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OUTSIDE, INSIDE

Afghanistan's paradoxical political party system (2001-16)

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FOREWORD

Since early 2002 Germany had actively joined the ISAF stabilization mission in Afghanistan which comprised more than 50 states and has engaged particularly in the development of democratic structures in this war-torn country.

The priority had been and still is the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan. These are absolute prerequisites for an efficient engagement to establish democracy in Afghanistan.

Germany has become one of the most active players in the reconstruction and development of the country and its civil society. We have to keep in mind the Bonn- Process (Petersberg) through which a new political basis was created for Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban, notably with the Bonn Agreement of 2001.

As the first German political Foundation, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) has opened an office in Kabul already in 2002 and immediately started work.

Despite all sacrifices and efforts of the International Community peace and stability has not been achieved, even after 16 years. Still the Taliban maintain control in many areas of the country.

There has been tremendous progress, however, in building state institutions, writing a new constitution, holding elections and especially developing the education sector with many schools and universities, spreading knowledge and fighting illiteracy.

But even these positive developments need peace and stability for lasting success.

Despite all efforts the Afghan Security Forces have not yet achieved the capability to guarantee law and order and security in the country. During the last two years we have witnessed a dramatic deterioration in security all over the country including Kabul.

Despite all set-backs the conditions in Afghanistan, particularly in the cities have much improved and the society is in spite of all shortcomings and deficiencies more democratic than ever in its tormented history.

The country remains, however, fragmented in its ethnic structures and the state building process is advancing very slow with many setbacks. The differences in development between cities and the countryside are still enormous.

Perhaps the International Community had underestimated the difficulties in developing Afghanistan into a functioning democratic model state which has not been achieved, even after 16 years of engaged efforts and many sacrifices.

Afghanistan, that "Graveyard of Empires" will remain a state sui generis with its own character and failures.

A functioning democratic law and order state with good governance, separation of powers, without endemic corruption and nepotism will remain a wishful vision for the time being.

At best we have created a weak and immature democracy.

Afghanistan is still not a nation state but remains a tribal society, not really united but divided. The state is not yet capable to exert full control over the tribes and different ethnic divisions. In this peasant- tribal society loyalties are oriented locally and not nationally. There is no trust in the nation-state and in its central government as long as Kabul does not have the monopoly of power and has to share influence with local Warlords or other powerbrokers.

The asymmetrical war against the Taliban is continuing and success remains uncertain .After 16 years of struggle and heavy fighting the government has finally reached the understanding that there is no military solution on hand. Reconciliation and a durable peace can only be achieved through negotiations with the Taliban.

Intensive bombing raids and drone attacks can achieve tactical military goals and weaken the enemy. But they will not achieve peace. In the affected population despair and hatred might increase and create more enemies and on the long bring even more support for the Taliban.

More efforts are necessary indeed to put Afghanistan on safe feet.

Germany has pulled its weight with the specific instrument of the Political Foundations and focused on the development of democratic structures and the civil society in Afghanistan.

But also in this context future success will depend of improved security. Behind high concrete walls and barbed wire or from the security in bunkers you cannot be particularly successful in your contacts to civil society or achieve democratic progress.

To achieve political stabilization we have to further support the parliament (Wolesi Jirga) and the political parties in the country. Parties in Afghanistan do appear already since the elections

in 1949 and 1952 though with diminished functions and not yet officially allowed by the King but trying to fill the role of opposition. Their role, however, has not been comparable to our party system. In addition to these we find also political parties

Many parties or political groups have their origin in local and ethnic solidarity and power structures on the basis of tribes, religious groups and even intellectual groups in Kabul.

The origin of the existing *Tanzim* parties is the "Peshawar Seven" which had been established as military command structures for different mujahedeen groups fighting the Soviet occupation.

During the last decades political parties in our sense have also developed, they range from Maoists to Islamists and do play a growing role in the political arena.

Research on parties is still infrequent but should be an important part of Afghanistan studies. It seems absolutely necessary to deepen the knowledge about the spectrum of political parties in Afghanistan. The role of political parties is an important indicator, how far Afghanistan has advanced on the difficult way of democratization.

The present study authored by Thomas Ruttig from Afghanistan Analysts Network -being one of the most experienced specialists on Afghanistan- will shed more light on the important topic of political parties in Afghanistan. He has continued his research based on his paper from 2006 which also had been published by KAS. This new research paper will further improve and deepen the knowledge about political parties in Afghanistan.

I hope that this paper will establish guidelines for further investigation and will find many interested readers!

Gunter Mulack
Ambassador (retired)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the status and relevance of political parties in present-day Afghanistan and provides a legal and political context on their evolution. It draws on and provides an update of the author's 2006 paper on the same subject, published by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS).¹

The paper aims to answer the following questions:

- How have Afghanistan's individual political parties evolved since they were fully legalised for the first time in the country's history, and since a political party system was established under the 2004 constitution?
- How has the legal framework in which the parties operate evolved and how has it influenced the evolution of the political party system?
- How have the major political currents – Islamists, (former) leftists, ethno-nationalists as well the new democrats and neo-Islamists – evolved within the existing political system?
- How have individual parties developed internally regarding inner-party reform and democratisation, how have they moved between continuity and fragmentation?
- What has changed since the National Unity Government (NUG) came to power in September 2014?

The paper will challenge persisting and simplified assumptions about political parties in Afghanistan, both in literature as well as among policy makers. These include assertions such as current Afghan parties are mainly "patronage machines... [r]ather than relying on political ideology;" that there "has never been much of a functioning political opposition ... in Afghan history;"² or that political parties are mainly limited to circles of urban intellectuals.

The role of political parties in Afghanistan's highly centralised presidential system, with only limited parliamentary checks-and-balances, is an important yardstick by which to measure how the country has fared on its opportunity to democratise in the post-Taliban era. The parties also show how

the socio-political diversity of the country's population is reflected in the political system. The paper thus explores how government policy during 'the Karzai years'³ and in the first years of his successor Ashraf Ghani's presidency impacted the emergence of (more) democratic and representative political parties and how the political parties' legal status relates to political practice. It aims at answering the question whether political parties have been strengthened in the current environment and have the potential to lead to a (more) democratic and representative political system in Afghanistan.

The paper is based on research conducted during extensive fieldwork in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2016. It draws on a large number of interviews with political party leaders, activists and analysts. The second major source are the regular Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) publications on the Afghan political party scene since 2009.⁴ This is supplemented by references to the increasing, but still limited, body of literature in this field, both by Afghan and non-Afghan authors, as well as by media sources, including those of the parties themselves. Most available literature, however, does not focus on the parties but rather wider on elections or democracy. Meanwhile, both government and non-governmental organisations' interest in political parties has virtually disappeared. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and KAS seem to remain the only institutions that continue to regularly work in this field in Afghanistan.⁵

The author would like to thank his AAN colleagues for their research, which substantially informed

¹ Thomas Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists – and a Void in the Center: Afghanistan's Political Parties and where they come from (1902-2006)," Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Kabul/Berlin 2006, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_9674-544-2-30.pdf.

² Noah Coburn and Anna Larson, *Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan: Elections in an Unstable Political Landscape*, New York, Columbia University Press 2013, 69, 73.

³ After 2001, as a result of the Bonn agreement, Hamed Karzai first became chairman of the Afghan Interim Administration (2001-02). After the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga, he headed the Afghan Transitional Authority (2002-04). In 2004 and 2009 he was elected president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. His two constitutionally possible terms ended in 2014.

⁴ AAN dispatches of my own and of AAN colleagues as well as interviews conducted by the author are not quoted directly in this paper, in order to limit the number of footnotes. AAN papers by guest authors are quoted separately. Find a list of AAN's publications on political parties in the annex.

⁵ Of particular value were the regular political party assessments by the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), unfortunately discontinued after 2011, at least for public consumption. The last one is: "Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties After the 2009 and 2010 Elections," National Democratic Institute, 2011, <https://www.ndi.org/files/Afghanistan-political-parties-july-2011.pdf>.

this paper. Particular thanks go to Khaled Gharanai, Project Assistant at KAS Kabul, and Obaid Ali, AAN researcher, for their assistance on this project. The author is also grateful to the three heads of the KAS office in Kabul for their support, Babak Khalatbari, who offered to publish my first paper, Nils Wörmer and Matthias Riesenkampff.

1.1 Structure of the paper

Following section 1 that lays out the structure of the paper and definitions of key terminology (political party, political current, democracy), section 2 focuses on the context. It gives an overview of the conditions in which Afghanistan's political party system evolved after the overthrow of the Taleban regime. Factors will be scrutinised that favoured or hampered the chances for a democratic, party-based political system evolving in post-2001 Afghanistan. This includes historical socio-economic and political factors, such as the emergence of forces of modernist change. Firstly, this pertains to the emergence of a new educated class before World War II from which, after World War II, the leaders of the country's first-ever political parties came who shaped the two democratic periods of that time: the "period of the liberal parliament" (1947-52)⁶ and the "decade of democracy" (1963-73). It lays out the three historical currents into which the author divides the parties of those periods, up to 2001. Regarding the obstacles facing political parties, the section will look at the inadequate implementation of the 2001 Bonn agreement, the roadmap for post-Taleban Afghanistan and its consequences for the legal framework that severely hampers the development of political parties, particularly those of a pro-democratic tendency, and limits their political space. Other such factors include the militarisation of political forces and the role of Afghan political Islam.

Section 3 details the development of the most important political parties during both the Karzai and initial Ghani years. This is done within the framework of the three historical political currents – Islamists, (former) leftists, ethno-nationalists) – and look at the emergence of two new ones – new democrats and neo-Islamists. Sub-sections will look at the parties' role in past elections, at internal efforts to self-democratise (in two case studies)

⁶ For detail about the movements in this period, see my 1985 diploma thesis: Thomas Ruttig, Zur Bedeutung der bürgerlichen Oppositionsbewegung der 50er Jahre unseres Jahrhunderts für die Formierung progressiver politischer Kräfte in Afghanistan, Berlin, Humboldt-Universität 1985.

and at government attempts to curb their numbers. Section 4 looks at the first 18 months of the National Unity Government and whether there has been a change in the government's approach to political parties.

The conclusions will establish the trends and possible perspectives of Afghanistan's political party system.

1.2 Terminology

1.2.1 Political parties and currents; political party system

This paper refers to "political parties" for political formations that call themselves parties, regardless of their individual size. This includes those recognised as such under Afghan law but also a number that have, for different reasons, not been registered. Furthermore, there are parties that are fully civilian in character (ie not linked to any illegal armed group) and others that have evolved as, or still are, predominantly military commander networks. The latter are usually called *tanzim* (Arabic/Persian/Pashto: "organisation") in Afghanistan.⁷

The *tanzims* and their leaders are a modern phenomenon in Afghanistan. The rule of traditional elites replaced by that of warlords and local commanders is only a result of the country's history over the past four decades.⁸ Political parties in general, in comparison, have a longer history in Afghanistan (see section 3).

Under current Afghan law, parties have to comply with various formal requirements in order to be registered. These, in themselves, force parties to consolidate in a number of ways, including: creating a formal organisation with a leader; generating a minimum number of members; establishing a countrywide presence; developing a political programme and constitution that distinguishes them from social and civil society organisations, membership regulations, financing as well as procedures to determine their leaders. It

⁷ Afghans mainly use the term for the Islamist 'parties' that were supported by Pakistan during the 1980s. Almost all *tanzims* are now registered as parties. Some added the prefix *hezb* (party) to their original name, eg *Hezb-e Jamiat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan*. To keep it simple, I use an English plural for the term (*tanzims*, not Dari: *tanzimha* or Pashto: *tanzimuna*). Note: All quotes from non-English sources (mainly Pashto, Dari or German) are usually translations by the author.

⁸ Thomas Ruttig: "Die an den Hebeln sitzen: Genese und Zukunft der 'Warlords' in Afghanistans neuer Oligarchie," INAMO, 78 (2014), 14-8.

is obvious, however, that a large gap exists between these legal requirements and what happens in practice politically, both on the government's side and on that of the parties. This includes weak monitoring by the relevant authorities and superficial adherence to registration criteria. The NDI found in 2010, for example, that the parties' constitutions are superficial and "are not working documents for the parties."⁹ While most party constitutions stipulate the holding of regular party congresses, this happens as an exception rather than the rule.

Another term used in this paper is "current," for groups of several political parties that share a certain ideological tendency, ie "Islamist," "leftist" or "ethno-nationalist." Some parties fall into two such categories.

There are, for example, Islamist and leftist ethno-nationalist parties. There is a *tanzim* that is mainly ethno-nationalist, but not Islamist in its ideology (although it has Islamist members). There are parties that are Islamist and ethno-nationalist at the same time. One ethno-nationalist party tries to present itself as a 'jihadi' party, as it opposed the Soviet occupation; however it never had a significant military structure (neither is it Islamist). Some initially pro-democratic parties, with the aim of becoming supra-ethnic, are becoming increasingly ethno-nationalist. (Find details on individual parties in chapter 3.)

For the term "political party system," this author uses leading political party researcher Oskar Niedermayer's definition: "the totality of parties in a political system and the fabric of their mutual relations." He adds that this fabric of the parties' mutual relations – and particularly "inter-party competition" – is key for the assessment of the character of a political party system.¹⁰

1.2.2 Democracy

In this paper the terms "democracy" and "democratic" refer to the aims of the road-map for post-Taliban Afghanistan agreed upon at the UN-chaired Afghanistan Conference held in Germany, the so-called Bonn Agreement.¹¹ Participants included leading members of established Afghan political parties and groups who were readying

themselves to take part in shaping Afghanistan's political future. Those aims included ending the armed conflict and establishing a "fully representative government ... through free and fair elections," acknowledging the "right of the people of Afghanistan to freely determine their own political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice."

The term democracy, in this paper, is not used for a 'state' that can be 'reached', particularly given the short time-span in question, or limited to holding regular elections – although regular, free and fair elections, and the participation of political parties in them, are indispensable elements of a modern democracy. The term is also not used as a reference for certain 'western' models, eg "liberal democracy", as a model for Afghanistan. Democracy takes shape in a country's specific context.

Experience over the past 15 years in Afghanistan has shown, though, that international actors have often made the holding of elections the only criteria for the state of democracy in Afghanistan. In 2006, US president George W. Bush declared the 'democracy mission' accomplished, stating that "Afghanistan has ... built a democratic government."¹² The country has indeed held regular elections. But most were not held within the time stipulated by the Bonn roadmap and, later, in the constitution. More importantly, none of the elections have been free or fair, instead they have been regularly marred by fraud, manipulation and international interference. More and more voters have been deprived of their access to cast their votes, both by the deteriorating security situation and the decision to concentrate polling stations in population centres.

2. A DEMOCRATIC, PARTY-BASED SYSTEM FOR POST-2001 AFGHANISTAN?

The overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001 paved the way for Afghanistan to become a country with a pluralist, participatory, democratic

⁹ "Political Parties in Afghanistan..." [see FN 5], 18.

¹⁰ Oskar Niedermayer (ed), *Handbuch Parteienforschung*, Wiesbaden, Springer 2013, 84.

¹¹ Officially: "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions", <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm>.

¹² "Interview of the President in Roundtable with Foreign Print Media", The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 4 January 2006, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080104-10.html (last accessed 7 January 2008; not accessible online any more); "White House Outlines Bush Address to U.N. General Assembly", *USINFO*, 19 September 2006, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2006/09/20060919175723esnamfuak0.9628717.html#axzz3ZJQ6KsyR>.

political system. In Bonn it was agreed that this system would be shaped “in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice.” In 2004, these political aims and principles were adopted into the new Afghan constitution, which includes the right to form political parties. Since then, the aim of democratisation has been upheld by the Afghan government and its donors.¹³

The right to form political parties was already enshrined in the Political Parties Law that came into force in September 2003. It stated that “[t]he political system of the State of Afghanistan is based on the principles of democracy and pluralism of political parties” (Art. 3) and that citizens could establish parties. It gave registered parties the right to assemble peacefully, free expression through their own and other media, coalition building and “introducing candidates at all elections,” without clarifying in which form. Registration would be with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), which was, in itself, controversial.¹⁴ The law also stated that parties could be dissolved if they were to “pursue objectives that are opposed to the principles of the holy religion Islam..., use force, threaten with or propagate the use of force; ... incite ethnic racial, religious or sect[arian] violence; ... create a real danger to the rights and freedom of individuals or intentionally disrupt public order and security”, and received funding from abroad.

These provisions were not fully adopted into the 2004 constitution. The constitution stipulated the right to form political parties (in Art 35) and that the composition of the lower house (Wolesi or “People’s” Jirga) of the Afghan parliament (Shura-ye Melli, National Council) would be decided in “general, free and fair elections.” (Art 83).¹⁵ It did

¹³ See for example the Afghan government’s statement at the Rio summit 2012 speaking of the country’s “young democracy” or a 2015 EU statement on long-term cooperation, setting “a stable democratic country for all Afghans” as a political aim. “Statement of H. E. Dr. Zalmay Rassoul Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) 22 June 2012,” Afghan mission to the UN, 22 June 2012, <http://www.afghanistan-un.org/2012/06/statement-of-h-e-dr-zalmay-rassoul-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-afghanistan-conference-on-sustainable-development-rio20-22-june-2012/#sthash.8DR5elO1.dpuf>; “The EU and Afghanistan initial Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development,” EU press release, 2 July 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150702_04_en.htm.

¹⁴ It is possible that the minister himself could be a member of a party and therefore biased.

¹⁵ Jirgas and shuras are terms for *local* bodies of consensual (male only) decision-making in Afghan traditional society. King Amanullah adopted them for the

not, however, link both, so did not explicitly give a role to political parties in the elections. Going beyond the Political Parties Law, it added that parties should not be “based on ethnicity, language, Islamic school of thought (*mazhab-e fiqhi*) and region.” These provisions looked good on paper, but they were selectively applied over the following years. Thus, parties were easily able to circumvent them. More importantly, no party has ever been investigated for their association with any of the hundreds of illegally armed groups. With that, the *tanzims* began to effectively be exempt from many existing rules, as the government neither had the means nor the will to impose them. There was also the danger that the law could be selectively applied against weaker parties that were not part of the post-2001 establishment.

Due to the 2001 US-led anti-Taliban interveners’ rhetoric of democratisation and human rights to legitimise their intervention, Afghans – including the elites and the Bonn participants – expected that the “Bonn process” would lead to a democratic system. Consequently, and particularly in the initial post-2001 years, Islamist political forces also saw themselves compelled to adopt some pro-democratic rhetoric and participated in the post-2001 political process, including its electoral and parliamentary elements.¹⁶

2.1 Factors conducive to a post-Taliban party-based democratic system

There were several factors that worked in favour of a post-Taliban democratic system. Firstly, the

semi-parliamentarian bodies he planned to establish. Both terms do not indicate democratic decision-making *per se* or that they are elections-based. See: Benjamin Buchholz, *Loya Jirga: Afghanischer Mythos, Ratsversammlung und Verfassungsorgan*, Freiburg et al, Rombach-Verlag 2013.

¹⁶ The two most influential Islamist parties, *Jamiat-e Islami* and *Hezb-e Islami*, both state in their programmes that only a government that is based on “the will of people” would be legitimate. While *Jamiat* explicitly commits itself to “democracy” and “party pluralism” (but not explicitly to elections), while *Hezb* leaves it open in which way the will of the people will be determined. According to a 2010 interview with *Hezb* leader Hekmatyar, the party is in favour of free and fair elections *according to Islamic rules*. Transcript with the author. Both party programmes are in: *Maramnamaha wa Asasnamaha-ye Ahzab-e Siasi-ye Afghanistan* [Programmes and Statutes of Afghanistan’s Political Parties], Vol 2, Kabul, Justice Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 1384 [2005/06], 827-34, 1158-70. “Western model of democracy not suitable for Afghanistan - party leader,” *ISAF Afghan Media Review*, 23 October 2004, author’s archive.

