by Junbesh that Uzbek be given the status of official language on a par with Pashto and Dari had quite a widespread resonance and subsequently became one of the main points of Junbesh's campaigning.

Ethnic mobilisation proved quite successful, even if the ethnic pluralism of northern Afghanistan forced Junbesh to be cautious on this issue. The rising credibility of Dostum's claim to be a leader of Afghan Uzbeks could be seen already a few months into the post-Taleban era, when he received the endorsement of one of Uzbekistan's opposition parties, *Birlik*, which in July 2002 published a favourable report on its web site,⁴⁶ not to mention the enthusiasm that Dostum could arouse in some Turkish politicians.⁴⁷ Even outside educated circles, although there was little sense of Uzbek ethnicity in Afghanistan before the war, during the 1990s there were signs that this might be changing. For example, the term *qawn*, originally meant to indicate one's own tribe or subtribe, by the beginning of the 21st century was increasingly being used to indicate all Afghan Uzbeks. Membership in a particular tribe or subtribe appeared to be losing importance.⁴⁸ While this trend had much deeper causes than Junbesh's propaganda, it is likely that it was also contributing to it by 2002. Among other things, a television company, AINA TV, was established in Mazar-i Sharif to voice Junbesh's views, and in early 2005 its coverage was expanded to the northeast.⁴⁹ Despite the lingering suspicion with which he is looked at among the most conservative Uzbek communities,⁵⁰ Dostum had some success in positioning himself as a 'useful', if not loved, representative of Uzbek interests in Afghanistan. Even in a relatively isolated district like Burka (Baghlan province), by 2004 the largely Uzbek population was exercising pressure on the local commanders, still aligned with Jamiat, to start supporting Dostum and Junbesh.⁵¹ To a large extent this was achieved through his own persona, him being the only Uzbek known throughout Afghanistan, although not always for good reasons, and the only one known to have power. Dostum's case proves that no publicity is bad publicity.

The impact of Dostum's persona was supplemented by a number of other initiatives. Once it appeared clear that federalism would not have been part of the new constitution, Junbesh started an orderly withdrawal and focused its propaganda on other issues, such as the creation of larger provinces, encompassing whole regions and the election of the governors, which would allow the minorities (and of course Junbesh itself) to build a power base within the state structures. For example, this is the case of the consolidation of the majority of Turkmen in a single province through the transfer of Greater Andkhoy to Jowzjan, which was claimed to make it easier to distribute education and other ethnically targeted services to Turkmen and at the same time increase their political leverage vis-à-vis the centre. Education was clearly the cornerstone of ethnic politics in Junbesh's post-war politics. Among the Uzbek

⁴⁵ See, for example, *Junbesh* (paper published Mazar-e Sharif) of 13 December 2003.

⁴⁶ *BBC Monitoring*, 13 July 2002.

⁴⁷ Communication with Dr. Umit Cizre, Geneva, July 2004.

⁴⁸ Gabriele Rasuly-Palczek, 'Ethnic identity versus Nationalism: the Uzbeks of north-eastern Afghanistan and the Afghan state', in Touraj Atabaki & John O'Kane (eds), *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 1998, pp.221-222.

⁴⁹ AINA TV, 6 February 2005. AINA also announced its intention to start covering eastern Afghanistan (Nangarhar) as well, a region inhabited by Pashtuns.

⁵⁰ Personal communication of Prof. Gabriele Rasuly-Palczek, August 2003.

⁵¹ UN source, April 2004.

intelligentsia the idea was being circulated of adopting Turkish as a common language of the Turkic minorities in Afghanistan and some members of Junbesh were supporting this view. In the short term, however, Junbesh was proposing to teach Turkmen or Uzbek until the third year of primary school and start teaching Dari and Pashto afterwards.⁵² More in general Junbesh was trying to convey the idea that only politicians belonging to their own kin could be trusted by the Turkic population to deliver goods and services.

