



Program for Culture and Conflict Studies

# **BALKH PROVINCE**

**The Program for Culture & Conflict Studies**

Naval Postgraduate School

Monterey, CA

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**GOVERNOR: ATTA MOHAMMED NOOR**

**POPULATION ESTIMATE: 1,245,000**

**AREA IN SQUARE KILOMETERS: 16,186.3 (2.5% of Afganistan)<sup>1</sup>**

**CAPITAL: Mazar-e-Sharif**

**DISTRICTS:** Shortepa, Kaldar, Dawlatabad, Nahri Shahi, Khulm, Chahar Bolak, Balkh, Dihdadi, Mazar-e-Sharof, Marmul, Chimtal, Sholgara, Chahar Kint, Kishindih, Zari (Subdivided within Kishindih in 2005).

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Chimtal (multi-ethnic, large Arab and Pashtun population, with a significant Hazara minority), Char Bolaq (Pashtun and Hazara, with Turkmen in the North), Dawlat Abad (multi-ethnic with Turkmen minority), Marmul (almost exclusively Tajik), Char Kent (Tajik and Uzbek, with a Sunni Hazara (Kawshi) minority), Zare (Uzbek, Beloch and Hazara).<sup>2</sup>

**RELIGIOUS GROUPS:** Sunni, Shi'a, Syyed Shi'a.

**OCCUPATION OF POPULATION:** Agriculture, Trade and Services, Animal Husbandry, some Manufacturing, Remittances, Non-Farm Labor, and Cannabis Trading.

**CROPS/LIVESTOCK:** Sesame, Olives, Sharsham, Wheat, Maize, Potatoes, Rice, Soybeans, Cannabis, Cotton, Tobacco, Cattle, and some Small Ruminants (goats, sheep, etc.) are mainly managed by nomadic Kuchis.<sup>3,4</sup>

**LITERACY RATE:** Male-38%, Female 19%<sup>5</sup>

**# OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS:** 153 Public, 1 Private

**SECONDARY SCHOOLS:** 218 Public, 3 Private

**HIGH SCHOOLS:** 94 Public, 3 Private

**STUDENT TO TEACHER RATIO:** 37:1

**COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES:** Balkh University (4,458 Students, 22% Female),<sup>6</sup> Balkh Petroleum and Gas Institute (346 Students, 4% Female).<sup>7</sup>

**ACTIVE NGOS IN THE PROVINCE:** UN Habitat, PIN, CHA, CARE, ACBAR, ANSO, ActionAid, ADWR, ACTED, ARCS, ARMP/AKDN, ATC, BRAC, CCA, GGA,

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical Yearbook 2007/2008, CSO, pg. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Katarine Larsson, "A Provincial Survey of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Saripul," November 2008, pg. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Larsson, pg. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Regional Rural Economic Regeneration Strategies (RRERS), "Provincial Profile: Balkh," pg.2.

<sup>5</sup> NRVA 2007/2008, pg. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Statistical Yearbook 2007/2008, CSO, pg. 69, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Beginning of educational year 2006-2007, Statistical Yearbook 2007/2008, CSO, pg. 39.

Hand in Hand Afghanistan Organization, IAM, ICRC, IRC, NPO/RRAA, NRC, Save the Children Sweden-Norway, Save the Children UK, SCA.<sup>8</sup>

**TRANSPORTATION:** The transport infrastructure in Balkh is reasonably well developed, with 38% of roads in the province able to take car traffic in all season, and 34% able to take car traffic in some seasons.

**ESTIMATED POPULATION WITH ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY:** 95% in urban area, 26% in rural.

**ESTIMATED POPULATION WITH ACCESS TO HEALTH FACILITIES:** 82% of the population has access to health services within an hour by foot or by animal.<sup>9</sup>

**HOSPITALS:** 8; Mazar-e-Sharif (360 bed hospital), Balkh Public Hospital (Mazar), Noor Hospital (Mazar), Military Hospital (Mazar), Jordanian Airport (Mazar Airport), Kodi Barq Hospital (Dehdadi), Balkh District Hospital (Balkh District), Khulam District Hospital (Khulam District).

**CLINICS:** 49

**SOURCES/AVAILABILITY OF DRINKING WATER:** Limited perennial river flow, tube well irrigation.<sup>10</sup> 29% has access to safe drinking water.<sup>11</sup>

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS:** In the area of telecommunications, Hairatan, Chimtal, Balkh, Dehdadi, Khulam, Charbolak, Nahre Shahi, and Dawlatabad districts of Balkh province has mobile phone coverage.