Bonn pledges had the support of broad sections of Afghan society. Time was ripe for democracy in Afghanistan following a succession of non- or anti-democratic regimes, which had proven unable to meet people's most basic social, economic and political needs. They had experienced Daud's one-party republic (1973-78); three phases of a leftist regime¹⁷ (1978-92) directly propped up by Soviet troops from 1979 to 1989; and two Islamist ones, the post-communist *mujahedin* government that let the country descend into factional wars (1992-96). Finally, there was the Taliban regime (1996-2001), when the country was almost completely isolated from the international community. The experience of almost four decades of lawlessness, extreme violence and impunity for the perpetrators made democratic principles look attractive.¹⁸

When working as a UN advisor to the Afghan commission preparing the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga (ELJ), the author of this paper attended, over a six-month-period, hundreds of meetings with Afghans from all provinces, from all ethnic and social groups, both men and women. It was obvious during the ELJ preparations that Afghans were not unfamiliar with democratic procedures, neither Afghan style – in the form of jirgas and shuras¹⁹ – nor Western style. They were keen to

¹⁷ I avoid the often-used term "communist" here. The analysis of the exact character of the then ruling party (*Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan*, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan/PDPA, later renamed *Hezb-e Watan*, Fatherland Party), with its eclectic ideological basis of Marxist, nationalist and 'third-worldist' elements, has often been overshadowed by the context of the Cold War. This discussion, however, will be essential for better understanding the history of Afghanistan's political parties.

¹⁸ A KAS survey before the first elections in 2004, although not representative but conducted in a still relatively peaceful period when people could be expected to answer relatively freely, showed that only twelve per cent of the respondents generally opposed 'democracy' – despite widespread misgivings about the abuse of the word by the PDPA regime. In the Taliban's former 'capital' Kandahar, even less – only five per cent – did so. A majority of surveyed Afghans were open to democratic values, provided they were be "harmonised" with Islamic principles. (What exactly 'democracy' meant to them remains open, but the survey's result seems to indicate that there was at least a large appetite for political participation.) Werner Prohl and Felix Werdin, "Demokratie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Afghanistan. Empirische Untersuchung zur Akzeptanz demokratischer Werte in einer islamisch geprägten Gesellschaft," *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, Kabul 2004, 2, 11-2, 21.

¹⁹ When the author helped to organise an election for the ELJ in Tagab district (Kapisa province), community

break the spell of what is known as the *tufangsalaran*²⁰ and there was an overwhelming desire for political participation and inclusive political decision-making procedures. This mood was reflected by the massive and enthusiastic participation in the ELJ and the first electoral cycle – the presidential election in 2004 and parliamentary and provincial council elections in 2005.

Secondly, various historical, socio-political factors suggested that a democratic Afghanistan might be built. These included the results of modernisation attempts that began in the early 20th century, meaning that Afghanistan's democratic tradition spans more than a century. It encompasses several periods of modernising reforms and democratic openings.

In the political sphere, the push for modernisation began in the early 20th century with the first constitutional movement (locally called the *mashruta-khwahan-e awwal*) of 1903-09. It was still limited to the few who had been educated at the court and the few schools. It was quickly suppressed.

This was followed by the *Jawanan-e Afghan* (Young Afghans) movement, which inspired the reform programme carried out during the reign of the reformist King Amanullah (1919-29). Under Amanullah, the first elements of parliamentarianism were introduced and civil rights for all Afghans – defined as all those who lived within the country's territory – guaranteed by a constitution.²¹ Amanullah's reforms contributed

leaders told him that his introduction to electoral procedures was not necessary because "we have TV and know how this works" and the only requirement was for the UN to monitor the ballot box.

It should be added that shuras and jirgas are not democratic institutions in the modern sense, not least because they usually exclude women. They have their origins in Afghanistan's historic tribal society, but have been adopted – as terms, not in their original function – into the institutional set-up of the Afghan state, starting with King Amanullah and his 1923 constitution that contained parliamentary elements with partly elected state and provincial councils (*shura-ye daulati* and *shuraha-ye welayati*). For the discussion of the democratic content of shuras and jirgas, see Buchholz, *Loya Jirga...* [see FN 14].

²⁰ This Dari word is insufficiently translated by our "warlords" and refers to "those who rule by the gun," i.e. warlords and lower-level commanders, reflecting the often localised form of Afghan politics.

²¹ The country's first constitution (*nezamnama-ye asasi-ye daulat-e Afghanistan*) of 1923 provided for consultative bodies that were to include elected members. The King also established a Legislative Council

particularly to breaking up the country's traditional social structures and expanding the education system, which, over the decades to follow, led to the emergence of a modern educated (middle) class. Its members referred to themselves as *roshanfekran* ("enlightened thinkers").

The Young Afghans were inspired, originally, by the late 19th century *tanzimat* reforms in Turkey, the emergence of the Young Turks movement and, later, by Atatürk's rebuilding of the new Turkey. Another influence were the reforms under Iran's new Shah, Mohammad Reza. The Japanese victory in the 1905 war with Russia – the first of an Asian country over a European power – was a further boost towards independent development all over Asia.

As democracy is impossible without democrats themselves, Amanullah's establishment of a modern education system had a more direct effect. The numbers of schools and students grew exponentially, attracting the sons of the rural elites. (Girls' education was limited in scope and came to an end after Amanullah's overthrow.) With the *roshanfekran*, it created the social forces that became the drivers of political modernisation in the years after World War II. Some of them fostered constitutional-democratic reform groups (described in the following section), which later became the first political parties, and reached out to other segments of the population. Authors such as the Afghan Taqi Wahedi and Russian Vladimir Boyko, called them "party nuclei" or "proto-parties."²² In those groups, certain prominent

(*mahfel-e qanun*). In 1928, he even suggested a directly elected parliament of 150 members, although with limited legislative powers that, however, did not materialise, as Amanullah was toppled in the following year. Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*, Stanford, Stanford University Press 1969, 251, 259. Soviet sources claim that he also tried to set up a political organisation, *Istiqlal wa Tajaddud* (Independence and Renewal) but do not provide sources. Viktor Korgun, "Afghanistan auf der ersten Etappe seiner unabhängigen Entwicklung," in *Afghanistan: Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Berlin, Akademie der Wissenschaften der UdSSR 1981, 155.

²² Taqi Wahedi, "Diruz wa imruz-e ahzab-e Afghani," In: *Khat-e sewum* (Meshhed), no 2-3 (spring/summer 1382=2003), 97; Vladimir Boyko, "The Origins of Political Parties in Contemporary Afghanistan in the Light of New Archival Data," *Central Asia Journal* no 46 (Summer 2000), 196. Afghan historian Ghoobar dates this back to the first decade of the 20th century and called the circles of the first *mashrutiat* (constitutional movement) from 1903 to 1909 "parties," even though there are no sources showing they used this term themselves. Mir Gholam Muhammad Ghoobar, *Afghanistan dar masir-e tarikh*, Kabul 1346 [1967], 717.

figures or families provided continuity, as well as an organisational and ideological backbone over several of these periods.²³ In the mid-1960s Afghanistan even experienced its own student revolt, a few years before the West did in 1968.²⁴

Such pro-democratic forces emerged again after 2001, in the form of a new political current, the new 'pro-democratic' parties. Some of those parties were initiated by young activists who had not been involved in the previous conflicts, others by older ones (most of them former leftists – often former Maoists, but also some supporters of the *Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan* [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan/PDPA] – and a few former *mujahedin*) who wanted to draw a clear line under their violent past. In the 1980s and 1990s some of these activists had opted out of the armed struggle on either side, although they found it difficult not to take sides politically.²⁵ Some of them saw themselves as the successors of the activists of the two first democratic periods, and took up their democratisation agenda.

2.1.1 The democratic phases of 1947-52 and 1964-73

There were two periods of democratisation following World War II. Much like Amanullah's reform programme, they began as top-down government policy, but were taken up by the *roshanfekran*, going beyond what the government had in mind. The first one, from 1947 to 1952, brought about the first secret and pluralistic parliamentary elections in 1949. The election resulted in the reformers establishing a small but ultimately wider foothold within parliament, which eventually became an organised opposition movement. Like the earlier Afghan reformers, they

²³ One of the most famous of those activists was Mir Gholam Muhammad Ghoobar [see FN 22]. He started his activity in the Young Afghan media in the 1920s. He was a liberal member of parliament and newspaper editor in the 1940/50s and played a role in the emerging pluralistic political party scene in the mid-1960s. Another prominent actor, from the 1940s to the 1980s, was the Mahmudi family members who led the first pro-democratic party and later several Maoist groups. In a symbolic gesture, democratically-minded Afghans every year visit the graves of Ghoobar and other deceased democratic activists during the Islamic festival of Eid-e Qorban.

²⁴ Ruttig, *Zur Bedeutung...* [see FN 6], 81-6.

²⁵ Thomas Ruttig, "Afghanistan's Democrats: From underground into marginalisation" in *Afghanistan 1979–2009: In the Grip of Conflict* e-book, Middle East Institute, Washington 2009, <http://www.mei.edu/content/afghanistans-democrats-underground-marginalization>.

took inspiration from regional developments, particularly from Mossadegh's nationalist government in neighbouring Iran in 1951-53, emulating its opposition to neo-colonialism. Other events around the world, such as the post-World War II de-colonisation movements and the 1968 students revolts, also spurred them on. The movement was also a reaction to the inflexibility of a state led by an exclusive, aristocratic tribal elite, which led the country into an economic crisis immediately after World War II. These political ideas, as well as their protagonists, were a constant throughout all of these periods.

Initial attempts to form a united reformist party failed, though. The leaders of the movement already responded to the main cleavages within Afghan society: between ethnic groups as well as between modernists (often revolutionary) and conservatives, or Islamist and secular forces. The conservatives chose to avoid a rift with the government, while some progressive MPs set up political parties to criticise the government, even attempting to obtain the government's permission to do so. The parties criticised the failure of the elites related to the monarchy to modernise the country's economy and pushed for fairer social relations (for example, by taxing land-owners, not only farmers and the urban working classes), as well as for full-fledged "democratisation." They advocated for the participation of "all classes" in deciding on "matters of society," free elections based on legalised "national and democratic parties", and a government responsible to parliament.²⁶ The parties were never legalised, however, and had to operate in a 'grey zone' before they were eventually suppressed.

Economic factors contributed to this first democratic period. After World War II, the government quickly saw itself depleted of its hard-currency reserves, obtained from war-related exports (such as furs, wool and cotton to the warring countries). These reserves had funded ambitious infrastructure projects, which had failed. The large-scale irrigation and land reform programme in the Helmand and Arghandab valleys, in particular, financed from the budget but carried out by a US company, generated much opposition. It had been designed to settle Pashtun communities and develop manufacturing industries to balance the industrial advantage of northern Afghanistan. In many respects, it was an early nation-building programme, the aim of which

²⁶ Defined as "rule by the people through the people for people." Abdul Rahman Mahmudi, leader of Hezb-e Khalq (People's Party), quoted in: Ruttig, *Zur Bedeutung...*, 72, 75 [see FN 6].

was to strengthen the economically disadvantaged southern Pashtun majority. When it failed, Prime Minister Muhammad Hashem was replaced by his far less autocratic brother, Shah Mahmud, in May 1946. In addition, the king, who had come to the throne in 1933 in the age of 17, started to gain real influence and proved to be more politically open-minded than the old elite of the Musaheban family (to which Hashem and Mahmud belonged).

For his part, prime minister Mahmud abolished torture and released political prisoners, among them members of the *Jawanan-e Afghan*.²⁷ He tolerated political activity by the newly formed political groups led by the *roshanfekran*, who acted in the tradition of the earlier modernist movements. Some were initially supported by the emerging class of Afghan entrepreneurs as well as by an ambitious rival in Mahmud's ruling royal Pashtun Muhammadzai clan, his nephew, Sardar Muhammad Daud. Daud, previously defence, then interior minister and finally commander of the army's central corps in Kabul, was sidelined by Mahmud. This had the effect of drawing him into the opposition, where he attempted to garner the support of the new *roshanfekran*-led groups.

While the government's agenda did have modernising aspects, the political groups' agendas went beyond that, aiming to democratise the Afghan state. These included a transition to a constitutional monarchy, which overlapped with nationalist (irredentist) claims over "Pashtunistan," ie the Pashtun-inhabited areas of Pakistan, which had been split from Afghanistan by British colonialism (the so-called "Pashtun question.") This transition fostered a drive towards ethno-linguistic emancipation, as it heralded Pashto as being the second national language, which was not in official use at the time.

In contrast to the original *mashruta-khwahan* and Young Afghans, most of the leaders and activists of the pro-reformist political groups did not come from circles connected with the royal court. Only some came from the Pashtun tribal aristocracy. Most were from the new post-Amanullah urban intelligentsia, in some cases also from more peripheral areas.²⁸ These groups – originally united and known as the *Wesh Dzalmian* (in Pashto) or *Jawanan-e Bedar* (in Dari: Awakened Youth), a

²⁷ Former King Amanullah never returned. He had been living in Italy and Switzerland ever since and died in 1960.

²⁸ Faridullah Bezhan, "Ethno-religious dynamics and the emergence of the Hezbe Seri Itehad (Secret Unity Party) in Afghanistan in the late 1940s", *Central Asian Survey* 12/2012, 31(4).

movement, not a party – organised discussion circles, public events and protest demonstrations, and supported strikes in the country's newly developing industries.²⁹

The *Wesh Dzalmian* movement soon split into various groups. Ethnic fault-lines played a role in the split but the parting of ways was also due to differences regarding the degree various leaders wanted to push for reform. Some were moderates, trying to maintain close links to the monarchy and the government, whom they saw as allies in their modernising aims. Others were more radical, a minority even pro-republican. Some prioritised the "Pashtun question;" others were sceptical about it and emphasised social issues. None of these groups had more than a few hundred members.

Separately, political groups among the Shia minority emerged as the result of a 'cultural renaissance' movement. This had been initiated soon after World War II by a religiously educated intellectual from Jauzjan province, Seyyed Muhammad Ismail Balkhi. In his speeches and sermons, he called for equality for the Shiites and for a democratisation of the country.³⁰ This provided some overlap with the other reformist groups. Balkhi's activity also coincided with an uprising against heavy taxation led by Arbab Ebrahim Bacha-ye Gauswar during the winter of 1945/46 in the Hazarajat district of Shahrestan. Gauswar later joined a coup attempt (conducted in an amateurish way, and which ultimately failed) in Kabul during Nowruz 1328 (1949), in which Balkhi was also involved. As a result, the group was

suppressed and dispelled. Balkhi (1922-68) was imprisoned and remained in custody for 14 years.³¹

Sunni Islamists, however, were yet to emerge as an organised force. Activists who would later join that part of the spectrum, including, for example, members of the Mojaddedi family, were still participating, or at least in contact with, the *Wesh Dzalmian* movement.³²

In the 1949 parliamentary elections, the first held by secret ballot and without open government interference, five members of the original *Wesh Dzalmian* movement were elected: apart from Ghobar, another the historian, Abdulhai Habibi, Abdulrahman Mahmudi, a medical doctor,³³ Gul Pacha Ulfat, a poet, and Karim Nazihi from Andkhoi in northern Afghanistan. They formed the *Jabha-ye Melli* (National Front/NF), the first ever political opposition caucus in an Afghan parliament. The name derived from Mossadegh's party in Iran. In Northern Afghanistan, *Ittehad wa Taraqi* (Unity and Progress), a group that followed pan-Turkist ideas; its name was similar to the official one used by the constitutionalist Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire. Led by two brothers, Faryab MP Muhammad Nazar Nawa and Abu-I-Khair Khairi, it mainly worked underground and even is said to have pondered an armed uprising. In the *Wolesi Jirga*, it cooperated with the NF. Both groups together soon attracted 11 fellow MPs as members and up to four dozen others as sympathisers – together more than a third out of a house of 120 MPs.³⁴ One of them, Ulfat, was elected second deputy speaker.

After the NF successfully initiated a more liberal press law in January 1951, a number of pro-reform 'newspapers' (which were, in fact, more like crudely produced pamphlets) with a circulation of around 1,500, started to appear.³⁵ The group also

²⁹ The first one ever took place in 1949 in the Jabal as-Seraj textile factory. It is unknown who organised these strikes, and it can be assumed that they were spontaneous. I heard from a source that wants to remain anonymous that Dr Mahmudi [see FN 26] was one of the strikers' contact points. First union-like organisations were reported only earlier from around 1967, in the form of 'funds of mutual support' among factory workers by the PDPA, see: Thomas Ruttig, "May Day on Workers Street: Trade unions and the status of labour in Afghanistan," AAN dispatch, 4 May 2014, <http://aan.af/1mr9AKd>. According to Soviet sources, there were 6,000 industrial workers in 1954 in Afghanistan.

³⁰ Author's interviews in Kabul. See also: David B Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press 2002, 326; [Muhammad Ismail Akbar, ed], *Daftar-e mutale'at-e siyasi "Rah-e ayenda"* [The political studies magazine "Rah-e ayenda"], n.d. [Kabul 2006], 2.

³¹ Rolf Bindemann, *Religion und Politik bei den schi'itischen Hazâra in Afghanistan, Iran und Pakistan*, Berlin, Verlag Das Arabische Buch 1987, 24-9, 37.

³² Ruttig, *Zur Bedeutung...* [see FN 6], annex 2.

³³ On Mahmudi, I have to correct my 2006 paper: He was neither Shia nor Hazara; he came from a Sunni family in Kabul.

³⁴ Ghobar writes that parliament had 171 members. Mir Gholam Mohammad Ghobar, *Afghanestan in the Course of History, Volume Two*, Alexandria, Va, 2001, 217. This book, however, is controversial; it was published first in 1999 by Ghobar's son Hashmat, and many Afghan researchers doubt that it has been originally authored by the elder Ghobar (or at least been edited).

³⁵ There were four in Kabul (*Angar, Watan, Neda-ye Khalq, Ulus*), collections of which survived in Afghan libraries. (The one of *Neda-ye Khalq* in Kabul's public library was burnt by the Taliban, apparently deemed to

pushed for electoral reform, the right for the public to attend parliamentary debates and for control over government spending on large infrastructure projects. They even held – unsuccessfully – the first ever vote of no-confidence for an Afghan government, in June 1951. As a result, this period became known as the “period of the liberal parliament.”

The National Front also triggered the country’s first organised student organisation, founded in March 1950 with the government’s permission. Initially attached to Daud’s National Club, the *Ettahadia-ye Muhassel-in-e Pohantun-e Kabul* (Kabul University Students’ Union) soon distanced itself from both the government and what it called “the dictator Daud,” decided to work on “democratic” principles, refrained from electing a permanent chairman. It quickly evolved into the reformist MPs’ main instrument for outreach. It drew large audiences of several hundred to its so-called ‘conferences’ at its main venue, the Kabul theatre (then called De Pohene Nendara, “Education Theatre”). There, reformist and other politicians would give presentations and the National Front’s MPs report about their parliamentary work. The students would travel through the provinces performed educating plays. (After some student performers were arrested, there were demands in the Kabul population to resume the performances.)

The government insisted that the union stuck to its ‘non-political’ character. When, after the arrests, Sayyed Muhammad Maiwand, who chaired the union’s next conference, declined to open it with the usual formula “in the name of the king”, the government used that as pretext to closed the union down in November 1950. Maiwand fled to Pakistan, shooting dead a border guard on his way. This led to further persecutions by the government. Many of the union’s members openly joined the opposition groups. When one of the reformist newspapers, *Angar*, reported the circumstances around the closure of the students’ union, the government started cracking down on the newspapers as well.

In the run-up to the 1952 parliamentary elections, the opposition started establishing regular political parties, although the law made no provision for

be connected to the later pro-communist PDPA.) More newspapers were published in other cities, but not much more than their names are known (and sometimes even not the name) *Payyam-e Afghān* (Herat or Kabul), *Seda* or *Neda-ye Mellat* (Herat), *Alefba* (Kandahar), an unknown one in Mazar-e Sharif and *Atom* in Maimana. Apart from Ulus which had become pro-government, none of these papers survived beyond February 1952.

this at the time. This ended the organisational unity of the *Wesh Dzalman* movement. Some of its Pashtun members had already clandestinely founded a *Wesh Dzalman* party in 1949 or 1950.³⁶ Two other groups went their separate ways in early 1951 – *Hezb-e Watan* (Fatherland Party) and *Hezb-e Khalq* (People’s Party). *Hezb-e Watan* tried to obtain legal recognition by petitioning the king, but was refused. At the same time, all major leaders started publicly calling for the legalisation of political parties in their respective newspapers. When *Hezb-e Khalq* publicised its programme in an attempt to gain more members, the government cracked down on all of the groups. Many activists were arrested, some for many years, and 40 members of the old house were prevented from running for re-election in 1952. The results of this election were manipulated once again by the government. The opposition organised demonstrations to protest vote rigging, to which the government reacted by carrying out more arrests. Some activists continued to work underground. *Hezb-e Watan* continued until 1956, at which point it dissolved, simultaneous to its leader Ghoobar’s release from prison (which, perhaps, was a precondition for his release). At the end of the legislative period in 1952, Ghoobar wrote in one of the reformist newspapers, *Watan*, that although the reformist MPs had not been “completely successful, (...) the National Front (...) has honestly and courageously fulfilled its mandate until the last minute (...) in a spirit of reformism and reconciliation between the nation and the state (...). The ability of the nation to achieve a democratic government (...) has become obvious.”