Conclusion: opportunistic ethnicism and the transition towards a new political order

Looking at the outcome of the presidential elections of October 2004, when Dostum obtained 10% of the votes, it could be argued that his efforts to be seen as a candidate of the Turkic minority had been successful. Since Uzbeks and Turkmens account for about 9-10% of Afghanistan population, it appears obvious that Dostum gathered sweeping majorities among them. A province-by-province analysis of the vote confirms this. His success came despite the hostility of a large part of the northern intelligentsia, including some key Uzbek, Turkmen and Arab figures. He had been quite successful in 2002-2003 at wooing a number of relatively high profile individuals, mainly intellectuals living abroad like Dr. Azam Dodfar, Dr. Mohammed Akbar, Enyatullah Shahrani and others towards Junbesh. He also attracted some *jihadi* politicians to his side, most notably Nehmatullah Shahrani, a former associate of Rasul Sayyaf. However, by the end of 2004 both Dodfar and Nehmatullah Shahrani had already broken their relationship with Dostum. This was in line with a trend which had already emerged in the mid-1990s, when a number of well-known Uzbek, Turkmen and Arab intellectuals, who had in the past supported Junbesh or maintained a relatively close relationship with it, like Ismail Akbar, Hedayatullah Hedayat or Asadullah Walwalji, increasingly distanced themselves from him and started to criticise him openly. In the context of Afghanistan in the early 21st century, Dostum's failure to keep the northern intelligentsia on his side still mattered little, but the potential impact of this shortcoming were potentially very damaging for the longer-term legitimisation of Dostum and Junbesh as standard-bearers of Turkic minority rights in Afghanistan.

The outcome of the elections was particularly surprising in the case of the Turkmens, as by the autumn of 2004 the (actually quite tiny) Turkmen intelligentsia appeared to be mainly bent on supporting Karzai or some other candidate, but not Dostum. Of the 20 or so leading intellectual figures among the Turkmens, only two, Ismail Munshi and Wazir Mohammad, are known to have either campaigned for or supported Dostum.⁵³ The idea that Dostum deliberately eliminated any possible strong leader within the community, in order to prevent the rising of a rival leadership which could separate the Turkmen community from Junbesh, is quite widespread among educated Turkmens. Dostum's success is likely to have been due to the modest influence of the 'educated' in Turkmen society. Of all the Afghan ethnic groups, Turkmens are definitely among those farthest from political activity and are still heavily influenced by local notables. By targeting the traditional notables, Dostum played a winning card, not least because despite state support the pro-Karzai elements had proved unable to deliver much to the Turkmen communities in terms of patronage or help. Qarqin, who had earlier been very influential among Turkmens, by late 2004 had lost much of his influence despite having been a cabinet minister in Kabul for quite a while. Even in his home district the population was divided between supporters and opponents of Qarqin. It could therefore be argued that Dostum succeeded in gathering the Turkmen vote because no serious

⁵² Personal communication with Nur M. Qarqin, Kabul, May 2003.

⁵³ UN source, August 2004; personal communication with Turkmen intellectual, Shiberghan, July 2004.

(that is organised) contender emerged from within the community itself, contrary to what happened, for example, in the case of the Tajiks and Hazaras. The formation of a Turkmen Council, which in the intentions of at least some of its promoters was clearly meant to produce such an alternative to Junbesh, by the end of 2004 had not taken off yet, both because of organisational difficulties (the Council never moved out of Kabul) and because of the limited influence of its members, most of them being former leftists intellectuals enjoying little following among the village notables and unable to dispense much patronage.⁵⁴

Dostum proved to be a successful political entrepreneur in October 2004, and it could be argued that if Turkic ethnicity finally conquered a position on the Afghan political scene, it was definitely due to Dostum's role in seizing the moment and adopting ethnicism as one of his key campaign platforms. However, his inability to keep the Turkic intelligentsia on his side might mean that his long-term legitimisation as the representative of the Uzbeks and Turkmens of Afghanistan might be impossible to achieve. Even if Dostum and Junbesh do not continue to lead for long the process of re-shaping of Afghanistan's political order that they helped initiate, they will still leave behind a significant legacy. If in the 1970s no political group had even 100 members in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan,⁵⁵ Junbesh was mobilising several thousand in 2004. Northern Afghanistan was not going to be the same again.

⁵⁴ Personal communication with Turkmen intellectual, Shiberghan, July 2004.

⁵⁵ Kh. Khashimbekov (1994), p.32.



Figure 1: Map of northern Afghanistan.