## **PRIMARY POLITICAL PARTIES**

### **JUMBISH-I-MILLI ISLAMI AFGHANISTAN (ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF AFGHANISTAN)**

General Abdul Rashid Dostum controls a political party called *Jumbish-i-Milli Islami* (National Islamic Movement) which is a core of *Jabhe-ye-Motahed-e-Milli*. He claims to have a strong support in up to eight provinces in the north of the country, including Samanagn province, predominantly populated by ethnic Uzbeks.

Dostum's major power base is in Uzbek enclaves in the northern provinces of Jowzjan, Balkh, Faryab, and Samangan. Dostum's headquarters is located in Jowzjan's capital, Shiberghan. In the past, Dostum held various official positions (deputy defense minister, a special adviser on security and military affairs, President Karzai's representative in the north) until the relations between President Karzi and General Dostum deteriorated.

### **JABHE-YE-MOTAHED-E-MILLI (THE UNITED NATIONAL FRONT)**

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<sup>8</sup> Beginning of educational year 2006-2007, Statistical Yearbook 2007/2008, CSO, pg. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Larrison, pg. 53-58, 77.

<sup>10</sup> NRVA 2007/2008, pg. 75.

<sup>11</sup> RRERS, pg. 1.

The largest opposition block built by General Dostum and aimed against President Karzai. Burhanuddin Rabbani and the late Ahmad Shah Massoud's closest advisers joined Dostum in his demands to change the presidential system into parliamentary, to negotiate with armed groups and to recognize the Durand line. On August 27 of 2008 the Front in a statement urged the neighboring countries, members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, and members of NATO alliance to hold a crisis meeting on Afghanistan.

### **HEZB-E WAHDAT-E ESLAMI-YE AFGHANISTAN (ISLAMIC UNITY PARTY OF AFGHANISTAN)**

*Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan* began as a Shi'a umbrella party led by Abdul Ali Mazari. Abdul Ali Mazari died under mysterious circumstances while in custody of the Taliban. During the Soviet invasion the party received support from Iran. The party "remains the primary political force among the Hazara."<sup>12</sup> During the period of Taliban rule, the party held on to the Hazarajat against the attempted blockade by the Taliban. It is currently led by Mohammad Karim Khalili, who is currently the Second Vice President to Hamid Karzai. For a time Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq was the military leader of the party under the political leadership of Khalili. Mohaqeq and Khalili had a falling out, however, over Mohaqeq's decision to run for president without the official approval of the party. Subsequently, Mohaqeq split away and formed his own party, *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan*.<sup>13</sup> The original Wahdat party has begun to lose influence and support among the Hazara, in part because of the pull of Mohaqeq's new party and likely because Khalili's position as Second Vice President distracts from his efforts to look after the needs of the Hazara.<sup>14</sup>

### **JAMIAT-E ISLAMI (ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF AFGHANISTAN)**

Led by Bahadruddin Rabbani, *Jamiat-e-Islami* became the dominant political resistance party in northeastern Afghanistan. In 1980, Jamiat was the second most popular resistance front and enjoyed strong support from the Tajik communities of Badakshan, the Panjshir Valley and Herat Province in the west.<sup>15</sup> Ahmad Massoud, Ismail Khan, Mullah Naqibullah and Zabibullah,<sup>16</sup> all influential Jamiat military commanders, would help galvanize *Jamiat* into one of the most formidable resistance movements of the Soviet-Afghan war. The failure of the Soviet Army to pacify the Panjshir Valley despite seven massive military offensives against the region between 1980 and 1984 solidified Ahmad Shah as a legendary commander

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<sup>12</sup> US State Department Afghanistan Culture and Ethnic Studies, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, at [http://iwpr.net/index.php?apc\\_state+hen-sabrina%20saqeb&s=o&o=afghan\\_elect\\_2005\\_profiles.html](http://iwpr.net/index.php?apc_state+hen-sabrina%20saqeb&s=o&o=afghan_elect_2005_profiles.html), accessed on 26 September 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Global Security, *Karim Khalili*, at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/khalili.htm>, accessed on 26 September 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 127.