The second democratic phase, locally known as the *daha-ye dimukrasi* (“decade of democracy”; 1964–73), was the longest and most important of these spells of political openness. It spanned from 1964 – when a new constitution changed Afghanistan into a full constitutional monarchy³⁷ – to the military

³⁶ Afghan sources differ on the date. According to one source, the Kandahar chapter split off the party in 1951 under the name of *Ukhuwat* (Brotherhood) – a reference to the Muslim Brotherhood? – and that there were attempts by Pashtun ethno-nationalists to rename it *Wesh Pashtun* (Awakened Pashtuns). Ghoobar, Vol Two... [see FN 33], 200.

³⁷ Out of all people, the Nazi German ambassador to Afghanistan, Kurt Ziemke (1933–36), remarked in his memoirs that Afghanistan was not an absolute monarchy then, as its king ruled over “free men, not subjects”, at least when it came to the Pashtun tribes, and therefore was unable to “impose reform measures.” Kurt Ziemke, *Als deutscher Gesandter in Afghanistan*, Stuttgart/Berlin, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1931, 391. Indeed, Amanullah 1923 *nezamnama* [see FN 21]

coup led by Daud, in July 1973. Daud's concept of modernisation – he had been prime minister from 1953 to 1963 – through five-year development plans and a “guided economy” had failed. His confrontational course vis-à-vis Pakistan on the Pashtunistan issue had backfired economically for the land-locked country.

Zaher Shah represented a new generation of the conservative elite who had tried to introduce a more open political system during the 1940/50s but subsequently stifled it when things got out of hand. In the early 1960s, the king wanted to muster the resources that lay within the new intelligentsia to bolster his own power. Among the members of the two commissions that drafted the constitution, there were three activists of the 1947-52 opposition – the former *Wesh Dzalmian*, Sayyed Shamsuddin Majruh (as chairman) and Muhammad Musa Shafiq, as well as one of the early 1950s *Hezb-e Watan* leaders, Mir Muhammad Seddiq Farhang. Although the change of the state system was a top-down development – the king had commissioned the new constitution – it practically achieved what three generations of *mashruta-khwahan* had fought for.

The new constitution of 1964 brought about formal parliamentary elements, a two-house parliament and relatively free, pluralistic elections with voter mobilisation, even in certain rural areas.³⁸ For the first time, it opened the way for the formation of legal political parties, pending the – already drafted – political parties law. This resulted in the emergence of an even broader spectrum of political parties (and independent newspapers) during the 1964-73 “decade of democracy”. The reformist political current that had formed with the 1949 “liberal parliament” reappeared – only stronger, involving a new generation of activists.

The broad range of political groupings ‘in waiting’ included leftists (Marxists), moderate leftists (some

provided for the establishment of some consultative bodies. After his months-long trip to Turkey, Europe and the US in 1927/28, Amanullah suggested a directly elected parliament of 150 members with limited legislative powers that, however, never materialised. Gregorian, *The Emergence...* [see FN 21], 251, 259.

³⁸ Marvin Weinbaum, “Afghanistan: Nonparty Parliamentary Democracy”, *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 7 (1972) 1, 69; Abdul Ghaffar Farahi, *Afghanistan during Democracy & Republic 1963–1978*, Peshawar, Area Study Center 2004, 103-4; M.S. Sarwari, *Afghanistan zwischen Tradition und Modernisierung*, Bern and Frankfurt/Main, *Europäische Hochschulschriften*, series XXXI (Politikwissenschaft), vol 2, 1974, 181; Ruttig, *Zur Bedeutung...* [see FN 6], 57.

tacitly republican),³⁹ conservative-Islamic/monarchists, Islamists and ethno-centrists, focussing on the rights of ethnic and/or religious minorities. Most of them, as fifteen years earlier, crystallised around newly emerging independent publications.⁴⁰ On the left, the main forces were the PDPA (founded in 1965) and *Jerian-e Demokratik-e Newin* (New Democratic Current), usually described as “Maoist”⁴¹ but better known as *Shola'i*, after the name of its short-lived publication, *Shola-ye Jawed* (Eternal Flame). In October 1965, this group established a clandestine organisation called *Sazman-e Jawanan-e Mutarraqi* (Progressive Youth Organization/PYO), which never made its existence or name public during that period. It ceased to exist in 1972.

Among the moderate left, there was *Hezb-e Mutaraqi Demokrat-e Afghanistan* (Progressive Democrat Party of Afghanistan) – among Afghans it was better known under the name of its newspaper, *Mussawat* (Equality) – led by Muhammad Hashem Maiwandwal, Prime Minister from 1965-67. It is described as “moderate socialist” with “pro-monarchic and pro-Islamic” tendencies.⁴² It mainly attracted Pashtun intellectuals who had earlier sympathised with the *Wesh Dzalmian*.⁴³

³⁹ Patrick J Reardon, “Modernization and Reform: The Contemporary Endeavour”, in George Grassmuck et al (eds), *Afghanistan: Some New Approaches*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan 1969, 172.

⁴⁰ For a list, see: Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Delhi (First Indian Edition), Rama 1994, 602-7. S[ayed] B[ahauddin] Majrooh/ S[ayed] M[uhammad] Y[usuf] Elmi, *The Sovietization of Afghanistan*, Peshawar, Afghanistan Information Centre, no year, 39-44, have 30 publications.

⁴¹ Hyman remarks that it was “not so closely aligned to Peking as to deserve such a simplistic description.” Anthony Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination 1964-83*, London, Macmillan Press 1984, 59. Afghans involved with the movement insist that this was no organisation but a slogan derived from Mao Zedong's ‘new democracy’: “ma nasher-e afkar-e demokrasi-ye nawin hastem” [we are the disseminators of the idea of new democracy]. Author's interview in Kabul, 2006.

⁴² Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination* [see FN 41], 58. Sarajuddin Rasuly, *Die politischen Eliten Afghanistans: Ihre Entstehungsgeschichte, ihre Bedeutung und ihr Versagen in der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Bern etc, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe XXXI, Politikwissenschaft 1997, 151.

⁴³ The party was relaunched after the fall of the Taleban. Its leader Muhammad Wali Arya, in the 1960s editor of the party's *Mussawat* newspaper, lives in the USA. Author's interview in Kabul, 2006.

Within the social-democratic current, *Mussawat* competed with *Afghan Mellat* – which officially called itself *Afghan Sosial-Dimokrat* (or, in pure Pashto, *Tolenpal Wuluswak*) *Gund* (Afghan Social Democratic Party). Founded by Ghulam Muhammad Farhad⁴⁴ in March 1966 and known amongst Afghans mainly for its advocacy of a Greater Afghanistan (or Pashtunistan), *Afghan Mellat* is often labelled “Pashtunist”, even “fascist,” by its critics; its leaders described it as a “third force, which is moderate, national and progressive.”⁴⁵ It remains active to this day.

Among the Islamic/Islamist forces, *Jawan-e Muslimin* (Muslim Youth) was the first to emerge; founded in 1969, it morphed around 1973 into *Jamiat-e Islami* (Islamic Society). Another loose Islamist group called *Khuddam ul-Forqan* (Servants of Providence) emerged in the mid-1960s from within a segment of the Ulema under the influence of the then-head of the Mojaddedi family, Ibrahim Mojaddedi. Another leader of (and rival within) the Mojaddedi family, Sebghatullah Mojaddedi, twice tried to start a (more Islamist) Ulema-based party, called *Jamiat-e Ulema-ye Muhammadi* during this period, but twice failed.⁴⁶ However, he later became the leader of one of the seven main Sunni *tanzim* during the anti-Soviet struggle.

Some in the elite still rejected genuine pluralism. There was talk about establishing a two-party system. In the 1965 elections for the Wolesi Jirga, which had been expanded to 216 seats but still operated without a framework of legalised parties, the conservatives remained in the majority. Also Islamist leaders – mainly *ulema*, among them later *tanzim* leader Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi – successfully campaigned for seats. There was a substantial minority of leftist and reformers. As parties had not been legalised by then, all candidates officially ran as independents, as they had 15 years earlier. For the first time they unleashed a real electoral campaign with rallies and speeches, that attracted thousands, at least in Kabul.

Political party activity was accompanied, again, by students’ and workers’ mobilisation. Troubled by events – including new students’ demonstrations

now in sync with the students’ revolts in Paris and elsewhere – the king shied away from signing the political parties law after it had finally passed both houses of parliament in 1968. According to Majruh, the king feared that the Marxists would come out on top. Bezhan sees another, more personal motive behind it: that Daud would establish a political party and seize power through it.⁴⁷ Afghan historian Mahmud Saikal called this a “fatal mistake”⁴⁸, as the far left (and possibly Islamic) radicals whom the king had wanted to stop continued their activities, but outside of any regulating legal framework, pursuing a strategy of *putschism* as the only way to power now. It was an approach that would propel the PDPA, then still in alliance with Daud, to power in 1973.

2.1.2 The emergence of Afghan political parties’ three historical currents – and the void in the centre

While there was some political differentiation between the activists of the earlier post-World War II period of democratisation, the three main political currents that shape Afghanistan’s political landscape to this day – the leftists, the Islamists and the ethno-nationalists – emerged more clearly during the “decade of democracy.” Within the leftist current, the split between Moscow and Beijing manifested itself in the formation of pro-Moscow Marxists and Beijing-inspired parties and groups. Among the Islamists, Sunni and Shia parties went their separate ways from the very beginning.

The failure to legalise political parties during the 1964-73 “decade of democracy” drove key constituents of the three currents underground, while many moderates disbanded. Most of those who chose the underground path were prepared to varying extents to use violence as a means to attain political power. These underground constituents of the three currents have determined the more-than-four-decades of violence that followed the 1973 coup and continue to shape Afghanistan’s political landscape today.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ In 1948, Farhad was the first elected mayor of Kabul. From 1934, he had studied in Nazi Germany and was fascinated by some aspects of its policy. See: Abdulhamid Mubarez, *Tahlil-e waqf’at.e siyasi-ye Afghanistan 1919-1996*, [Kabul] 1375 (1996); <http://www.afghanmellat.de/farhad/Farhad.htm>.

⁴⁵ Editorial by Eng. Esteqlal, *Afghan Mellat* (Peshawar), 5 Jan. 1988.

⁴⁶ Edwards, *Before Taliban...* [see FN 30], 200-1, 254-5.

⁴⁷ Faridullah Bezhan, “The Emergence of Political Parties and Political Dynamics in Afghanistan, 1964–73”, *Iranian Studies*, Vol 46, 6/2013, 924.

⁴⁸ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, London and New York, IB Tauris 2004, 155.

⁴⁹ See also my paper, “How It All Began: Pre-1979 Origins of Afghanistan’s Conflict,” *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 19 January 2013, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/publication/aan-papers/how-it-all-began-pre-1979-origins-of-afghanistans-conflict/>.

The general failure to legalise parties, both during the “liberal parliament” period and the “decade of democracy,” also ensured that there were never anything more than the most embryonic of attempts to establish a moderate or pro-government party.⁵⁰ This created what this author calls the “void in the centre” of the political spectrum. Such a party was only created during Daud’s one-party state in 1977;⁵¹ the opposition PDPA adopted this role when it assumed power in 1978. Neither party had enough legitimacy to fill the void, though. A second, later political decision deepened that shortcoming in the emerging Afghan political party system: Pakistan’s policy of only supporting armed Islamist groups in the fight against the Soviet occupation during the 1980s. As a direct consequence, all non-Islamist resistance groups – moderates (like Afghan Mellat) and leftist radicals (the Maoists) – were sidelined and forced into an alliance with the *haftgana tanzim*.

Political parties were formally legalised for the first time only in 1987 under President Najibullah (1986-92). By then, however, the country was in the middle of a war that made genuinely democratic political competition impossible. Moreover, the ‘political opening’ remained under rigorous state control. As a result, the spectrum of the parties legalised during that time was limited to mainly leftist and a few liberal-democratic and moderate Islamic parties, including a local Shia Hezbollah.

One Afghan author opined that the four-year rule of the *mujahedin tanzim* (1992-96) “could be seen as the only multi-party coalition rule in Afghanistan [’s history]”, but also added that it “definitely went wrong.” (Neither was it democratically legitimised.)⁵²

The fact is that although periods of relative openness became more frequent during the second half of the 20th century, non-democratic periods were significantly longer. True, a number of parties – whether under their original name or

in the form of successor parties – have shown remarkable ideological (and sometimes organisational) continuity, in some cases spanning many decades; many are active to this day. But at no time during any of these periods was a stable democratic system established in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, research shows us that attempts for democratisation have a higher chance of success in countries that have already experienced earlier such attempts, even if these failed.⁵³ This is the case in Afghanistan, and constitutes another factor that improved the prospects of successful democratisation in the post-2001 period (all the more so if one views ‘success’ and ‘failure’ as relative terms). As we have seen, Amanullah’s reforms failed in the short term but had long-term effective results.

2.2 Hurdles for a post-Taliban party-based democratic system

2.2.1 Historical factors

At the same time, substantive hurdles stood in the way of a development towards a democratic system in Afghanistan. Some were rooted in the country’s history. The failure to legalise political parties in the 1950s and 1960s, which excluded them from participating in elections (except with known members figuring as ‘independent candidates’ – a practice continuing to the present day), forced the more radical ones into the underground. From there, they began to organise a takeover of power by violent means (*coup d’états* or armed struggles). Groups that prepared the establishment of moderate parties, in contrast, opted to obey the law and dissolved. This created the moderate void in the centre that has not been filled by any significant political party or movement to this day.

The introduction of one-party states in both 1973 and 1978, as well as the beginning of a wider, armed struggle against the PDPA regime (which took over in 1978) as well as the occupation in 1979 resulted in the need for more secretive, militarised, hierarchical and individual-centred structures in opposition parties and created an adequate mind-set. This significantly hampered the

⁵⁰ In 1949, Daud – when out of power – created the Klup-e Melli (National Club), both to undermine the more radical reformists and to create a power-base for his return to power, which happened in 1953. After 1964,

⁵¹ The party was called *Melli Enqelabi Gund* (or *Ghurdzang*) (National Revolutionary Party, or Movement). Until 1977, some parties were still allowed to be active semi-legally, including the PDPA and *Afghan Mellat*.

⁵² Maryam Baryalay, “Pluralism And Political Parties In Afghanistan,” *Tolonews*, 8 September 2013, <http://elections.tolonews.com/pluralism-and-political-parties-afghanistan>.

⁵³ See eg Sheri Berman, “How Democracies Emerge: Lessons from Europe,” *Journal of Democracy*, 18 (2007), 30, 38; Marc F Plattner, “Liberalism and Democracy: Can’t Have One Without the Other,” *Foreign Affairs*, 77 (1998) 2, 180. Although this has mainly been researched in Eastern and Central European countries, the same mechanisms should be at play in developing countries, despite their much more complicated environment.

evolution of, and peaceful competition between, civilian parties with visible, democratically functioning structures.

The armed struggle changed the make-up of the national elites, and with it the character of most parties that emerged between the 1940s and 1960s. Leftist and Islamist parties developed parallel military and intelligence structures. The PDPA relied more and more on armed power to defend its regime, including the use of local, often ethnicity-based, militias. Some of them later developed into separate *tanzims* (Jombesh, Paiwand). Some left-wing ethno-nationalist groups, smaller in size, converted into local militias. Some even played to both sides. SAZA, for example, maintained contacts with *Jamiat* (based on their common ethnic character) but also, and separate from the PDPA, with the Soviets, who particularly mistrusted the PDPA's Khalq faction.⁵⁴

On the Islamist side, the campus- or madrassa-based political Islamist groups of the 1960s turned into military-political networks. On the Sunni side, what had been a loose but united movement split into various *mujahedin tanzims* under competing leaders. Massive Western, Arab and Chinese support enabled them to expand throughout the country. *Ulema* (religious scholars) or Islamist members of the 'technical' intelligentsia moved into ideological and political leadership positions, first in the *tanzims* after 1992 in the post-PDPA state. Pakistan's military dictator General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (who ruled between 1978-88) ensured that the external resources were exclusively channelled to the seven Islamist *tanzims* based in Pakistan. Field commanders, fighters and refugees were forced to join one of the seven *tanzims* (but multiple memberships remained widespread which enabled commanders and others to access resources of various organisations). All other groups that participated in the resistance were marginalised.⁵⁵

This allowed the *tanzim* leaders to reinterpret the national liberation struggle in religious terms, as a 'jihad'. Religion became the dominant factor of self-identification against foreign occupiers. While the *tanzims* were supported by most of the population in their fight against the Soviet occupation, this was probably less the case when it came to their concept of the establishment of an

'Islamic state.'⁵⁶ But the religious legitimisation of the fight against the Soviets and their Afghan allies changed the social status of the mullahs who – at least in the Pashtun tribal belt – had remained, until then, at the lower end of the social pyramid who grew into a powerful class. This continued under the rule of the Taleban, when the mullahs became the executors of government rule.⁵⁷

In contrast to Islamists and leftists, certain historical parties (*Afghan Mellat*, for example) and smaller, exiled groups indirectly profited from their exclusion from the wartime military aid by being able to maintain their civilian character.

2.2.2 The role of political Islam

Another factor hampering democratic development the how the forces of political Islam looked upon democratic pluralism. Although there was pluralism among *tanzims* themselves, there was widespread reluctance if not clear-cut refusal to give political forces that did not prioritise Islamic values a political role. In the post-2001 period, there was mobilisation against 'non-Islamic' political forces. The insurgent wing of Hezb-e Islami, for example, included in a peace plan in 2010, which they submitted to the Afghan government, that only 'Islamic' parties should have the right to participate in future elections.⁵⁸

After 2001, the group of the surviving *mujahedin* leaders – now calling themselves 'jihadi leaders' – gained a key role and exerted significant influence in the political sphere. President Hamed Karzai would regularly consult them on key political decisions, trying to gain religious legitimacy for

⁵⁶ This was reflected in a – not representative – survey the Peshawar-based Afghanistan Information Centre conducted in half of Pakistan's Afghan refugee camps in April 1987 showing that 72 per cent of respondents favoured the return of ex-King Zahir, 12.5 per cent a "purely Islamic state" and only 0.45 per cent any of the *tanzim* leaders. The publication of this survey cost AIC head Sayed Bahauddin Majruh his life; he was assassinated in early 1988. Edwards, *Before Taliban...* [see FN 30], 279-83.

⁵⁷ I discuss the role of the elites and their religious self-legitimisation in more detail here: Thomas Ruttig, "Situation Report: Religion in Afghanistan," *Tony Blair Faith Foundation*, London 2014, <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/country-profiles/afghanistan/situation-report>.

⁵⁸ During the 2001 Emergency Loya Jirga elections, *Shura-ye Nazar* – a military structure linked to *Jamiat-e Islami* – would systematically 'invite' all candidates in the central region around Kabul to one of its venues and present them, in some cases, and symbolically, with a choice between the Quran and a pistol (or money).

⁵⁴ Some of these groups also took part in Najibullah's late 1980s' 'controlled pluralism.'

⁵⁵ Monarchist, ethno-nationalist and leftist (Maoist) groups.

these decisions and himself. In the constitution, the balance between the four defining Bonn principles – Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice – is ambivalent, although religion is mentioned first. As there is no institutionalised state body that defines what is ‘Islamic’ and what not, this function is left to unofficial bodies such as the informal council of the ‘Jihadi leaders’ who base their claim to play that role on their leading role in the ‘jihad’. There were regular attempts to curb human rights, particularly women’s rights, and pressurise related institutions and activists in the name of religion. The ‘Jihadi leaders’ increasingly treated criticism against their group as ‘criticism of Islam’. President Ghani curtailed the role of the ‘Jihadi leaders’, and this has pushed some of them into a position of semi-opposition. They formed councils that they describe as critical but supportive of the government, although explicitly not as oppositional. (Individual leaders publicly criticised the government without giving up government positions.)

After 2001, certain *tanzims* and religious leaders did not hide their aversion to what they saw as ‘western’ democracy introduced to Afghanistan, or their view that Islamic values predominate over international norms and freedoms. For example, *Harakat-e Islami* leader Mohseni referred to the 2004 election as being “against the national interests of the country” and labelled freedom and democracy “... an illusion.” This view, however, was mostly held tacitly and not openly expressed. This, however, happened increasingly over the years, in Friday sermons and in public statements by religious scholars, members of parliament and even government ministers.