Source: CIA

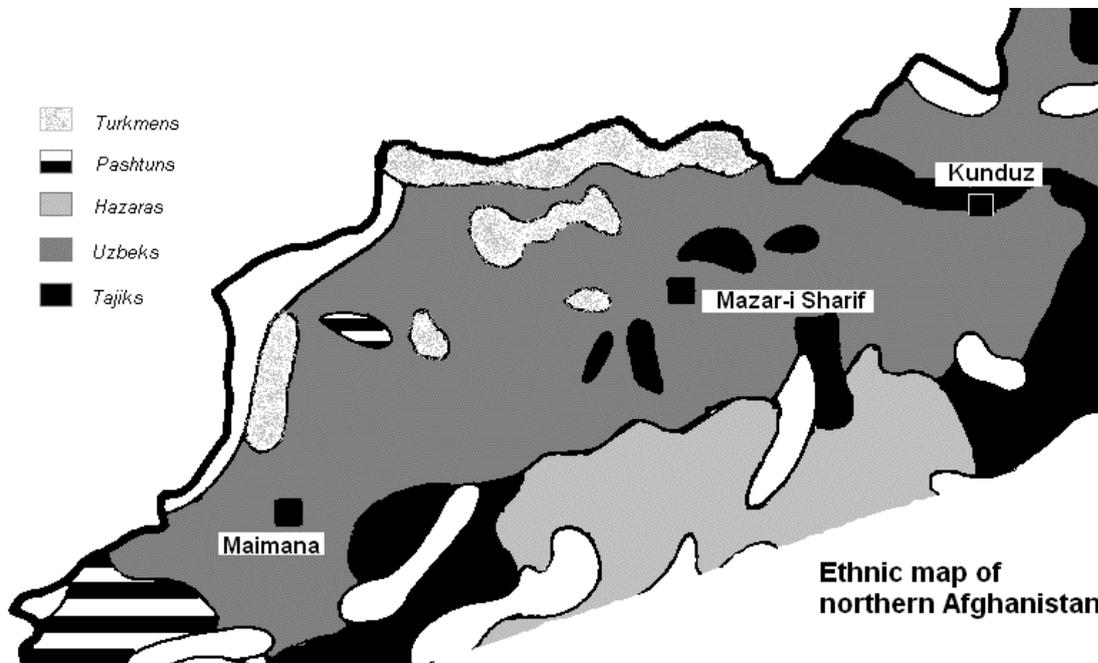


Figure 2: Ethnic map of Northern Afghanistan

Source: *Le Fait Ethnique en Iran et en Afghanistan*, Editions du CNRS, Paris, 1988, p. 5.

Glossary

Guruh-i Kar: left-wing ethnic nationalist group, which split from HDKA in the 1970s.

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami: one of the Sunni jihadi parties, which fought in the war against the Soviet army.

Harakat-Islami: one of the Shiite parties which fought in the war against the Soviet army.

Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq (HDKA): People's Democratic Party, a Marxist party which ruled Afghanistan in 1978-1992.

Hizb-i Islami: Islami Party, a radical Islamist party with a story of hostility towards *Jamiat-i Islami*.

Hizb-i Wahdat: Unity Party, a ethnic-based party led by Hazara clergymen.

Ittehadia Islami-ye Wilayat-e Shamal: a Turkic nationalist party formed in the early 1980s to fight against the Soviet army

Jamiat-i Islami: Islamic Society, a moderate Islamist party which played a key role in the war.

Junbesh-i Milli: National Movement, a secularist party based in northern Afghanistan.

Junbesh-i Hambastagi Milli: party formed by the majority of *Guruh-i Kar* in 2002, led by Eng. Ahmad and Enyatollah Edoyat

Kangare-ye Milli: ethnic nationalist party formed in 2003 by Latif Pedram

Loya Jirga: tribal gathering, assembly.

SAZA (Sazman-e Enqelabi-ye Zahmatkashanha-ye Afghanistan): left-wing ethnic nationalist party, formed in the 1970s

Shura-i Nezar: Supervisory Council, a faction within *Jamiat-i Islami*, originally created by commander Massud.

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The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

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In Colombia:

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Research Objectives

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.
- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.



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