<sup>16</sup> Zabibullah was based in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif and was responsible for the area from Faryab Province to Kunduz Province. He was killed in 1984. He was succeeded by a less charismatic and less ideological commander, Mawalwi Alam, who never achieved as high of a status as Zabibullah.

and helped preserve popular support for Jamiat throughout the region. In general, Jamiat is considered to be a moderate Islamist movement that drew recruits from those educated in government schools (both religious and secular) and among the *ulema* (in the north) and the naqshbandi Sufi order found throughout the north. Although multiple ethnic groups including Pashtuns formed comprised Jamiat, it is most commonly referred to be dominated by Tajiks from the northeast.

### **SUPERVISORY COUNCIL OF THE NORTH (SCN)**

In 1984, top resistance commanders operating the northern provinces of Takhar, Badakhshan, Balkh and Kunduz formed a council under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Massoud.<sup>17</sup> The Supervisory Council of the North became an integrated military unit comprised of both political and security components and posed the greatest threat to the communist occupation of Afghanistan in the north. Although many of the SCN leaders were affiliates of Rabbani's *Jamiat-e-Islami*, the SCN established deep ties with local communities and ran its affairs independently from the *Jamiat* leadership based in Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> Many former SCN commanders and fighters continue to exert influence and power at various levels throughout the Northern provinces.

### **HUMAN TERRAIN UZBEKS**

Although primarily inhabiting the North of Afghanistan, Uzbeks can be found all over the country. At present, Uzbeks in Afghanistan number just under three million, making up approximately nine percent of the country. They are concentrated in Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul, Takhar, Kunduz, and Faryab provinces. The most famous Uzbek in the country is undoubtedly the warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, a colorful character who has fought on most sides in the last thirty years. After the Taliban took control of his home base of Mazar-i Sharif he fled to Turkey, but has since returned to Afghanistan, and is once again debatably the most powerful man in Northern Afghanistan. Uzbeks speak Uzbek, a Turkic language, although many, especially outside of their core areas in Northern Afghanistan, speak Dari and other languages.

### **TAJIKS<sup>19</sup>**

Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan after the Pashtuns and comprise between 25-30% of the population. The Tajiks in Afghanistan tend to live in settled communities as opposed to a nomadic lifestyle. Pashtuns refer to them as Farsiwan, or speakers of Farsi, the lingua franca of Afghanistan (50% of Afghanistan speaks Farsi, as opposed to only 35% for Pashtu). Between the Tajiks and Pashtuns there has been significant animosity in recent years. Forming the

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<sup>17</sup> Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil War and the Future of the Region*, (NY: Palgrave, 2002), 92-93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Table on Tajik tribal genealogy is available at our site: <http://www.nps.edu/programs/CCS/Docs/Tribal%20Trees/Tajik.pdf>

backbone of the Northern Alliance, they also have a base in the nation of Tajikistan. They held out fiercely against the Taliban. Most Tajik are Sunni Muslims, but a few are Shi'a. Tajiks made up the majority of the Northern Alliance, both in terms of membership and leadership. Tribal ties have largely broken down among the Tajiks; therefore, social organization is defined primarily by geography. Despite their lack of cohesiveness the Tajiks are often brought together due to the perceived common threat posed by the Pashtuns.<sup>20</sup>

## **HAZARA**

The Hazara, a distinct ethnic and religious group within the population of Afghanistan, have often been the target of discriminatory and violent repression. Most likely descended from the Mongols of Genghis Khan, (there is also a strong argument that they are of Eastern Turkic origin), the Hazara are noticeably different in physical appearance when compared to the Pashtun majority. In terms of religion, the vast majority of the Hazara are of the Shi'a Muslim faith, again in contrast to the Pashtuns who are Sunni Muslim. Due to these differences, "the Hazara have experienced discrimination at the hands of the Pashtun-dominated government throughout the history of modern Afghanistan."<sup>21</sup> As the traditional underclass of Afghan society, Hazara were exploited and made to work as servants and laborers. As a result there tends to be an anti-government and anti-Pashtun bias among the Hazara. In present day Afghanistan, the Hazara are divided geographically into two main groups: the Hazarajat Hazara and those who live outside the Hazarajat. The Hazarajat is located in the Hindu Kush Mountains in central Afghanistan and is "centered around Bamiyan province and include[s] areas of Ghowr, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Ghazni province."<sup>22</sup> The Hazara living outside of the Hazarajat live in and around Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Samangan province. Due to atrocities committed against them by the Taliban, the Hazara by and large are opposed to the Taliban. In August 1998, the Taliban massacred approximately 4,000 Hazara in Mazara-e-Sharif; this massacre was followed by another the next month when the Taliban killed another 500 Hazara in Bamiyan. The Hezb-e Wahdat (Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan) is an umbrella political organization which commands the support of large numbers of Hazara. The Hazara are also often at odds with the Kuchi population within the Hazarajat, Wardak and Ghazni. [Hazara Genealogy \(PDF\)](#)