Nevertheless, most *tanzims* (*Jamiat*, *Jombesh*, *Hezb-e Wahdat*) fielded candidates in the 2004 presidential elections. Although they lost to Karzai, who was the favourite both of the international community and large parts of the population (as he had not been directly involved in the civil war), they were able to assert control over their respective, ethnically-defined constituencies: *Jamiat*’s candidate, Qanuni, won in most Tajik-dominated provinces, *Jombesh*’s Dostum in the Uzbek/Turkmen north and Mohaqeq in some Hazara provinces. (Khalili, the other important Hazara leader, supported Karzai.) Based on their dominant positions within the system, the *tanzims* swept the 2005 parliamentary elections.⁵⁹ This

⁵⁹ After the first elections of 2005, religious scholars and *mujahedin* commanders held a majority with at least 134 of the 241 seats in the Wolesi Jirga. Thomas Ruttig, “Afghanistan: Institutionen ohne Demokratie,” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP-Studie*, Berlin 2008, 19,

dominance gave them a bargaining chip for future elections, particularly the presidential ones that required extensive coalition-building.

2.2.3 *The patchy implementation of the Bonn Agreement*

The Bonn Agreement was only partially implemented. The disarmament of civil war militias in particular remained superficial, concentrating on the “low-hanging fruit” but allowing for stronger militias to be integrated into the new armed forces.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the post-Taleban political process was marred by massive external intervention, particularly by the US and often through the United Nations. This included repeated, often detrimental, interference in the democratic processes, including during all elections.

It started simultaneously with and immediately after the conference. The pledge to keep Kabul free of military forces was broken by the anti-Taleban United Front,⁶¹ as was the Bonn pledge to demilitarise Kabul and other urban centres in order to allow the deployment of the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the new government. A fifth delegation of pro-democratic forces – although officially invited – was barred from the negotiating table at the last minute, practically excluding them from the new executive established as a result of the Bonn Agreement.

It continued with influencing the composition of the Emergency Loya Jirga (ELJ) in 2002. The US elbowed out former King Muhammad Zahir, who had been proposed as an alternative head of state, in favour of future president Karzai. During the first two presidential elections of 2004 and 2009, pro-Karzai interventions continued. In both cases, diplomatic pressure prevented run-off elections after the first-round result proved inconclusive or unclear, ultimately producing Karzai victories. This interference also played out indirectly. During the 2002 ELJ elections and the first parliamentary election in 2005, the US-led coalition gave their local anti-Taleban allies, the *tanzims*, free range to use intimidation and violence to suppress the then-still-active pro-democratic forces. In 2004, President Bush (or his special envoy in Kabul,

http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2008_S17_rut_ks.pdf.

⁶⁰ Ruttig, “Afghanistan: Institutionen ohne...”, 21-2 [see FN 59].

⁶¹ Officially: United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (better known as ‘Northern Alliance’ or ‘United Front’).

Zalmay Khalilzad) took the final decision that a party-less electoral system would be used in future elections, via the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV).⁶² This decision haunts Afghanistan's legislature to the current day (see chapter 3). Also, the National Unity Government 'solution' produced after the inconclusive 2014 presidential vote was a direct result of US intervention.

Western governments publicly celebrating the outcome of elections they had heavily influenced as 'victories of democracy,' stood in the way of much-needed reforms. The need to reform the electoral system – including giving a larger role to political parties – had been articulated early on and *ad nauseam* by many multilateral and international institutions, as well as the Afghan election observer organisations, but remained unheeded.⁶³

A census – the basis for a transparent voter registry – never took place. Voter registration was so sloppy that it allowed for mass fraud, starting from the first election cycle of 2004/05. Impunity for war crimes and human rights abuses committed in earlier stages of the conflict was established early on as major perpetrators turned into western allies. This enabled them to run for office uncontested and to use illegal armed groups to coerce voters. On top of this, a document signed in Bonn by all neighbouring countries guaranteeing non-interference was never honoured.

All this led to an immense loss of trust among Afghans in the new political system. Afghans became more and more convinced that the West's rhetoric about democracy, human and women's rights was just posturing. This probably amounts to the single biggest defeat of the west in Afghanistan: the de-legitimisation of democracy in

the eyes of Afghans.⁶⁴ The practical (non-) implementation of key aspects of the 2001 Bonn Agreement shows just how harmful the role of external actors can be to democratisation processes, particularly in transitional countries and *Interventionsgesellschaften* ("intervened societies") such as Afghanistan.⁶⁵

Despite the many causal layers for this failure to establish functioning and fully legitimate democratic institutions in Afghanistan, a number of authors have argued that the post-2001 democratisation 'imposed' a 'western' model on a society that was not ready for, or even compatible with, democracy.⁶⁶ Islamists regularly use the same argument. Demonstrations under slogans like "No democracy, we want just Islam"⁶⁷ regularly mobilise a growing section of young, educated Afghans.

Given the character of the long series of western interventions in Afghanistan's post-2001 political process, it is factually incorrect to say western-style democracy was imposed on Afghanistan through the Bonn agreement. To the contrary, Bonn focussed on restoring and updating institutions that had existed before the state crisis broke out in 1973: the constitution of 1964 for the transition period (with the notable exception of the monarchy as form of government), the bicameral parliament, and general elections. The

⁶⁴ Smith, *Afghanistan's Troubled Transition* [see FN 62], 160.

⁶⁵ See Robert Pinkney for example, "International Democracy Promotion: The End of the Road or the Discovery of New Pathways?," Paper presented at Political Studies Association, Bath, 11–13 April 2007, www.psa.ac.uk/2007/ppps/Pinkney.pdf; Martin Brusis and Peter Thiery, "Schlüsselfaktoren der Demokratisierung. Mittel-/Osteuropa und Lateinamerika im Vergleich," Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, not dated, www.boell.de/downloads/demokratieforderung/brusis_thiery_schluesselfaktoren.pdf. I borrow the term *Interventionsgesellschaft* from Michael Daxner, in: Thorsten Bonacker, Michael Daxner et al, eds, *Interventionskultur: Zur Soziologie von Interventionsgesellschaften*, Wiesbaden, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2010.

⁶⁶ See eg Marina Ottaway and Anatol Lieven, "Rebuilding Afghanistan: Fantasy versus Reality," Carnegie Endowment, Policy Brief no 12, Washington January 2002, 5. One author went so far as comparing this – admittedly flawed – process with a "re-education camp." Conrad Schetter, "Das Umerziehungslager des Westens," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 June 2006, http://ag-afghanistan.de/files/schetter_umerziehungslager.pdf.

⁶⁷ See the photo of such a slogan here: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/publication/aan-papers/between-jihad-and-traditionalism-afghanistans-new-generation-of-islamic-activists/>.

⁶² Scott Seward Smith, *Afghanistan's Troubled Transition*, New Delhi et al, Viva 2012 (First Indian Edition), 160. According to the author, the US envoy "intervened brusquely at a meeting with United Nations officials and diplomats in Kabul to declare that he had just spoken to President Bush, who said 'SNTV is the choice. SNTV is going to happen.'"

⁶³ The first one was probably: Andrew Reynolds and Andrew Wilder, "Free, Fair or Flawed: Challenges for Legitimate Elections in Afghanistan," AREU, Briefing Paper September 2004, <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/433E-Free,%20Fair%20or%20Flawed-BP-print.pdf>. All reports summed up in: "Recommendations for Electoral Reform in Afghanistan: A Compendium of Electoral Reform Recommendations in Afghanistan," *Democracy International*, April 2010, <http://democracyinternational.com/sites/default/files/Rrecommendations-for-Electoral-Reform-in-Afghanistan-PDF.pdf>.

Bonn agreement foresaw that general decisions during this transition period would be made through traditional Afghan mechanisms; namely two *loya jirgas* (the Emergency *Loya Jirga* 2002 and the Constitutional *Loya Jirga* 2004) – “until such time as a fully representative government can be elected through free and fair elections.” This would mark the end of transition from traditional to modern means of decision-making. The Bonn roadmap was based on a plan developed by Afghan actors, namely members of the diaspora.⁶⁸

The problem of the Bonn agreement was not its content, but that it was never fully implemented. It was not ‘alien’ democratisation that was the mistake, but rather its implementation.⁶⁹ Therefore, for this author, the debate as to whether the Bonn blue-print was flawed because it made Afghanistan imitate ‘the West’ too much, or because too much undemocratic interference subverted processes intended to be democratic (paired with an actual, although initially hidden disinclination towards democracy among large parts of Afghanistan’s elites) is decided in favour of the latter.

This failure to implement the Bonn agreement, and later the provisions of the constitution and many laws, led to a lopsided playing field between the diverse Afghan political forces, including the political parties. If properly implemented, pro-democratic forces would have had more room to manoeuvre and probably could have helped to push Afghanistan towards a more democratic outcome.

2.2.4 Karzai’s political parties aversion

One additional factor was the new head of state’s aversion to political parties. Karzai made this known from the beginning.⁷⁰ In two BBC

⁶⁸ The 1999 “Action Plan” developed by the Rome group, a loose alliance of leading (royalist and other) members of the Afghan diaspora. A hardcopy is in the author’s archives. The United Front, besides the Rome group the second important Afghan participants in Bonn, had previously endorsed the plan “in principle” and subscribed to its modified version in Bonn although, against its wishes, the position of a prime minister was dropped on US insistence. The Bush government tried to establish a state system similar to that of the US, with a powerful president, which resulted in an over-centralised and inflexible system in Afghanistan.

⁶⁹ More detail in Ruttig, “Afghanistan: Institutionen ohne...” [see FN 59].

⁷⁰ Karzai, though, had been member of a *tanzim* during the struggle against the Soviet occupation, of Prof. Mujaddedi’s ANLF (see section 3). In 1992, he served as deputy foreign minister under Mujaddedi’s three-months tenure as first post-PDPA interim president.

interviews, in 2002 and 2003, he criticised parties in general for being responsible for the Soviet occupation and the bloodshed of the civil wars.⁷¹ Therefore, in his eyes and in general, parties were no good:

Afghanistan was never threatened by any ethnic group of Afghans or by any tribes in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was threatened by political groups or rivalries from countries or interference from outside. I'm not personally inclined too much towards political parties.

Afghanistan was destroyed (...) because of the political agendas of the parties that were not national. (This seems to refer to the PDPA only; he would not have referred to the tanzims as anti-national.)

Later, throughout his 13-year-long tenure, Karzai consistently discouraged political party politics. In both *Loya Jirgas*, and again briefly before the first parliamentary elections, at a Community Development Councils conference in September 2005, Karzai urged the participants to vote against party-associated candidates. He particularly discouraged political activity at universities and schools.⁷² An Afghan writer confirmed that Karzai showed “no reluctance to express his distaste for

Before, in the 1980s, he worked as a kind of political fixer between different *tanzims*, diplomats and journalists on behalf of his father, a deputy speaker of parliament during the monarchy. After Abdul Ahad Karzai was assassinated in 1999, his son took his position in the Rome group and became more prominent. See: Bette Dam, *A Man and a Motorcycle*, Utrecht, Ipso Facto Publishers 2014, 41-58.

⁷¹ “Hamid Karzai: Talking Point Special,” BBC, 10 May 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/1940038.stm; “Talking Point Special: Hamid Karzai,” BBC, 1 October 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/talking_point/isl/am_west/02_10_03/html/thewindow.html. His criticism of being “not national” seems mainly to refer to the PDPA, whose Marxist ideology is perceived as imported, and its successors. Karzai’s ELJ and CLJ speeches are not available online, but the author was present and heard them.

⁷² In his final speech at the 2003/04 CLJ he said he backed a presidential, rather than a parliamentary system, because there were “no strong political parties” and that those existing were “tribal” (ethnic), but truly “national” parties were needed. In June 2012, Karzai was quoted on Shamsad TV calling on school and university students “to avoid involvement in political activities. He said that universities and schools are not places for fanatics and the young people should try to study, because their involvement in political activities will not help them serve their country and families”. Quoted in *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 23 June 2012.

political parties and organizations – whether on TV, at public events or university graduation ceremonies.”⁷³ From the very beginning, his preference was for what he called “a political system more reliant on communities rather than political parties” with “traditional elements of consultation ... coming from the countryside.”⁷⁴

Although Karzai usually spread the blame for Afghanistan’s crises across the political spectrum, “the radicals of the right, the radicals of the left, religious radicals,”⁷⁵ his political praxis showed a clear bias in favour of the *tanzims*. For example, he encouraged his government’s members to relinquish their party position when in office,⁷⁶ but then exempted some from this requirement. While vice president Khalili, for example, remained registered as the leader of his *Wahdat* party throughout his two tenures from 2004 to 2014, *Afghan Mellat* leader, Ahadi, had to vacate his party post.

Other sources explain Karzai’s ‘aversion’ to political parties as a form of his “intolerance of political opposition” in general. A long-term Afghan observer and specialist on elections, who did not want to be quoted by name, told the author in August 2015 when asked about the president’s motives: “Because it is easier to buy individuals than to buy a whole party.”⁷⁷

For political expediency, leading western governments preferred to work in a highly centralised government set-up came which came at the expense of other actors in the new pluralist political landscape, including parliament and the political parties. This indirectly bolstered Karzai’s

aversion to political parties and helped to sideline them.

With parties that were too strong to deal with directly, Karzai used a divide-and-rule approach. His main target was *Jamiat-e Islami*, the core party of the former Northern Alliance and of numerous later alliances – although, in fact, he was allied with the party in a coalition starting from the 2001 Bonn conference. The over-centralisation of the state was reflected in the president’s powerful constitutional position. This, and the character the system assumed, being based on patronage and not institutions, gave him “several tools – high-profile appointments, especially – capable of breaking the unity of parties and coalitions.”⁷⁸ He used these tools to successfully drive a wedge between *Jamiat* political heavyweights. Some ended up in government. Others, at the same time, were in opposition. This happened repeatedly and in different combinations throughout the entire Karzai era. As a result, *Jamiat* leaders – particularly Dr Abdullah in 2009 and 2014 – were unable to establish a unified opposition party or even able to mobilise the entire *Jamiat* constituency (more detail on *Jamiat* in chapter 3).

2.2.5 A parallel political system

Another major cause for the stagnation of Afghanistan’s party system has been the existence of a second, parallel political system that is not even superficially legitimised in any democratic sense. In the Karzai years, this system was built around Karzai’s kitchen cabinet in “the Palace” and the unofficial advisory council of ‘Jihadi leaders.’ This has only partially changed under the NUG, with “the Palace” continuing to play a central role in decision-making through appointed councils (like the Development Council) while the cabinet is increasingly disempowered and the parliament continues to be kept at the fringe – not least because, after the delay of the 2016 parliamentary election, it now has to struggle with dwindling legitimacy (its tenure extended by a controversial presidential decree). Also the current semi-oppositional shuras of the NUG period belong to this category. They claim to be coalitions of parties while, in practice, they are closed circles of leaders attempting to exert political influence at the centre of power, using their parties as bargaining chips. This puts individual party leaders into positions of

⁷³ Baryalay, “Pluralism And Political Parties” [see FN 52].

⁷⁴ “Hamid Karzai: Talking Point Special” [see FN 71]; Mujib Mashal, “Hamid Karzai: ‘I Didn’t See a War in Afghanistan—I Saw a Conspiracy’”, *The Atlantic*, 23 June 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/an-exit-interview-with-afghan-president-hamid-karzai/373199/>.

⁷⁵ Mashal, “Hamid Karzai” [see FN 74].

⁷⁶ See his statement welcoming then-Justice Minister Sarwar Danesh quitting his party membership in 2005 here: “Afghan Report: December 30, 2004”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1340603.html>.

⁷⁷ This echoes what a party leader quoted in an ICG report said as early as in 2005: “...you can’t intimidate [a] party”. “Afghanistan: From Presidential to Parliamentary Elections”, International Crisis Group, Asia Report 88, 23 November 2004, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/088-afghanistan-from-presidential-to-parliamentary-elections.aspx>, 18.

⁷⁸ “Afghanistan’s Parties in Transition,” International Crisis Group, Asia Briefing 141, 26 June 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/b141-afghanistans-parties-in-transition.aspx>.

power, ie inside the system, but their parties, as such, remain outside it.

This parallel political system contributes to the lopsided playing field, within what is already a limited political space for parties in general, thanks to the government's failure to enforce parties' internal democratisation and demilitarisation as required by the law. Under these conditions, some parties have been able to thrive, while others – particularly newly emerged, pro-democratic forces – have been excluded. But the imbalance also exists between the four main currents – with the *tanzims* and some ethno-nationalist parties obtaining access to positions of power while most of the new forces remain outside.

This has resulted in the very scenario against which the International Crisis Group warned in 2013 – whereby “the government's effort to curtail the number of parties, while a popular measure among many Afghans, could shut out moderate political movements and emerging youth organisations, leaving voters with limited choices among only the biggest of the *tanzims*.”⁷⁹

2.2.6 An anti-party electoral law

Karzai's position on political parties had significant practical consequences – not least a direct impact on the Electoral Law and the voting system chosen for parliamentary elections.

First, Karzai stalled the draft Political Parties Law in cabinet for nearly a year. This led to the law's entry into force just ten months before the initial date for the first parliamentary elections, which were scheduled to be held simultaneous with the presidential ballot, in July 2004. (The presidential vote was later postponed to October 2004, with parliamentary elections separated and further delayed to September 2005.) This particularly impeded pro-democratic parties as they sought to prepare for the elections; in order to communicate their strong pro-rule of law position, which they wanted to contrast with that of the *tanzims*, they did not want to start working until the law entered force. (These events resembled those of the 1960s “decade of democracy”, when the King finally refused to sign such a law and moderate forces dissolved.) The *tanzims* did not share these legal qualms. Sayyaf's *Dawat-e Eslami*, *Harakat-e Enqilab-e Eslami* and Khalili's *Hezb-e Wahdat* initially insisted that they did not even need to register as their existence preceded the new law. (They later gave in, but were among the last to register.)

The law also banned external party funding. In practice, this did not hamper the former *tanzims*, which had long-established relations with external benefactors, and were able to circumvent the ban, as the government was unable or unwilling to rein them in. As a USIP report very carefully put it: “Parties are left open to the speculation that they accept funds from outside or foreign forces—Iran, Pakistan, Saudi, Russia, India, the United States, or Turkey, for example.”⁸⁰ The other political forces, in contrast, were soon starved of resources, as there was no existing funding culture. Members were either unable or unused to pay membership fees, while sponsorship and other forms of party funding were unknown. This provision gave another advantage to the *tanzims*.

On top of the delay in passing the parties law came a cumbersome bureaucratic registration process. A “political party may officially start its activities after being registered by the Ministry of Justice” only (author's emphasis). Although hurdles for registration were initially not that high – the law set a minimum of 700 members for all parties – the process did not end with the bestowal of the licence (*jawaz-e fa'aliyat*, lit: “permission of activity”). It also included a lengthy procedure of official notification by the MoJ to provincial administrations about the registration of every individual party and before activities on the provincial level were permitted. As a result, these delays effectively entailed a nine-month process for party validation – registration, then the establishing of countrywide structures and entering into of an electoral campaign, which almost none of the party activists had ever experienced. The leader of a new party described to the author in detail the hurdles the parties faced at that time. This, in particular, affected their members in rural areas, as did the absence of copy shops (to produce the required documents), electricity or even paper. Many members had no ID card. In areas controlled by armed groups, they feared disclosing their membership or to give their full details. Cheating was also widespread, as ID cards – the basis of the registration – could be obtained by force, or under false pretences.

The drafting process for the Electoral Law was also delayed, until early 2004, only a few months before the planned election date. At that point, the parties were enthusiastically jostling for a good starting position in the first electoral cycle, and

⁷⁹ “Afghanistan's Parties in Transition” [see FN 78], 9.

⁸⁰ Anna Larson, “Political Parties in Afghanistan,” USIP, Special Report, March 2015, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR362-Political-Parties-in-Afghanistan.pdf>, 7.

enjoying their newly won freedoms under the Political Parties Law.

A core issue in the Electoral Law was the choice of the voting system to be applied. The first problem was *how* the matter was decided. The parties had been promised that they would be consulted about the future electoral system; but this became a farce. During the first round of consultations convened by the Joint Electoral Monitoring Board and by UNAMA in early 2005, all but two⁸¹ of the 34 parties participating (almost all of the parties registered at the time) favoured a proportional representation and party list system. However, most supporters in the executive, in order to accommodate the SNTV supporters, made it clear they would settle for the compromise of a mixed system, ie with parliamentary seats divided among individual candidates and party lists. In a follow-up meeting, a number of parties presented a joint proposal where they would be allocated the modest number of 49 out of 249 Wolesi Jirga seats (less than 20 per cent). These seats would be distributed on the basis of lists in a single, countrywide constituency. The remaining seats would be determined by SNTV. However, their input was not considered. The situation became even worse when UNAMA called a second consultation in March 2005, during which the participants found out that on the very same day President Karzai had presided over a cabinet meeting that had already finalised the decision in favour of SNTV.⁸²

The second problem was *what* was decided. The constitution provided for “free, general, secret, and direct elections” for the Wolesi Jirga; the term ‘direct’ was interpreted by Karzai as non-party based, and a stipulation instead for individual candidates only. The Electoral Law spells this out, by stipulating that voters can choose between individual candidates who explicitly can also be nominated by parties (Art 20,4). Thus, the law indirectly rules out party lists and the use of a proportional system.⁸³ It does not contain a provision that the electoral system would be SNTV; a system known to tend to produce lopsided results. Finally, Karzai successfully pushed through an exotic version of a rarely used multi-constituency SNTV system, combined with an additional provinces-based women quota. This combination made the system not only extremely

complicated but also, in the tense security situation, excluded entire communities – thereby producing even more unrepresentative results.⁸⁴ Earlier, Karzai had rejected an initial draft prepared by the justice minister because it allowed parties to nominate lists of candidates for each constituency and gave voters a choice between voting for a party or for an independent candidate.⁸⁵

The right of political parties to present their candidates was further curbed by the design of the candidate registration forms in the 2005 election. It lacked a box in which a possible party affiliation could have been registered. As a result, party affiliations would not be visible on the official ballot papers. Candidates could only choose to display it on their own hand-out material.

In fact, the 2004 Election Law withdrew large parts of the rights given to political parties by the constitution and the Political Parties Law – another sign of Afghanistan’s ambiguous legal framework. The SNTV voting system chosen for the parliamentary elections became a severe setback for all political parties, as it relegated them to the sidelines. A 2009 AREU report concluded that⁸⁶ “[a]t first glance, SNTV limits the extent to which parties can be successful in the elections, because there is no formal incentive for candidates to join parties when they can stand and win seats independently.” It adds, though, that particularly the *tanzims* had been able to “out-manoeuvre the constraints of the system” by methods which “could have involved either or both coercion and vote buying” – ie the very advantages given to them by the government’s inability or

⁸¹ The two parties were *Hezb-e Wahdat* (Khalili) and *Jabha* (Mojaddedi), both supporting Karzai.

⁸² The author attended both meetings as an observer.

⁸³ Find the text of the law here: <http://unama.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?link=Elections+2009%2FElectoral-law-eng.pdf>.

⁸⁴ A UN paper described the SNTV system as “uncommon. It was once used for parliamentary elections in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Today, it is still used in Vanuatu, the Pitcairn Islands and Jordan, as well as the elections of the upper house in Indonesia and the Thai senate.” “Primer on the Single Non-Transferable Vote System,” UNAMA, not dated [2009], <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/Election%20System%20in%20Afghanistan%20Primer.pdf>. During the 2010 parliamentary elections, for example, all seats for Ghazni province were won by Hazaras while the large Pashtun population remained unrepresented, as it did not turn out due to Taleban threats. This led to a months-long crisis, with Karzai finally pushing through a redistribution of seats without elections.

⁸⁵ “Afghanistan: From Presidential...” [see FN 77], 18.

⁸⁶ Anna Larson, “Afghanistan’s New Democratic Parties: A Means to Organise Democratisation?”, AREU, March 2009, 10-1, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/49c254a02.pdf>.

unwillingness to curb violations of the Political Parties Law.

The late passing of the Political Parties Law and the lengthy registration process meant only five parties were officially registered by then. Only these would have been legally able to field candidates in the 2004 presidential election. Nevertheless, some others also did: Of the 18 candidates who contested the first round, ten were leaders or known members of political parties. Four had this printed on the ballot (Qanuni/New Afghanistan, Pedram/Congress, Eshaq Gailani/Solidarity Movement, Nejrabi/Independence Party). The latter was the only one who represented an already legalised party at that point. Those who ran as 'independents' included Mohaqqueq (*Wahdat*), Dostum (*Jombesh*), Mansur (*Jamiat*), Ahmadzai (*Dawat*) and the only candidate from a new democratic party, Nedai (*Ittehad-e Melli baraye Dimukrasi/National Union for Democracy*). In this case, the law was applied in a very lax way.

After the first parliamentary elections were delayed until September 2005, the number of eligible parties increased to 73.⁸⁷ Finally, 200 of the 249 MPs elected were believed to be members or sympathisers of 33 political parties. 19 of these were Islamic/Islamist, seven were new democratic, four were leftist and three were ethno-nationalist. According to AREU, Islamists, religious conservatives and traditionalists had 113 seats (close to a majority) vis-à-vis 43 held by "liberals and leftists."⁸⁸ SNTV had favoured the better-organised *tanzims* that were able to rely on their local networks, vast resources and backing by

militias.⁸⁹ They also profited from the suppression of the UN "mapping" report on war crimes, the draft of which contained many names of perpetrators from the pre-Taliban phases of the conflict.⁹⁰ The Afghan electoral law stipulated that participants in such crimes had to be excluded from running as candidates. However, it also provided that this would only apply for convicted war criminals. At the time, no such case had even been brought to court in Afghanistan. A small number of mainly second-ranking commanders were excluded based on the provision that they were linked to illegal armed groups.

After the parliamentary election, Karzai made sure that these political parties were unable to manifest their potential in parliament strength by stopping them from setting up their own factions. This 'ban' was not based on any legal regulation. In fact, the Rules of Procedure of both houses allow for MPs to set up "parliamentary groups." But similar to the exclusion of political parties from the electoral process, an intimation was created – by again *not mentioning* political parties in the rules – that setting up party-based factions was not seen as appropriate. (In Afghanistan, often things are considered legal only when they are explicitly allowed.) While some authors argue that these groups were intended "to encourage the formation of political blocs" in the house and to "ultimately form the foundations of issue-based political parties,"⁹¹ practice showed that the opposite was the case. The creation of non-party parliamentary groups undermined existing parties, but did not promote new ones. None of the parliamentary groups of the 2005-10 Wolesi Jirga represented a certain party.⁹² AAN research shows that these groups barely met nor were active in parliamentary life. Many MPs registered in their name denied that they were members.

⁸⁷ "The September 2005 Parliamentary and Provincial Council Elections in Afghanistan", National Democratic Institute, 2004, https://www.ndi.org/files/2004_af_report_041006.pdf, 8.

⁸⁸ But the house included 40 commanders associated with armed groups, 24 members who belonged to criminal gangs, 17 drug traffickers and 19 members who faced serious allegations of war crimes and human rights violations. According to a high-ranking AIHRC member, more than 80 per cent of winning candidates in the provinces, and more than 60 per cent in Kabul, were linked to armed groups. Andrew Wilder, "A House Divided? Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections," AREU, December 2005, <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/531E-A%20House%20Divided-IP-print.pdf>, 7, 14. See also Noman Dost, "Why intellectuals and technocrats failed," *Pajhwok*, 13 November 2005, in the author's archive. On candidates' vetting for links to illegal militias, see "A Glass Half Full," *The Economist*, 15 September 2005, <http://www.economist.com/node/4407983>; "Rights Body Warns of Warlords' Success in Elections," IRIN, 18 October 2005.

⁸⁹ The UN/AIHR "democratic rights" reports were just a pale reflex of the events. Many cases reported by this author, then in UNAMA, were not included, often with the argument that violence was not political, but caused by personal rivalry.

⁹⁰ The report had been leaked and can be found under: <http://www.flagrancy.net/salvage/UNMappingReportAfghanistan.pdf>.

⁹¹ Coburn and Larson, *Derailing Democracy* [see FN 2], 85.

⁹² A rare exception in the 2010-15 Wolesi Jirga is *Etemad* (Trust), formed in 2012, that only consists of Hazaras and, it seems, *Hezb-e Wahdat* (Khalili) followers. Abasin Zaheer, "Itimid parliamentary group formed", *Pajhwok*, 5 December 2012, in the author's archive.

In the end, the application of the SNTV system did not serve Karzai's wish⁹³ to weaken the parties or to reduce their number. The fact was that as long as elections were held on a non-party basis (ie the votes for parties were not counted countrywide), there would be no selection effect between the parties with more or less support – and no subsequent pressure on those with low numbers to dissolve or merge with other ones. Under the current system, each party can continue claiming as much support as it wants.

With their legal and practical marginalisation, the political parties in general lost much of their political drive. Only occasionally did they continue pushing for a change of the electoral system, towards the compromise solution of a mixed system. In March 2008, dozens of parties (*mujahedin*, pro-democratic and leftist) demonstrated in front of the parliament to demand modifications to the electoral system again. This time they suggested distributing 60 per cent of the Wolesi Jirga seats on the basis of proportional representation and party lists and 40 per cent on the basis of a 'majority vote' (SNTV). This had no effect. The next flare-up of such activity came in 2013, before the 2014 election, with the establishment of *Shura-ye Hamkari-ye Ahzab-e Siasi wa Etelafha-ye Afghanistan* (Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions of Afghanistan/CCPPCA) – an electoral-reform-oriented, single-issue alliance of 21 parties. It put significant pressure for electoral reform on Karzai and represented the high-water mark for unity between Afghan political parties since they had been legalised almost ten years earlier. The CCPPCA has since become defunct, however, over alliance building for the upcoming election which saw member parties ending up on different tickets undermining their will to continue cooperation. In the following years, a numbers of parties also participated in various electoral reform bodies set up by civil society organisations. The strongest

⁹³ During the 2004 presidential campaign, Karzai ran with a reform programme and with the promise to "end the coalition government." This was read as a promise to get rid of the *tanzim* representatives in his government, then still widely popular. This policy was still based on the assumption that his moving against the 'warlords' was what the international community wanted. The reality only dawned on Karzai when he started moving against Ismail Khan in Herat in September 2004, asked for ISAF backing but was rebuffed, with the argument that ISAF would not intervene in 'green-on-green' (ie inter-Afghan) conflicts. After that, Karzai's behaviour changed and he started working with the remaining warlords, making their unofficial group one of his main advisory bodies.

push for a change in the electoral system, however, came from the country's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) that proposed, in 2013, to reserve one third of the 249 Wolesi Jirga seats for political parties in the third parliamentary elections in 2015. The proposal was voted down by the SNTV-elected parliament

The SNTV system and the marginalisation of parties created a number of deleterious effects on the country's political system as a whole. It fragmented parliament, led to low discipline in its ranks and generated high absentee rates during debates. These resulted in long delays on legislation, random voting patterns and opened the doors for manipulation and bribing. It weakened parliament's weight vis-à-vis the executive (as may well have been intended). It also put massive strains on executive-legislative relations, as the humiliated house started sniping against the executive, leading to frequent institutional paralysis.⁹⁴

In the long run, former president Karzai's aversion to parties became codified in law, contributing to the over-centralised form of government, and making the separation of powers lopsided, to the legislature's detriment. The more centralised, and the less inclusive or democratic the style of government became, the more the political space theoretically provided for by the 2004 constitution and the Political Parties Law atrophied in practice during Karzai's time in office.

3. CURRENT TRENDS IN THE POLITICAL PARTIES SCENE

3.1 General trends

Political parties surfaced in higher numbers than ever in 2001. This included parties of the three political currents that had consolidated during the decades of war, although in different degrees. The parties of the Islamist and ethno-nationalist currents were bolstered and legitimised by their resistance against the Soviet occupation. In the case of the *tanzims*, particularly, their core followers originate from the wartime networks of commanders and fighters whose loyalty has

⁹⁴ See eg Abasin Zaheer, "No debate as amendments to law on poll panels tabled", *Pajhwok*, 30 March 2015, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/03/30/no-debate-amendments-law-poll-panels-tabled>; Abasin Zaheer, "Lack of quorum hinders decision on draft supplementary budget", *Pajhwok*, 14 November 2012; <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/11/14/lack-quorum-hinders-decision-draft-supplementary-budget>.

survived after 2001 but who might not formally be members of a party. They provide the backbone of the *tanzims*’ “vertical [and top-down only] structures of communication.”⁹⁵

The leftist current, in contrast – due to its alliance with the ‘alien’ Soviet Union, the atrocities committed under its regime and its militarily defeat in 1992 – lost much of its legitimacy. This was particularly true for the PDPA sub-current. But also the Maoists who had fought the PDPA regime together with, and after their sidelining in the 1980s often within certain *tanzim* fronts, were discredited by the Islamists as Marxists, too.

With the new democrats, a new fourth current surfaced after 2001, trying to use the space the international intervention in the name of rights and democracy would provide. It referred to and took up the political legacy and agenda of the 1940s-70s constitutional-democratic movements. Some of the (former) leftists joined the pro-democratic current.

Many parties, in all currents, fragmented. This was often due to the ambitions of individual leaders and the hope to attract funds but did not reflect ideological or programmatic differences. For them, NDI’s political parties analyst Kid Spence coined the term “vanity project.”⁹⁶ The fragmentation also reflected that the *tanzims*, but also the PDPA, were more associations of local, ethnic and commanders or *andiwali* networks rather than parties in a modern sense.

Although the fragmentation of the political scene makes it difficult to distinguish between many of the individual parties, there is a very clear ideological distinction between the four existing currents: the Islamists, the leftist (whether in their previous revolutionary-Marxist or their current social-democratised incarnations), the ethno-nationalists and the new-democrats. The main cleavage is between the Islamists advocating an Islamic form of government and those supporting a secular state.

By end of June 2016, there were 57 registered political parties.⁹⁷ The zenith had been reached before the 2010 presidential election with 110, before the latest re-registration (see 3.5). There were 17 Islamist, nine leftist, eight ethno-

nationalist, three new pro-democratic and one monarchist party.⁹⁸ An overall number of Afghans who were party members then can not be given as the law requires parties only to register a minimum number of 10,000 members. From that, it could be deduced that there must be at least around 600,000 registered party members – with the caveat that there is space for manipulation in the registration procedure and there might be a number of ‘ghost members.’

As a result of the fact that political parties are not necessarily required to compete successfully in elections there was no incentive for political parties to consolidate internally as democratically functioning membership entities. In many cases, they do not have a clear-cut membership beyond the minimum requirements for registration. The lax implementation of the parties law also has not forced them to go much beyond their ‘traditional’ ethnic group. Most of the parties – or at least their narrower leadership circles, with the exception of the RJP and some pro-democratic parties – are dominated by a certain ethnic group: *Jamiat* by Tajiks, *Hezb-e Islami*, *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami* and *Dawat/Ettehad* by Pashtuns, *Jombesh* by Uzbeks, *Wahdat* by Hazaras, *Harakat-e Eslami* by Sayyeds, *Paiwand* by the Ismaili sect.⁹⁹ This has neither changed in practice nor in their public perception. The law banning ‘ethnic’ or ‘sectarian’ parties has not been enforced either and is easy to circumvent, by adopting ‘façade’ minority representatives into their leaderships.

Because parties can run candidates in elections but not constitute party-based factions in parliament, parties (or their leaders) only need their members and voters at election time. The NDI and Giustozzi found that even stronger parties close down their local structures between elections and that their limited “activities often occur on an ad hoc basis and not according to a procedural format.”¹⁰⁰

Most Afghan parties continue to have only nominal organisational structures, particularly outside

⁹⁵ “Political Parties in Afghanistan” [see FN 5], 20.

⁹⁶ Kit Spence, “Political Party Assessment Afghanistan,” National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, [Kabul], 2006, 11.

⁹⁷ The MoJ list (in Dari) is here:

<http://moj.gov.af/Content/files/57parties.pdf>; there is no English language list anymore.

⁹⁸ About the remaining twenty parties, there was not sufficient information to categorise them.

⁹⁹ This is painted with a very broad stroke, though, and also reflects public perception. The local character of *tanzim* mobilisation during the war led to a more diverse picture, for example with large Pashtun communities in the south supporting *Jamiat* or, in the north, *Jombesh* while *Hezb-e Eslami* also includes Hazara networks. Also non-*tanzims* often mobilise via person- or family-related networks.

¹⁰⁰ “Political Parties in Afghanistan” [see FN 5], 21, 23; Antonio Giustozzi, “March towards democracy? The development of political movements in Afghanistan,” *Central Asian Survey*, 3 (2013), 329.

urban centres – but this does not mean they are not present there. The author has regularly encountered party activists from outlying areas when visiting central party offices in Kabul or provincial centres.¹⁰¹ Most of them say that they work under semi-legal conditions at best. Therefore, they rather have to rely on the traditionally more informal networking practices characteristic of Afghan society. The struggle against the Soviets also significantly extended the basis of the *tanzims* to rural areas where loyalty to them remains strong. The PDPA, with its associated youth, women's and professional organisations, had two million members and also spread across urban and rural areas, including among the rural intelligentsia, among them particularly teachers. (The PDPA's Khalq faction was dubbed the 'teacher's party.') Also left-wing and left-wing ethno-nationalist parties moved 'to the villages,' according to Maoist ideology, and opened fronts there. Some of which remain influential to the day – see SAZA's and Congress's electoral influence in rural areas of the north (3.2.2.3). Similarly, the election success of left-wing MP Malalai Juya (excluded from parliament because of her criticism of warlords in 2007) in Farah province in 2005 was based on mobilisation earlier of local Maoist ('teachers' and 'engineers') fronts that had formally joined Islamist *tanzims*.

Membership is often unclear or noncommittal; multiple memberships are possible. The author participated in the opening congress of a party in 2010 where – except for the party founder – all other speakers told him they were not a member of the party and did not plan to join but had only attended out of interest. The deteriorating security situation has exacerbated the trend that party members do not want to, or do not dare to, make their membership known. Even in Kabul, many parties do not display a signboard at their offices because of security concerns.

Members also do not have much say in drafting parties' programmes and policies. This is done best

¹⁰¹ New academic research papers also brought about historical evidence that some political parties have emerged either from rural environments (*Hezb-e Eslami* Khales) or from outside the Kabul centre (*Hezb-e Serri-ye Ettihad* during the 1047-52 democratic period). One of them is Islamist, the other ethno-nationalist. See: Faridullah Bezhani, "Ethno-religious dynamics..." [see FN 28], 445-64; Kevin Bell, "Usama bin Laden's 'Father Sheikh': Yunus Khalis and the Return of al-Qa'ida's Leadership to Afghanistan," *Combating Terrorism Center*, West Point 2013, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/usama-bin-ladens-father-sheikh-yunus-khalis-and-the-return-of-al-qaidas-leadership-to-afghanistan..>

by a small core circle of people around the party leaders.¹⁰² Almost all leaders have been elected by such inner circles in backroom deals, rather than by delegates at party congresses. In some parties, the succession at the top (for example, after the death of 'traditional' leaders like, Muhammadi, Khales and Rabbani) seems to have taken a 'dynastic' tendency typical of other countries in the region. This option is often used as a fall-back position where the succession is not clearly regulated internally. Then, appointing a son of a former leader seems to be an attempt to avoid head-on competition. In some cases, this has done more harm than good to the party's unity, particular when the 'dynastic' solution meant to be an interim solution is perpetuated before the background of an indecisive waiting game between several party heavyweights. *Jamiat-e Islami* (see 3.2.1.1) is a point in case.

Many Afghans see their party as just another supply system for social services (and sometimes recruitment is based on this premise), as many parties run training courses, try to obtain contracts for aid projects, provide stipends to students, pull strings to provide jobs or offer physical protection in a war situation. This perpetuates pre-democratic patronage networks rather than intra-party relations that make democratic decision-making possible.

To today's Afghan parties, the term *Honoratiorenpartei* ("dignitaries' parties") could be applied that had been coined by Max Weber (1864-1920) for early 20th century Germany. The famous German sociologist described this as a stage of development of a party during which local dignitaries determine their principles and politics when they do not have many members or when the relationship between the members and the leaders remains loose and members are not yet in a position to influence their party's politics, while voters still prefer a well-known dignitary by comparison to other, unknown leaders.¹⁰³ Afghans have their own, very appropriate term for those dignitaries: *mutanafezin*, "those with influence." The *tanzims*, however, and some ethno-nationalist groups, are a special Afghan case of dignitary parties: dignitary parties 'with armies,' ie militias as – unofficial – armed wings.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² "Political Party Assessment Afghanistan," National Democratic Institute, 2006, 13-4.