## **TATARS<sup>23</sup>**

The Tatars, a group of Turkic people most of them live in Republic of Tatarstan of the Russian Federation, around the Volga River in Russia. Large ethnic Diasporas are Central Asian and Caucasus of the former Soviet Union, Turkey and

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<sup>20</sup> 2007 CIA World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (accessed June 28, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> US State Department Afghanistan Culture and Ethnic Studies, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See the table on Tatar tribal genealogy at <http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Docs/Tribal%20Trees/Tatar.pdf>

Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, many of the Tatars settled after either trying to escape the Russians, or as traders. Majority are Sunni Muslims.

## **SECURITY LANDSCAPE**

Security in Regional Command North, which includes Balkh province, is among the best in the country. As the majority of the population in the north is non-Pashtun, the Taliban and al-Qaida have failed to establish a base there. Still, warlords, criminal groups, drug smugglers, and tribal feuds have destabilizing effects in RC North.<sup>i</sup>

The districts of primary concern are: Chintal, Char Bolaq

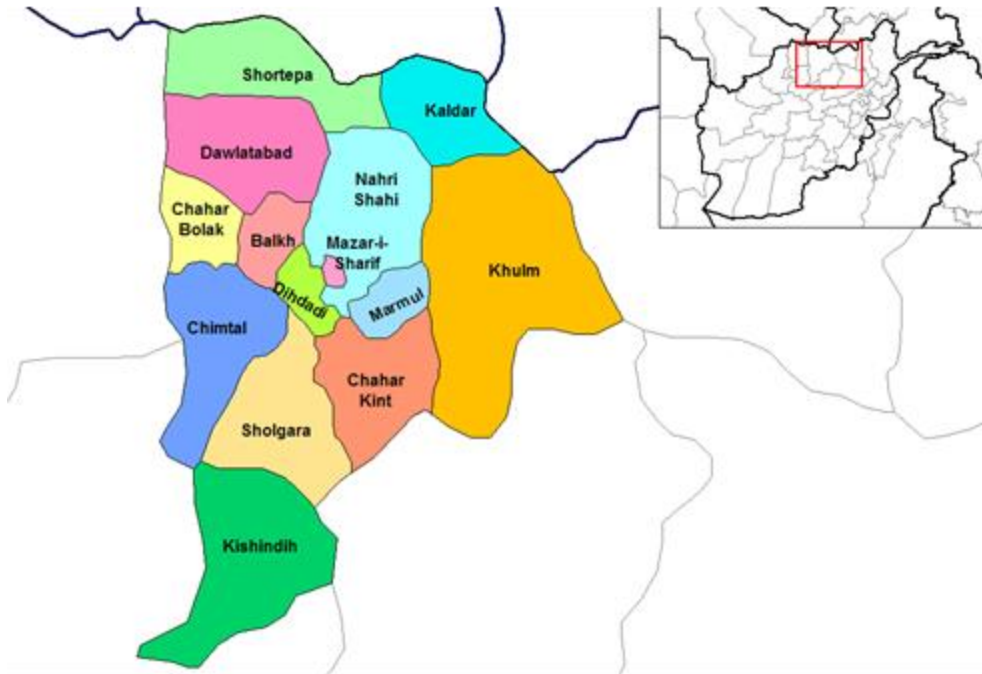
## **PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD TALIBAN**

There is very limited popular support for the Taliban, except for in a few enclaves inhabited by ethnic Pashtuns. These areas are mainly the Chintal and Char Bolaq districts.<sup>ii</sup>

## **DISTRICTS**

The districts of Balkh Province are

- Shortepa
- Kaldar
- Dawlatabad
- Nahri Shahi
- Khulm
- Chahar Bolak
- Balkh
- Dihdadi
- Mazar-e-Sharif
- Marmul
- Chintal
- Sholgara
- Chahar Kint
- Kishindh
- Zari (subdivided within Kishindh in 2005)



<sup>i</sup> "Regional Command North," Institute for the Study of War. <http://www.understandingwar.org/region/regional-command-north>. Accessed May 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Larsson, pg. 26.