¹⁰³ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck 1972 (5th ed), 843, 850.

¹⁰⁴ After the inconclusive second round of the 2014 presidential election, "postvoting violence was threatened and by many accounts was a real risk, at the

3.2 The four party currents

3.2.1 The Islamist current: the *tanzims* thriving in fragmentation

As mentioned above (chapter 3), the design of the Afghan election system, with its marginal role for political parties and, resulting from that, how power politics play out in practice, has mainly strengthened the *tanzims*. Historically, there are two sets which differ according to the religion of their rank-and-file base, ie Sunni or Shia Muslim, and, historically, by their regional protector and donor during the anti-Soviet struggle, ie Pakistan (with strong direct financial support from Saudi Arabia) or Iran. Both the Sunni and Shia *tanzims* emerged from Islamist political organisations created between the 1950s and 1980s. These took their current form during the fight against the PDPA regimes (1978-92) and, in particular, the Soviet occupation (1979-89).

The Sunni *tanzims* were known as the *haftgana* (or Peshawar ‘Seven’), as they were supported by Pakistan in the 1980s and had their headquarters in Peshawar. Initially there were six: *Hezb-e Eslami*, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; a second *Hezb-e Eslami* founded by a religious scholar, Mawlawi Yunus Khales; Ustad Borhanuddin Rabbani’s *Jamiat-e Eslami*; *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami* (Islamic Revolution Movement) set up by Mawlawi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi, also run by *ulema*; and two smaller groups, led by leaders of different Sufi brotherhoods, *Jabha-ye Nejat-e Melli-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan National Salvation Front/ANLF), led by Sebghatullah Mojaddedi who briefly was the first *mujahedin* interim president in 1992, and *Jabha-ye Eslami-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan* (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan/NIFA), led by Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani (who was just recently appointed chairman of the of High Peace Council/HPC). The seventh *haftgana* party is *Dawat-e Eslami* (Islamic Call; originally *Ettehad-e Eslami bara-ye Azadi-ye Afghanistan*, Islamic Union for the Freedom of Afghanistan) led by the *alem* Abdul Rassul Sayyaf. It was founded in 1980 as a Saudi Arabia-sponsored attempt of coalition building between the Sunni *tanzims*, but Sayyaf,

extreme extending to the possibility of some kind of soft coup and the formation of a parallel government.” William A. Byrd, “Understanding Afghanistan’s 2014 Presidential Election: The Limits to Democracy in a Limited Access Order,” US Institute of Peace, Special Report 370, April 2015, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR370-Understanding-Afghanistan’s-2014-Presidential-Election.pdf>.

who was elected leader of it, turned it into his own *tanzim*.¹⁰⁵

On the Shia side, there are two main *tanzims*: *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami*, a merger of eight smaller parties supported by Iran in the 1980s, and led by late Ustad Abdul Ali Mazari (killed by the Taleban in 1995), and *Harakat-e Eslami*, led by Sheikh Muhammad Asef Mohseni. Apart from religion, both have distinct ethnic backgrounds: *Hezb-e Wahdat* is a Hazara party, while *Harakat* represents the Shia Sayeds, who consider themselves direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad who, therefore, are often considered a separate ethnic group, or even as Arabs, in Afghanistan. Between both, there are also clear social cleavages. The mainly rural (or suburban) Hazaras are originally farmers and labourers (they have become arguably the most vertically mobile group in the country since the 1980s), the Sayeds constitute a religious elite, religious intelligentsia group.

All *tanzims* continue to exist. With one exception they are active as registered political parties. The remaining one – *Hezb-e Eslami* (Khales) – survived in the form of a family-centric network around the Nangrahar province-based Arsala family and with its own foundation. (Other *tanzims* also have established foundations.) It was prominently present in the Karzai cabinet and administration. Lately, it has become more active again and supported the Ghani election campaign. All *tanzims* continue to rely on commander networks and militias, particularly in the provinces.

Most *tanzims* continue to be headed by their historical or jihad-time leader: ANLF by Mojaddedi; NIFA by Gailani; *Dawat* by Sayyaf; and the mainstream of *Hezb-e Wahdat* by Khalili. The same is true for *Hezb-e Eslami*’s insurgent wing that is still led by Hekmatyar. Two leaders – Khales (of his *Hezb-e Eslami*) and Muhammadi (of *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami*) – have peacefully passed away;

¹⁰⁵ This party and its leader are often but incorrectly dubbed ‘Wahhabi.’ Sayyaf apparently presented himself as one in the 1980s, but he has a background in the 1960/70s Afghan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and, according to Afghan observers, prays in the Hanafi style, the mainstream Afghan Sunni sect. Dawa’s current relationship with Saudi Arabia remains unclear; the Gulf Kingdom is understood to have backed the candidacy of Ashraf Ghani in 2014. Malaiz Daud, “Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective,” Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, CIDOB Policy Research Paper, December 2015, http://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/stap_rp/policy_research_papers/afghanistan_overview_of_sources_of_tension_with_regional_implications_2015.

Rabbani of *Jamiat* was assassinated by the Taliban in 2011. The leader of the second largest Shia *tanzim*, *Harakat-e Eslami*, Mohseni stepped down in 2005. After their leaders' demise, *Jamiat*, *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami* (temporarily) and NIFA (in practice, though not formally) have been led by sons of their historical leaders, a sign of dynastic politics among the *tanzims*.

At the same time, all *tanzims* – with the exception of the small, extremely leader-centric ANLF – have seen splits. This has increased the number of what could be called now 'parties with *tanzim*-origin' to 22 from amongst the currently registered 56 parties. Only the Shia and, recently, (Sunni) *Harakat* have managed to re-unite its main factions; although smaller ones remain independently active.

The stability of the mainstream *tanzims* is grounded in the fact that, during the anti-Soviet jihad, political Islam had become the dominant factor of their self-identification and legitimisation. During the wars, the clergy – both its higher and lower echelons, ie the *ulema* and mullahs – became increasingly influential. They took up political and ideological leadership and were able to marginalise (with Pakistani support) other forces that resisted the Soviets. The *mujahedin* parties – both Sunni and Shia – continue to be led by *ulema* or pious members of the (technical) intelligentsia.

The surviving *mujahedin* leaders now refer to themselves as 'jihadi leaders,' a post-2001 term. They reconstructed their "post-Jihad identity"¹⁰⁶ exactly on their participation in the fight against the Soviet occupation and later the Taliban regime. They dominate the political discourse and occupy key positions in the government, judiciary, and armed forces and (through large investments) in the economy. Criticising them is treated (by them) as an attack on Islam itself. Repeatedly, courts have been instrumental in political debates that had religious connotations, often over women's or other rights issues, or in cases of criticism of Jihadi leaders, which were treated as 'criticism of Islam' and equated with 'blasphemy.'¹⁰⁷ This represents a new method of

top-down, institutionalised politicisation of Islam, exacerbated by the lack of judicial independence in Afghanistan.

3.2.1.1 Jamiat-e Eslami

After 2001, *Jamiat* has remained both a party and a broader movement of partly overlapping political parties, alliances, networks, regional and sub-factions. It has managed to remain a part of government, both under Karzai and Ghani, while cultivating the image of being a political opposition force at the same time. In its self-legitimisation, it presents itself as the leading force in the jihad against the Soviet occupation and the only genuine one in the *muqawamat* (resistance) against the Taliban, with "martyr Ahmad Shah Massud" as its most powerful symbol, and therefore the natural governing political force in the country. In the immediately post-Taliban years, its leaders ran a campaign to delegitimise the diaspora Afghans, who had joined the first Karzai governments, for not having directly participated in the jihad.¹⁰⁸

The movement's centre of gravity is the *Jamiat* party – and, at the same time, this is the object of a

blasphemy after challenging orthodox Islamic views on women's rights. In both cases, the accused were Shia. In a similar case in 2008, a student and freelance journalist in Mazar-e Sharif, Parvez Kambakhsh, was jailed and sentenced to death for blasphemy after he distributed articles (published in Iran) that were judged to have questioned tenets of Islam. Following massive international protests, the verdict was commuted to 20 years in jail. He was later pardoned by President Karzai and spirited out of the country.

¹⁰⁸ Diaspora Afghans were labelled as *sag-shuyan* ("dog washers"), human rights defenders as *kafer* ("unbeliever") or western agents. Mansur called "those coming from the west and accuse the *mujahedin* of being warlords" as "puppets who dance to the tune of their foreign bosses." *Payam-e Mojahed*, quoted in *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 24 April 2008. Sayyaf equalled technocrats with "sellers of the country" in 2014 when the new president made the former a criterion for future appointments: "If jihad is not a criterion, is selling your country a criterion?" See Helena Malikiyar, "New Afghanistan: Mujahideen need not apply?", *al-Jazeera*, 12 February 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/02/afghanistan-mujahideen-apply-ghani-abdullah-150212110939490.html>. During the 2002 ELJ, Sima Samar, deputy chair of the 2001/02 interim government and later heading the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, was called the "Afghan Salman Rushdie" and, thereby, declared an assassination target by *mujahedin* media. Also, the provision introduced into the 2004 constitution that ministers cannot hold two passports is part of the anti-diaspora campaign. The constitution – as in many other cases – is ambiguous on how the issue should be treated (Article 72, 1).

¹⁰⁶ "Political Parties in Afghanistan" [see FN 5], 11.

¹⁰⁷ The first of these was the 2003 case of the newspaper *Aftab* that had printed an article accusing the jihadi leaders of using Islam as an "instrument to take over power" in order to establish the "rule of the mullahs," calling this "holy fascism." After accusations of 'insulting Islam,' its editor-in-chief Sayed Mir Hossain Mahdawi was forced to flee abroad; the newspaper had to close. In 2005, monthly *Huquq-e Zan* (Women's Rights) was banned and its editor-in-chief Ali Mohaqqueq Nasab threatened with the death sentence for

power struggle. It includes regional factions like the Panjshiris, the Parwanis, Rabbanis' Badakhshis, Atta's Balkhis, Ismail Khan's Heratis – and a Herati sub-faction around the Afzali family. The Panjshiri leaders were the most influential until around 2004 when they were the (shrinking) core of the Karzai cabinet. The commanders' network remains a structure providing internal cohesion in the background, even though it formally has stopped existing. This was established by the late Ahmad Shah Massud in 1985 – *Shura-ye Nazar-e Shemal* (Supervisory Council of the North) – mainly covering Panjshir, Parwan, Kapisa and Kabul province, as well as the northeast. It is also an instrument to ensure the dominance of the Panjshiri faction, both in *Jamiat* and the broader *Jamiati* camp.

Distinct political groups in the wider *Jamiati* camp include Mansur's Muslim People's Party, Qanuni's officially defunct *Hezb-e Afghanistan-e Newin* (New Afghanistan Party), Abdullah's new National Coalition, the Massud brothers' Ahmad Shah Massud Foundation (one Massud brother also temporarily had his own party, *Nohzat-e Melli*, the National Movement) and former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh's *Rawand-e Sabz* (Green Trend; the green is for Islamic here, not for ecological). Mansur's party no longer has not much visibility, particularly after he was elected into parliament in 2010. It also has never been registered. An earlier re-unification of *Jamiat*, *Afghanistan-e Newin* and a part of *Nohzat-e Melli* decided in a joint meeting of leaders in December 2005 never fully materialised, despite an Islamic oath of allegiance (*bay'at*) to Rabhani by all signatories.¹⁰⁹ As a result, Qanuni's party never fully disappeared and, although it has not been publicly active for a number of years, can be re-mobilised under changed circumstances.

However, after the assassination of *Jamiat's* undisputed military leader Ahmad Shah Massud in 2001 all these groups became less cohesive. The deputy he had appointed, former *Jamiat* intelligence chief Muhammad Qasim Fahim, proved less able to hold the various factions together, not least as he served as a defence minister under Karzai and accepted the position of his First Vice President in 2004. Between 2001 and the 2004 elections, *Jamiat* had to gradually give up

¹⁰⁹ "Tawafuqnama-ye *Jamiat*-e Islami-ye Afghanistan wa Hezb-e Afghanistan-e Newin wa Nohzat-e Melli-ye Afghanistan [Agreement of *Jamiat*-e Islami, New Afghanistan Party and National Movement]," *Payyam-e Mujahed*, 1 Jaddi 1384 [21 December 2005], author's archive. Despite the agreement, the parties continued operating separately at least for several months.

its almost complete dominance in government; a process that continues to the present. It lost many key positions in the security sector.

Twice, in 2009 and 2014, it competed for the presidency, both times with Abdullah as its candidate. Both times he was defeated, as a result of a combination of fraud and insufficient mobilisation. In both cases, a number of *Jamiati* leaders either abstained from openly campaigning for Abdullah or were baited by Karzai with a place on his ticket as vice president or key government positions. The game changer in both cases, however, was Jombesh's exit from opposition fronts set up to support Abdullah's candidacy, shifting numerous voters over to Karzai.

After his 2009 defeat, Abdullah drew the conclusion that he needed a much better organised, stable opposition party or alliance for the 2014 elections. It was named after his 2009 campaign slogan *Taghir wa Omid* (Change and Hope).¹¹⁰ During the 2010 parliamentary election Abdullah claimed his coalition supported more than 300 candidates for the 249 lower house seats and helped many fundraise for their campaigns.¹¹¹ In December 2011, he renamed it *Etelaf-e Melli-ye Afghanistan* (National Coalition of Afghanistan/NCA), turning it into a formal coalition of parties, councils and social groups. Two more *Jamiat* heavyweights, Qanuni and Ahmad Wali Massud, also joined. This made it look more like a real coalition and less a one-man show. When launching the new coalition, a spokesman drew a pointed distinction between the (then dissolved old) National Front and its leadership's "political disability" and "weak impression" during the 2009 presidential elections. He said that the new coalition, in contrast, was committed to its own political plans and goals, and not to seats in the government. However, despite the multi-ethnic look of the coalition's leadership, the coalition itself was unable to secure major allies from beyond the *Jamiati*/Tajik camp.¹¹²

Currently, in the Ghani cabinet, for the first time since 2001, no Tajik or *Jamiati* is vice president of

¹¹⁰ *Taghir wa Omid*, in turn, had its roots in an earlier National Front that declared itself officially as "opposition" in November 2007 after a suicide attack killed scores of people, including seven MPs, in Baghlan.

¹¹¹ Amanda Hodge, "World's Afghans fund new voice," *The Australian*, 17 September 2010, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/worlds-afghans-fund-new-voice/story-e6frg6so-1225925041844>.

¹¹² Ghulam Sakhi, "The elections and political realignments in Afghanistan," Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report 5/2014, 7.

the country. Apart from CEO Abdullah, only two key portfolios remain in *Jamiat's* hands: foreign affairs (Rabbani) and economy (Abdul Sattar Murad).¹¹³ *Jamiat* remains the single largest, organised military-political force in the country. It has a strong presence in parliament. It continues to dominate the armed forces' officers' corps with its many associated official or unofficial militias, particularly in the north. It has a large number of governors, provincial police and NDS chiefs, as well as with its alliance with other *tanzims*.

Today, it projects itself as the major force stemming against what is described as a growing Pashtun domination in government and a possible 'Grand Pashtun coalition', including the Taliban. It sees itself as a defender of the values of the jihad, which, due to the foreign influence, has come under threat. *Jamiat's* interim leader Salahuddin Rabbani stated in July 2015 that his "was the only party which was fighting against the Taliban" and that the *mujahedin* who "have fought for 30 years in the name of religion and honesty in terms of defending the country [...] must not be ignored."¹¹⁴

In the context of the conflict with the Taliban, ethno-nationalist ('Tajikist') tones are more frequently heard from *Jamiat's* ranks. Protests against the Taliban attack on Kunduz in Kabul in September/October 2015 were carried out under flags of the *Jamiat*-headed Islamic State of Afghanistan and with generally anti-Pashtun slogans. Saleh and his *Rawand-e Sabz* have made their opposition to a "sell-out peace deal with the Taliban" their central campaign issue. They presented themselves as the focal point of what Saleh calls the "anti-Taliban constituency."¹¹⁵ Historically, this has two reasons. First, during the jihad, *Jamiat* mainly recruited among the Tajik population; and Tajik ethno-nationalist feelings have been particularly strong in the party founder's province Badakhshan. (There, and in Kabul, *Jamiat* absorbed a number of former leftist activists.) Younger party members or sympathisers are equally susceptible to such ideas.

¹¹³ In early 2016, the posts of interior minister and (acting) head of intelligence were added again.

¹¹⁴ Reza Hashemi, "Rabbani in Badakhshan: Mujahideen should not be ignored", Tolonews, 19 July 2015, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/20514-rabbani-in-badakhshan-mujahideen-should-not-be-ignored>; Sayed Arif Musavi, "Northern Political Parties Unite Against Insurgents: Noor", Tolonews, 17 July 2015, <http://mobile.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/20499-northern-political-parties-unite-against-insurgents-noor>.

¹¹⁵ Amrullah Saleh, "The Anti-Taliban Constituency: The key to success in Afghanistan", *National Review*, 6 April 2011, author's archive.

Due to its inability to resolve the leadership issue, *Jamiat* continues to punch under its weight. This is also reflected in the 'Abdullah camp's' role in the current government that is paralysed by the many particular interests in its own ranks, and by his loss of personal support in *Jamiat's* ranks. The lack of unity in *Jamiat* and the wider movement also undermines Abdullah's long-term attempt to build a more coherent political coalition that could mobilise sufficient votes to win a future election.

3.2.1.2 The many strands of Hezb-e Eslami

Initially, in the 1970s/80s, there were two parties called *Hezb-e Eslami* – one founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the other one by late Yunus Khales. The fact that both use the same name has confused many. The latter has often been called a splinter from the former. That is incorrect. Both chose an obvious name when forming in two different milieus during the onset of the fight against a leftist regime considered anti-Islamic: Hekmatyar's among the urban Islamist intelligentsia; Khales' among rural, tribal communities in the country's east and southeast regions.¹¹⁶ Both – and Sunni *Harakat* (about this later) – are special cases among today's *tanzim*, as they have factions on both side of the current war.

When Hekmatyar's *Hezb* was not invited to participate in the Bonn process, it joined the armed struggle against the Karzai government and its western allies. The party's – and Hekmatyar's personal – long-standing rivalry with *Jamiat*¹¹⁷ seems to be another strong reason for its opposition to the post-2001 Afghan state with its strong *Jamiat's* component. Today, it is the second largest insurgent group.¹¹⁸ In contrast to the Taliban, *Hezb* (Hekmatyar) has had regular political contact with Kabul during most of the Karzai years, officially starting in March 2010. In March 2016, Hekmatyar renewed his offer to join peace talks;¹¹⁹ in May 2016, a peace agreement with the Afghan government was initialled.

¹¹⁶ Bell, "Usama bin Laden's 'Father Sheikh'..." [see FN 101].

¹¹⁷ See eg Nils Wörmer, *The Networks of Kunduz. A History of Conflict and Their Actors, from 1992 to 2001*, Afghanistan Analysts Network, Thematic Report 02/2012, 8-9.

¹¹⁸ The Haqqani network, seen by some as a separate organisation, is integral part of the Taliban movement; its current operational leader Serajuddin Haqqani, is a deputy head of its Leadership Council.

¹¹⁹ "Afghan Hezb-e-Islami militants hold peace talks in Kabul", BBC, 22 March 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8579380.stm;

The contacts with Kabul were helped by the many former (or current) *Hezb* members who, individually, had joined the government after 2001 (or, as some claim, in an organised attempt to infiltrate it). They set up their own party that was officially registered only in late 2005 after the parliamentary election. It uses exactly the same name and insignia as the Hekmatyar wing and claims to represent the entire party¹²⁰ and reluctantly distanced itself from the Hekmatyar wing. Their mutual relationship remained unclear. Nevertheless, Karzai has given *Hezb* cabinet, governor and other positions at least since 2004 so as to balance his *Jamiat* competitors.¹²¹ In parliament's second term (2010-15), it was deemed to be the largest (unofficial) faction with some 35 MPs. When the May 2016 peace agreement is finalised, this could further enhance the party's influence in the Afghan government.

The party's internal life proved to be lively, though. The first leader of the party's legal wing, MP Khaled Faruqi belonged to the same tribe (the Kharoti) as Hekmatyar. He was ousted from his post in a "national gathering" of the party in 2007 (not a full congress). His replacement, Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, became economy minister under Karzai in 2010 – without being forced to quit his party position.¹²² He was the first *Hezb* leader to enter a cabinet since Hekmatyar joined the last, short-lived pre-Taliban *mujahedin* government in 1996. This was another sign as to how close relations between the president and this particular party actually were. Meanwhile, Faruqi continued

Karzai confirmed them in 2012: Aryn Baker, "The Loneliness of the Afghan President: Karzai on His Own," *Time*, 31 May 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2116065,00.html>; Javed Hamim Kakar, "Afghan govt welcomes HIA decision to join peace process," *Pajhwok*, 13 March 2016, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/13/afghan-govt-welcomes-hia-decision-join-peace-process>.

¹²⁰ "Poshtibani-ye Shura-ye Tasmim-giri-ye Hezb-e Islami az daulat [Hezb's Decision-making Council Supports Government]," *Anis* (Kabul), 14 Saur 1383 [4 May 2004], author's archive.

¹²¹ Prominent *Hezb*is in state offices include ex-ministers Omar Daudzai, Faruq Wardak and Asef Rahimi, Karzai's chief-of-staff Abdul Karim Khorram, current Wolesi Jirga speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim and several provincial governors, including Ataullah Ludin who, before, led the unofficial *Hezb* faction in the Wolesi Jirga.

¹²² Apart from the various *Jamiat*s, there were other exceptions, all *tanzim* members: late Sayed Reza Kazemi (of *Eqtedar*) and former health minister, Dr Fatemi, who was known as a member of Hazrat Mojaddedi's party. *Afghan Mellat's* Ahady was the only one who – at least publicly known, refused to resign.

to challenge the 2007 vote and to run an unregistered splinter group.

Around the time of the 2014 presidential election, the Hekmatyar wing became more active in the country (while continuing its armed insurgency) and created some centrifugal forces. Qutbuddin Helal, one of the two deputies of Hekmatyar, returned to Afghanistan and launched a presidential bid as an 'independent.' Hekmatyar issued contradictory statements about his support of Helal and the election in general.¹²³ Finally, Helal only won 2.75 per cent of votes and joined Ghani for the second round, but his activity (it is unclear whether this was with Hekmatyar's consent) blurred the lines between *Hezb's* inland and insurgency wings further. Re-unification talks between the Hekmatyar and the Arghandiwal factions, as well as later with the *Ettehad-e Shuraha-ye Hezb-e Islami* (Union of Hezb Councils), were reportedly initiated as early as in 2013,¹²⁴ but have so far not reached their goal.

Arghandiwal's party split into several factions. In a political about-face, his faction declared support for Dr Abdullah, a member of *Hezb's* original arch-enemy *Jamiat*.¹²⁵ This finally brought the party the position of deputy CEO, filled by a deputy leader of Arghandiwal, Muhammad Khan, and a number of cabinet posts, including that of the influential justice minister (Dr Abdul Basir Anwar) and the one for rural development (Nasir Durrani), with influence over substantial funding from the village-oriented National Solidarity Programme. Arghandiwal did not return to the cabinet. Another faction, under the name of Hezb Councils, which included historical leaders and provincial heavyweights, ended up supporting Ghani, after having sided with Dr Zalmay Rassul in the first round, then believed to be Karzai's candidate.¹²⁶ It

¹²³ "Rebel Group to Boycott Afghan Presidential Runoff," *Pajhwok*, 21 April 2014, author's archive.

¹²⁴ Javid Hamim Kakar, "HIA factions in talks on reunification", *Pajhwok*, 14 April 2013, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/04/14/hia-factions-talks-reunification>.

¹²⁵ Interview with representative of the political HIA wing's Sabawun faction, provided by Philipp Münch, 14 November 2013; "Islamic Party Voices Support for Contender Abdollah, not Helal in Afghan Election," Noor TV, 19 February 2014, author's archive.

¹²⁶ Interviews Münch [see FN 125]; "Leadership of Divided Hezb-e Islami Party Backs Rasul for Afghan President", Afghan Ariana TV, quoted in *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 22 February 2014; Ghanizada, "Hezb-e-Islami Shura Endorses Ashraf Ghani in Election Runoff," Khaama Press, 9 May 2014, <http://www.khaama.com/hezb-e-islami-shura-endorses-ashraf-ghani-in-election-runoff-6084>.

included provincial governor Juma Khan Hamdard, 1980s deputy party leader Qazi Muhammad Amin Waqad, who had left it in 1988, and *Hezb*'s former head of intelligence Wahidullah Sabawun, who registered his own as splinter party, *Hezb-e Muttahed-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan* (United Islamic Party of Afghanistan) in 2006. The council continued its activities after the election.

Ghani appointed four high-ranking *Hezb* officials from different factions as his advisors in June 2015.¹²⁷ Helal, Hamdard, Faruqi and Akram Khpelwak, another former provincial governor – possibly mainly to loosen the links between them and his predecessor Karzai who, despite denials, has become a rallying point for opposition to the NUG.

The position of Hekmatyar's *Hezb* on democracy and pluralism remains blurred. It has repeatedly declared that it favours elections, but not under the current government. It was also the first political force – in a 'peace plan' submitted to Karzai in 2010 – that suggested to terminate the current political set-up, as Karzai's supporters now demand: and, to create a transitional government and hold new elections "under Islamic rules." In effect, this would replace the current formally open pluralistic system with *mujahedin*– and *sharia*-only 'pluralism.'

Also, Khaled's *Hezb-e Eslami* has split into a pro- and an anti-government wing. Haji Din Muhammad leads the pro-government wing. It has not been active under the old party's name for over a decade. However, Din Muhammad played a central role under the Karzai government, serving as governor of Nangrahar and Kabul, as well as chief coordinator of Karzai's 2009 presidential campaign. In 2014, he swung behind Ghani and, for the first time, spoke in the name of his former party again.¹²⁸ The party had not registered, though, so far.

The party's insurgent wing – the so-called Tora Bora Military Front (*De Tore Bore Nezami Mahaz*) – is led by late Khaled's son Anwar-ul-Haq Mujahed. He set it up in 2007, after his father's death in 2006. Active exclusively in his home province of

Nangrahar, it joined the Taleban movement within two years, kept its name, but was officially dissolved in October 2015. Most of its fighters were fully absorbed into the Taleban under the pressure of its new Taleban leader Mawlawi Muhammad Mansur. Mujahed apparently stayed outside, though. He hinted at a comeback, while some of his men have joined the local *Daesh* (Islamic State Khorasan Province) franchise.¹²⁹

The split between the Arsala'i family of Din Muhammad and the Khaled family reflects a local tribal cleavage in the party between the competing Khugiani (Khaled) and Jabbarkhel Ahmadzai (Arsala'i).

3.2.1.3 Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami, the second *ulema*-led *tanzim*, went through a time of fragmentation after 2001 and almost disappeared. Its founder Mawlawi Muhammadi had dissolved the party in favour of the Taleban in 1994. He had passed away in 2002. His son Ahmad Nabi Muhammadi briefly established himself as the leader in his father's place and changed the party's name into *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami wa Melli-ye Afghanistan* (Islamic and National Revolution Movement of Afghanistan). He was soon voted out of office. His replacement, Maulawi Muhammad Sayyed Hashemi, after declaring himself a candidate, finally joined the Karzai camp in the 2009 elections. The party then faded from public view and did not re-register under the new Political Parties Law.

This was reversed in 2011 when former MP (and minister in the *mujahedin* and Taleban governments) Muhammad Musa Hotak registered the party under its original name again. It was further strengthened during 2014/15 when former Harakatis, who had been part of the Taleban regime but had 'reconciled' with the new order (some of them joining the HPC), joined the arena again. In 2015, a new *Harakat* leadership emerged under the former head of the Taleban 'religious police' (*amr b-il-maruf*) Mawlawi Qalamuddin. The party remains torn between its declared 'constructive' criticism of the NUG and moving into open opposition. The latter tendency became apparent when Qalamuddin joined a new front initiated by Afghan Mellat leader Anwar-ul-Haq Ahadi in January 2016. Meanwhile, other

¹²⁷ Farid Hussainkhail, "President Ghani Announces Appointment of Four Senior Advisers," Tolonews, 11 June 2015, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/19956-president-ghani-announces-appointment-of-four-senior-advisers>.

¹²⁸ Abasin Zaheer, "Islamic Party also swings behind Ahmadzai", *Pajhwok*, 17 February 2014, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/02/17/islamic-party-also-swings-behind-ahmadzai>.

¹²⁹ Rahimullah Yusufzai, "New Taleban group named Tora Bora said fighting in eastern Afghanistan", *The News* (Pakistan), 26 February 2007, http://www.afghanemb-canada.net/public-affairs-afghanistan-embassy-canada-ottawa/daily-news-bulletin-afghanistan-embassy-canada-ottawa/2007/news_articles/february/02272007.html.

leadership members denied they were part of it (more background about the front is given below).

One *Harakat* faction, led by Mawlawi Abdul Hakim Munib, who had become the first former Taleban official appointed into a high governmental position (as governor of Uruzgan province, 2006-07) had already joined the competing Jihadi and National Parties Shura founded in 2015.¹³⁰ He took over a registered break-off faction set up by Mawlawi Muhammad Osman Salekzada in 2004, *Hezb-e Sa'adat-e Melli wa Islami-ye Afghanistan* (National and Islamic Prosperity Party of Afghanistan). In 2015, he registered it under the name *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan* (People's Islamic Revolution Movement).

An earlier, regional split of the original *Harakat* – between late Muhammadi's Logari faction and one group mainly active in Ghazni and Paktia – feeds into the insurgency. In the 1980s, it became known after its leader Mawlawi Nasrullah Mansur as *Harakat* (Mansur).¹³¹ He was assassinated in 1993 and some of his relatives joined the Taleban in 2002 in Paktia. This group is sometimes referred to as the Mansur network.¹³² Its leader Abdul Latif Mansur is a member of the current Taleban Political Commission.

An early Islamist party, founded in 1967, that supported *Harakat* (Mansur) during the anti-Soviet struggle was *Jamiat-e Khuddam ul-Furqan* (Servants of Providence). In 1979 it joined *Harakat*. Most of its members followed Nasrullah Mansur into its own group. In the 1990s, they went further into the Taleban movement but maintained its own features. In late 2001, it tried to re-position itself under the leadership of Mawlawi Amin Jan Mojaddedi as a 'moderate Taleban party', but was denied recognition by the Kabul government. While most of its members joined the HPC and the 'new' *Harakat* in 2015 and declared that the *Khuddam* dissolved, Mojaddedi, who also is based in Kabul, stayed apart and continues the movement. In late 2015, he toured parts of south-eastern Afghanistan to reassert his support and

¹³⁰ Javed Hamim Kakar, "Support to Ahmadzai on the rise", *Pajhwok*, 25 February 2014, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/02/25/support-ahmadzai-rise>.

¹³¹ Officially, it was called *Harakat-e Newin-e Enqelab-e Eslami* (New Islamic Revolution Movement). Both factions officially reunited in 1992.

¹³² Thomas Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity in the Taliban Universe," in Antonio Giustozzi, ed, *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, London, Hurst 2009, 57-88.

was greeted and protected there by Taleban fighters. He reiterated *Khuddam ul-Furqan's* existence and "neutrality," distancing him from pro-government *Harakat*.

The relevance of – all parts of – *Harakat* is its close link with the Taleban movement since the latter came into being in 1994. Many *Harakat* leaders were high-ranking Taleban officials. With the debates about political negotiations with the Taleban, they have become more vocal and position themselves as a possible 'bridge' to the insurgents. In early August, Qalamuddin's faction participated in a much-criticised mourning ceremony in Kabul after the death of Taleban leader Mullah Omar was announced.¹³³ However, Mojaddedi's remaining *Khuddam ul-Furqan* group seems to be in a better position to play such a role.

3.2.1.4 Mahaz, Nejat and Ettehad/Dawat

Compared to *Jamiat*, *Hezb-e Eslami*, both with strong countrywide organisations, and even *Jombesh*, with its main base in the north, NIFA, ANLF and *Dawat* represent relatively small family- or person-centric networks that also have followers in many parts of the country, but less widespread. All three have not seen much change over the past 15 years. They mainly thrive on the charisma and the political connections of their respective leaders.

Nejat has continued to be almost a one-man organisation, led by Hazrat Sebghatullah Mojaddedi. He managed to occupy various key, mainly symbolic, positions during the entire post-2001 process. This included him being chairman variously of the Senate from 2005 to 2010, the Constitutional Loya Jirga 2003, the Consultative Loya Jirga 2013 that discussed the controversial US-Afghan bilateral security agreement (BSA), and of the Programme to Strengthening Peace (the predecessor of the HPC, established in 2005). The latter was never fully closed and run by Mojaddedi's son in the later years. The only other prominent ANLF member was Din Muhammad Gran, member of the Supreme Court, who passed away in early 2016. When Karzai appointed Rabbani, and not Mojaddedi, as head of the High Peace Council in 2010, both fell out with each other. This was repeated after Karzai ignored the 2013 BSA jirga's decision and refused to sign the security agreement. In the 2014 presidential election, Mojaddedi supported Ghani. He is

¹³³ Abdul Wali Arian, "Taliban Mourns Mullah Omar's Death in Kabul", *Tolonews*, 1 August 2015, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/20700-taliban-mourns-mullah-omars-death-in-kabul>.

without any official position but has become more vocal in his criticism of the NUG. With the creation of the Jihadi and National Parties Shura in 2015, he tried to regain the position of senior Jihadi leader from Sayyaf who later set up his own council.

Mahaz, in contrast, fared worse until its leader, Pir Gailani, was appointed HPC head in February 2016. Previously, he was only invited to open the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga, but the chair went to Mojaddedi. His son Hamed Gailani was rejected in parliament in 2010 as minister for tribal and border affairs. The top-most position for a NIFA member was the provincial governor post held over many years, to the day, by Abdul Jabbar Naimi, a close aide to the Gailani family.¹³⁴ Sayyed Ishaq Gailani's *Nohzat-e Hambastegi-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan National Solidarity Movement) is a party that had split off NIFA in the 1990s in Pakistani exile. In contrast to the mainstream NIFA – and after a short attempt of its leader to run on his own¹³⁵ – it supported Dr Abdullah in the 2014 election (as it did in 2009). Eshaq Gailani has twice successfully run for parliament.

Sayyaf's *Ettehad*, in contrast, punches above its weight; although it is not very visible publicly. The party leader was an MP from 2005 to 2010. Qanuni defeated him in his bid to become the lower house's speaker. Re-elected in 2010, Sayyaf vacated his seat in October 2013 so he could run for president. With only 7.04 per cent of the vote he did not make it into the second round. (His candidacy was often interpreted, not as an attempt to become president, but to position himself to be able to exert maximum influence on the new government.) Sayyaf finally supported Ghani – but only tacitly; for him it had priority not to alienate himself from Abdullah, the *Jamiat* and the broader *mujahedin* camp.

Followers of Sayyaf have occupied a number of key posts, particularly in the judiciary, but also hold posts as provincial governors. Members of his party were Chief Justice during the initial post-Taleban years. They continue to chair the High Council of Ulema with its 34 provincial branches. Although paid by the government, it acts like a non-governmental watchdog over the Islamic-ness of the government. Sayyaf was also a major

¹³⁴ Former defence minister Abdul Rahim Wardak belonged to the party during the anti-Soviet war, but maintained little political relationship with it after 2001.

¹³⁵ For this purpose, Gailani formed a short-lived alliance with a number of – mainly leftist – parties. Ahmad Ramin Ayaz, "New Coalition Endorsed by Taliban Former for Elections", Tolonews, 5 September 2013, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/11815-new-coalition-endorsed-by-taliban-formed-for-elections>.

initiator of the so-called National Reconciliation, General Amnesty and National Stability Law that came into force in 2010. This amounts to a "blanket amnesty for all those involved in past and present Afghan conflicts" and the crimes committed during those times.¹³⁶ In 2013, Sayyaf started an initiative to constitutionalise the Jihadi leaders council that has not achieved its aim so far.¹³⁷

Despite the fact that Sayyaf is neither the most senior among the *tanzim* leaders, nor, as a Wahhabi, a mainstream *alem*, Sayyaf had become a key politician in the Karzai years. Vulnerable to accusations of earlier support for terrorist groups,¹³⁸ he allied himself closely with the former president without striving for office in the executive. Playing the 'jihadi' card, publicly defending '*mujahedin* rights' and attacking their 'exclusion' from power and accusations of war crimes, he manoeuvred himself into a position of the *tanzim* leaders' unofficial group that became Karzai's key body for consultation during his second term.¹³⁹ As an MP, he also supported Karzai's agenda in parliament.

Sayyaf's position after the end of the Karzai era remains undefined so far.

As the only *tanzim* leader, he did not join Mojaddedi's Council of Jihadi and National Parties. With the NUG coming under increasing criticism, he launched his own council (see 4.3) in December 2015. This positions itself in the political centre, between the current government and the pro-Karzai opposition (which has no formal

¹³⁶ Sara L. Carlson, "To Forgive and Forget: How Reconciliation and Amnesty Legislation in Afghanistan Forgives War Criminals while Forgetting their Victims", *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs*, November 2012, 413.

¹³⁷ The text was only published in Dari, in: "Sayyaf shura-ye jadid-ra tanzim mekonad" [Sayyaf Organises a New Council], *Yadgar-e Afghan*, 9 June 2013, <http://www.yadgarafghan.com/da/news/politics/2013-06-09-07-39-07.html>.

¹³⁸ Tony Cross, "Abdulrab Rasul Sayyaf – [the] man who brought bin Laden to Afghanistan," Radio France International, 17 March 2014, <http://www.english.rfi.fr/asia-pacific/20140317-abdulrab-rasul-sayyaf-man-who-brought-bin-laden-afghanistan>.

¹³⁹ Saleha Soadat, "Sayyaf Criticizes NUG Over Sidelineing Mujahideen From Power", Tolonews, 15 February 2015, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/18220-sayyaf-criticizes-nug-over-sidelineing-mujahideen-from-power>.

organisation), while insisting that it was no opposition set-up itself.¹⁴⁰

3.2.1.5 The Shia tanzim

The two biggest *tanzims* on the Shia side, *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami* (Islamic Unity Party) and *Harakat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Islamic Movement), experienced different degrees of fragmentation in the post-Taleban era. While the smaller *Harakat* overcame this to some extent, *Wahdat* did not. Itself a unity party created from various smaller groups under Iranian pressure in 1987, the two major factions (led by Khalili and Mohaqqueq) and two minor factions (Akbari and Urfani) by now have become consolidated parties in their own right and with different names.¹⁴¹

Khalili's party has its stronghold in the central Hazarajat.¹⁴² It also seems to dominate among the Herati Hazaras. It had been allied with former president Karzai. Its leader Khalili served two terms as his second vice president. Banned by the constitution to run again, a close ally – former justice and education minister Sarwar Danesh – successfully joined the Ghani ticket in 2014 and took over Khalili's former position. Meanwhile, Mohaqqueq dominant in the more urban Hazara-inhabited areas in Kabul and in the north around

Mazar-e Sharif, remained in opposition. He ended up in the government as well, as second deputy Chief Executive Officer in the NUG. On the subnational level, governor posts in the two main Hazara provinces Bamian and Daikundi are divided between the two largest Hazara factions, led by Khalili (belonging to the Ghani camp) and Mohaqqueq (Abdullah camp).

A group that broke away from Akbari's *Hezb-e Wahdat* after 2001 and formed *Hezb-e Eqtedar-e Melli* (National Rule Party) has consolidated as a member of Dr Abdullah's opposition National Front. Its original leader Sayyed Mustafa Kazemi, leader of the Khomeinist Afghan Pasdaran 'party' during the 1980s, became a MP and was killed in a bomb attack in 2007. He was replaced by his brother Sayed Ali Akbar Kazemi.

Harakat – the only relevant Shia group based in Iran during the anti-Soviet jihad that remained apart from *Wahdat* in 1989 – had split into two factions in 2005. Its founder-leader Sheikh Mohseni stepped down soon after the split. A reunification of both factions in 2008 under Sayed Hossain Anwari – the party's former most important field commander, planning minister under Karzai and current MP – did not hold. The original mainstream of the party, using its original name, is led by Abdul Ghani Kazemi while Anwari leads a group that calls itself *Harakat-e Eslami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan's People's Islamic Movement). Kazemi's party supported Dr Abdullah in the 2014 presidential election, while Anwari's put its weight behind Ghani, after having joined the ticket of former defence minister Abdul Rahim Wardak in the first round of the election.

Also, one of the two groups of Afghan Ismailis in Baghlan province, a minority among the Shia,¹⁴³ has organised itself as a party *Hezb-e Paiwand-e Melli* (National Accord Party) under the leadership of the local spiritual leader in Baghlan's Kayyan Valley, Sayed Mansur Naderi. Similar to *Jombesh*, it was originally a militia supporting the PDPA government that switched sides to the *mujahedin* in 1992. Also, after 2001, it often allied itself with leftist parties,¹⁴⁴ but has usually ended up on the

¹⁴⁰ Humayoon Babur, "Afghanistan's old guard set up opposition party", AP, 18 December 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghanistans-old-guard-set-up-opposition-party/2015/12/18/bdb698b0-a579-11e5-8318-bd8caed8c588_story.html

¹⁴¹ Khalili's party retained the original name, *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Islamic Unity Party). Mohaqqueq's party adopted the name *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan People's Islamic Unity Party). Akbari's *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Melli Eslami-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Islamic and National Unity Party) only re-registered in 2015; Qurban Ali Urfani's *Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Mellat-e Afghanistan*, (Afghanistan's Nation's Islamic Unity Party) did not manage to do so. In 2013, in the run-up to the elections, Akbari's party announced the formation of a front with three other smaller Hazara parties. Then it decided to support Zalmai Rassul in the first round, but switched to Dr Abdullah in both rounds. Abasin Zaheer, "4-party alliance set up to push for fair polls," *Pajhwok*, 20 August 2013, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/08/20/4-party-alliance-set-push-fair-polls>.

¹⁴² See also: Niamatullah Ibrahim, "Divide and Rule: State penetration in Hazarajat (Afghanistan) from the monarchy to the Taleban," London School of Economics, Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper 42, January 2009, <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/CrisisStates/WP42.2.pdf>.

¹⁴³ The other group, mainly in Badakhshan's Wakhan area, follows the Ismailis' worldwide leader, the Aga Khan.

¹⁴⁴ Before the 2009 presidential election, Naderi promised to join and fund a coalition of pro-democratic and leftist parties but dropped that promise when he joined the Karzai camp. See also Mangal Mustafa, "Democratic parties' coalition formed", *Pajhwok*, 25 March 2012, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/03/25/democratic-parties-coalition-formed>.

side of the government in election times. In 2014, Naderi joined the Ghani camp and was awarded with one cabinet post for urban development, which was occupied by one of his sons.

3.2.1.6 Excursus: A Taleban party?

Although the Taleban could be called another Islamist *tanzim*, as they pursue certain political aims different from those of other Islamist groups (such as driving foreign troops out and re-establishing an Islamic emirate), they have so far not shown any sign of interest in party politics. They have rejected repeated offers to integrate into the current political set-up, as they reject it altogether as the result of foreign intervention. That they have shed their original name, *De Talebano Islami Ghurdzang* (Islamic Movement of the Taleban), which resembled that of a political party, in favour of their 'governmental' name, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is now used in all their official documents and statements, can be read as another sign for their refusal of party politics.

Attempts to find out how much room for compromise there would be if a political settlement could be reached – including on political pluralism – has not been seriously tested to date. Similarly, attempts of dissident leaders to form a 'political wing' of the Taleban movement that would enter a political process, failed.¹⁴⁵

Appeals to 'reconciled' former Taleban leaders living in Afghanistan such as former foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel to set up a 'moderate' Taleban party¹⁴⁶ – and de facto split the Taleban movement – were also rejected.

¹⁴⁵ A former head of the Taleban political commission, Agha Jan Mutasem, who tried so in 2012, was attacked, denounced by the Taleban leadership and has remained isolated. See for example Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, "Afghanistan: A Moderate Defies the Taliban," *The Daily Beast*, 25 April 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/04/25/afghanistan-a-moderate-defies-the-taliban.html>. The issue how the Taleban could adapt themselves to a political role in Afghanistan, however, was part of a "thematic dialogue between Norway and the Taleban" that took place between 2007 and 2010, inconclusively, however. It also included attempts to "help the Taliban to draw up a policy platform for participation in elections." See: Bjørn Tore Godal et al, "En god alliert – Norge i Afghanistan 2001–2014," *Norges offentlige utredninger*, 2016: 8, Oslo, 2016, <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/09faceca099c4b8bac85ca8495e12d2d/no/pdfs/nou201620160008000dddpdfs.pdf>, 151, 153.

¹⁴⁶ See eg "Karzai: Taliban could be opposition party", UPI, 12 July 2012, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-

3.2.2 The ethno-nationalists: reflecting ethnic diversity

3.2.2.1 Afghan Mellat: from 'Pashtunism' to a broader base?

Despite the constitution's ban on ethnic political parties, many do have a strong base among certain ethnic groups. This includes the country's oldest surviving party, *De Afghan Mellat Gund* (Afghan Nation Party), founded in 1966.¹⁴⁷ It mainly represents Pashtuns and advocates the irredentist cause of 'reunification' of Pashtun areas originally part of Afghanistan that fell to Pakistan after the partition of British-India in 1947. After 2001, it tried to re-brand itself as a 'jihadi' party, as it had opposed the 1980s Soviet occupation, and joined some 'jihadi' party councils; however it never had a significant military structure (neither is it Islamist).

Afghan Mellat is one of the strongest examples of systematic party building in post-2001 Afghanistan. They seriously attempted to shed their Pashtun-only (and, in the eyes of many Afghans, chauvinistic) image in favour of a broader ethnic base. It is widely believed that this was helped by two of its main leaders' key government positions – prominent intellectuals Anwar-ul-Haq Ahadi, as finance (and later commerce) minister, and Gholam Jailani Popal, until recently head of Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) – and connections with well-funded NGOs to mobilise resources. Therefore, *Afghan Mellat* was labelled, half-jokingly, the 'customs party' in the earlier post-Taleban years, as the finance ministry under Ahadi controlled this important source of revenues and was accused of using some revenues for the party building.¹⁴⁸

While the party re-absorbed two splinter groups,¹⁴⁹ it also faced internal tensions over the leadership.

News/2012/07/12/Karzai-Taliban-could-be-opposition-party/UPI-69451342095090/; "Taliban political party being considered", UPI, 22 March 2009, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/03/22/Taliban-political-party-being-considered/UPI-68201237732734/.

¹⁴⁷ Some party sources even date the party's history back to the 1950s.

¹⁴⁸ Ahadi's inner-party foes in the 2016 row over his new opposition front also accused him of financial wrongdoings. Khwaja Basir Ahmad Fitri, "Personal interests, dictatorship split up Millat Party," *Pajhwok*, 10 March 2016, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/10/personal-interests-dictatorship-split-millat-party>.

¹⁴⁹ This included in 2007 the more leftist *Wulusi Mellat*/People's Nation led by Rahim Pashtunyar, that had participated in cross-ethnic attempts to set up a

Before the 2009 presidential vote, Ahadi – supported by the party’s supreme council – launched a later aborted presidential bid that was opposed by Jailani Popal.¹⁵⁰ The party then swung behind a minor independent candidate, MP Mir Wais Yasini, a Pashtun from eastern Afghanistan, one of the party’s strongholds. There were rumours that Jailani Popal, then a close ally of President Karzai, had attempted a take over bid for the party leadership – in a period when Ahadi’s relationship with Karzai was tense. The party avoided a split, though. At its fifth party congress in October 2012, Ahadi stepped down as the party’s chairman and was elected “honorary leader”. His place was taken over by Astana Gul Sherzad, thus far the party’s general-secretary. At the same time, the party dropped its longstanding official name, *Afghan Tolenpal Wuluswak Gund* (Afghan Social Democrat Party), for its wider known label “*Afghan Mellat*,” and, in the 1960s, the title of its newspaper. (It had earlier lost its recognition by the social-democratic Socialist International as the Afghan social-democratic party.¹⁵¹)

In 2014, Ahadi started another presidential bid but was rejected by the IEC. He finally went with Ghani. Another faction supported Dr Abdullah, led by Amin Wakman, Ahadi’s predecessor in the party leadership during the years of exile during the Soviet occupation that continues to use the party’s original name. Previously, Wakman had tried unsuccessfully to get the nomination as the party’s candidate in a leadership meeting in 2013.¹⁵² When Ahadi initiated a new opposition coalition called *De Afghanistan Newey Melli Jabha* (Afghanistan New National Front) in January 2016, this led to his exclusion from the party (more in chapter 5).

democratic coalition in cooperation with *Paiman-e Kabul*, and a group led by late Shams-ul-Huda Shams.

¹⁵⁰ Tolo TV, 4 February 2009, quoted in *BBC Monitoring South Asia*.

¹⁵¹ Supported by the German SPD, it had held an observer status at the Socialist International (SI) for a while. Currently, the French PS is said to advocate giving an Afghan SI seat to *Hezb-e Kangara*, instead. The SI website currently neither lists an Afghan party under member, consultative nor observer parties. <http://www.socialistinternational.org/maps/english/asia.htm>

¹⁵² “Rowdyism hits Afghan Millat meeting”, *Pajhwok*, 5 August 2013, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/08/05/rowdyism-hits-afghan-millat-meeting>; Abasin Zaheer, “AIDP to support Abdullah in polls,” *Pajhwok*, 30 January 2014, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/30/aidp-support-abdullah-polls>.

3.2.2.2 Jombesh: a non-Islamist tanzim

Jombesh-e Melli Eslami (National Islamic Movement)¹⁵³ can also be described as a *tanzim* as it shares the structural features of a military-political network with the Islamist ones. General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the current vice president of the country, leads this. In contrast to the Islamist parties, it supported the leftist PDPA regime until 1992. It is, in essence, ethno-nationalist. Even though the name includes an “Islamic” attribute, it is more secular in character (although this is not true for all its leaders and associated commanders). In this sense, it is a special case of a ‘non-*mujahedin tanzim*.’

Despite frequent fluctuations its mainly non-Uzbek commander networks are largely intact. The northern Pashtun commanders, for example, have switched back and forth between *Jombesh* and *Hezb-e Eslami*.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, it has a strong party organisation with developed leading bodies and active provincial branches. It is possibly one of Afghanistan’s best-organised political parties. The only relevant splinter party is led by one of Dostum’s former deputies, General Abdulmalek Pahlawan, *Hezb-e Azadi-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Freedom Party). They did not re-register in 2010.

Jombesh has remained ideologically heterogeneous. It brings together former leftists and Turkey-influenced reformer-politicians with conservative and Islamist commanders. Its founder General Dostum keeps everything is tightly together, but also immune to reform. He has been the ‘only’ *Jombesh*’s honorary party chief since the last congress in 2008. He dominates and, when needed, overrules all party bodies. In his official position, Dostum was succeeded by Sayed Nurullah Sadat, hitherto one of the party’s deputy leaders.

With its distinct ethnic character, its member base is the Turkic minority of the Uzbeks and the Turkmen from the north of Afghanistan. *Jombesh* is able to mobilise a relatively coherently active constituency. It is arguably *the* key Afghan swing

¹⁵³ A significant part of the information used in this chapter and in chapter 4.3 comes from Robert Peszkowski, “Reforming Jombesh: An Afghan Party on Its Winding Road to Internal Democracy,” AAN, Briefing Paper 03/2012, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20120831Peszkowski-Jombesh-final.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ Some Uzbek *Hezb* commanders are linked to the still registered *Hezb-e Edalat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Islamic Justice Party) led by Qazi Kabir Marzban.

vote. It seems that Dostum, in the first presidential election in 2004, ran on his own, precisely for the purpose of showing the numerical strength and unity of his constituency; he secured exactly ten per cent of the vote. So far, always the Pashtun candidates profited from it; Karzai in 2009 and Ghani in 2014.

However, Dostum, and with him *Jombesh*, have remained unreliable allies, particularly for opposition forces. Ever since the fall of the Taleban regime, *Jombesh* has been oscillating between being part of the government, during campaign times, and the opposition much of the time in between.

In 2007, *Jombesh* joined the (then) new, ostensibly anti-Pashtun National Front with *Jamiat* and Mohaqqueq's *Wahdat*, only to jump ship to Karzai. Dostum was soon disappointed about what he saw as *Jombesh's* under-representation in the government. This led to a lack of resources. It made some *Jombesh* commander networks turn away from the party. The result was a veritable crisis in the party. The crisis deepened following a standoff with a rebellious *Jombesh* commander in Kabul in April 2008 after which Karzai threatened Dostum with arrest and trial. The *Jombesh* leader chose to retreat abroad to save face. This opened the way for a modernising push from its reformers.

Before the hotly contested 2009 election, Karzai allowed Dostum to return triumphantly. He reappointed him to his former, but symbolic, post of Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army and secured Dostum's support in the polls.¹⁵⁵ This allowed Dostum to reassert himself as *Jombesh's* real leader. Rifts amongst the reformists played into Dostum's hands. A group of younger Turkish-educated reformers – called the "Aidan group" – were headed by Alem Sa'i. He was then the governor of Jawzjan. They owed their careers to Dostum after he selected them for scholarships. They then drifted back towards the powerful leader in an attempt to win his support for their own claim to the party leadership in competition with a more left-wing reformer group. In return, this group helped Dostum rebuild a loyal following at the provincial level. Dostum fulfilled his promise to Karzai and possibly secured his victory. But the 2010 parliamentary election saw *Jombesh* lose seats again.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Good background in: Kevin Sieff, "Ex-warlord returns to Afghanistan's political mix", *Washington Post*, 24 April 2014, <http://newsok.com/ex-warlord-returns-to-afghanistans-political-mix/article/feed/678850>.

¹⁵⁶ *Jombesh* members were down from 20 (in the 2005-10 Wolesi Jirga) to 15 in the new parliament. With other

In order to gear up for the 2014 election, Dostum and his backers purged the party's leadership in early 2013 of their joint opponents. Azizullah Kargar replaced official party leader Nurullah, who had been unable to secure re-election to parliament in 2010. He, with nine other members, lost his seat in the party's 55-strong political committee. These changes in leadership also showed Dostum's dissatisfaction with MPs behaving too independently. Faizullah Zaki was appointed head of the party's political committee to prepare the long-overdue party congress before election.¹⁵⁷ This, however, did not happen.

At that point, *Jombesh* was still part of the opposition National Front of Afghanistan (NFA). This included *Jamiat*, Mohaqqueq's *Hezb-e Wahdat* and Saleh's Green Trend who were discussing fielding a joint candidate in the 2014 polls; a combination where the chances for victory over any Pashtun candidate would have been high. Later in 2013, president-to-be Ghani offered Dostum the post of First Vice President. Dostum's turn-around almost definitely cost Abdullah the victory in 2014. Instead, he secured for himself the highest ever position held by an Uzbek in an Afghan government,¹⁵⁸ as well as for the Uzbeks

allies, *Jombesh* was able to count on some 25 MPs. Also, the Dostum-Sa'i realignment broke after a conflict in mid-2013. Then, for the first time *Jombesh* members left the party. Sa'i's supporters set up several councils and two movements outside the party, *Eslahat wa Adalat* (Reform and Justice) and *Eslahat wa Mosharekat* (Reform and Participation). In defiance of their leadership, they backed presidential candidates other than Ghani in 2014 and presented provincial council candidates independently. Meanwhile, these structures have disappeared again, some individuals returned to *Jombesh*, others are siding with the Abdullah camp.

¹⁵⁷ Interestingly, the MoJ's list of registered parties still had Nurullah as *Jombesh's* chairman in October 2015. It is not clear whether *Jombesh* just had not notified the ministry about the change of leadership or whether the MoJ does not recognise it. Sadaf Shinwari, "Afghan warlord Gen. Dostum threatened for his war crimes," Khaama Press, 16 February 2013, <http://www.khaama.com/afgan-warlord-gen-dostum-threatened-for-his-war-crimes-1377>; "Sadat: Genral Dostum dar umur-e Hezb-e Jombesh-e Melli Eslami-ye Afghanistan mudakhela me-konad" [Sadat: Gen Dostum interferes in the affairs of *Jombesh* party], Radio Azadi, 27 Dalw 1391 [15 February 2013], <http://da.azadiradio.org/content/article/24903036.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Not everything went democratically, though. At a campaign rally on 7 June 2014 in Baghlan, Dostum threatened his local constituency: "If you do not cast your votes in favor of Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, you are traitors." Karim Amini, "Uzbek and Turkmen Traitors if They Don't Vote Ghani: Dostum," Tolonews, 7 June 2014, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/election->

(but not necessarily *Jombesh*) three ministries. While this was a political triumph for *Jombesh* and Dostum personally, *Jombesh's* move to democratisation has been brought practically to a standstill. This is a result of the party being instrumental as a vote machine by Karzai and Ghani, the party leaders' unwillingness to allow new leaders to emerge, and many *Jombesh* leaders' – including reformers – businesses accommodating themselves in new governmental positions. Dostum's position is as strong as rarely before, and the party remains a bargaining chip in his hands.

3.2.2.3 Tajik ethno-nationalists: SAZA/Azadegan and Kangara

The main leftist ethno-nationalist party, *Sazman-e Enqelabi-ye Zahmatkashan-e Afghanistan* (SAZA/Revolutionary Organisation of Afghanistan's Toilers), has consolidated in some of its areas of origin in the northeast. This is, particularly, in Badakhshan where it can mobilise armed support with remnants of militias established in the late 1980s that later collaborated with *Jamiat-e Eslami*. This is based on common ethnicity. In November 2007, SAZA united with four like-minded, pro-democratic groups under the name of *Hezb-e Azadegan* (Party of Free-Thinkers). It is sceptical about Afghan democratisation. It initially rejected the offer to register, but later changed its mind. The *Azadegan* participated in a number of attempts to merge progressive, left wing forces, cooperating even with (formerly) Pashtun nationalists. This indicated that it is in the process of shedding its original hard-line ethno-nationalist outlook.

In the same constituency, *Hezb-e Kangara-ye Mellī-ye Afghanistan* (National Congress Party of Afghanistan) led by Latif Pedram, is active. It often adopts chauvinist, anti-Pashtun tones.¹⁵⁹ This makes it the radical fringe of the leftist ethno-nationalists, at least on the rhetorical level. It also is a strong proponent of introducing a federal system in Afghanistan. The party had been supported initially by the French Socialist Party and promoted as the Afghan member of the Socialist International.¹⁶⁰

2014/15161-uzbek-and-turkmen-traitors-if-they-dont-vote-ghani-dostum.

¹⁵⁹ See also Abdulfattoh Shafiev, "Language Politics Back in the Spotlight in Afghanistan," *Global Voices*, 30 January 2015, <https://globalvoices.org/2015/01/30/language-politics-back-in-the-spotlight-in-afghanistan/>.

¹⁶⁰ There it took the place of *Afghan Mellat*. Currently, no Afghan party is listed anymore. See "Member parties

In 2014, after the formation of the NUG that includes most large parties in some form, Pedram tried to use the chance that there was no formal opposition left. Positioning himself as the leader of the remaining opposition, he launched what he called the "first opposition party" at a large gathering in Kabul in October 2014. His supporters wore orange-coloured shawls, and pledged to bring together an opposition alliance.¹⁶¹ As an MP, he also declared himself leader of the opposition in parliament. He criticised the unity government, stating that a president could only be determined through a ballot. He condemned the US-Afghan BSA and promised to strengthen democratic norms in the country. His initiative did not receive much response, and petered out soon.

Both SAZA and Kangara have a relatively stable, but small, local support base in Badakhshan. The province is the original home of Afghan Tajik ethno-nationalism, as the founder of the original group of this tendency, *Settam-e Mellī* ([Against] National Oppression),¹⁶² Taher Badakhshi, came from Badakhshan. This political tradition is still represented, especially where the former party cadres originated from the landlord nobility. These parties can rely on the voters in the home districts of their leaders, as well as secularists and young people from across the province, in some urban centres, and from previous PDPA networks. This is not sufficient for presidential elections, though. In 2009, this camp fielded three candidates. They all received less than one per cent of the vote countrywide: Pedram, Mahbubullah Kushani from SAZA and Bashir Ahmad Bezhani from a (not registered) Kangara splinter group. In 2014, none of them ran. Pedram made it safely into parliament twice, in 2005 and 2010, and in 2010 also Bezhani.

3.2.2.4 New Hazara/Shia parties

Various attempts to establish a broad modern, post-*tanzim* Hazara party have failed. Potential leaders were either not ready to shed their relationship with the historical *tanzim* leaders, or got caught up in opportunistic politics, ie attempts to turn such a party into a pro-government vehicle.

of the Socialist International," The Socialist International, <http://www.socialistinternational.org/viewArticle.cfm?ArticlePageID=931>.

¹⁶¹ Muhammad Hassan Khetab, "Pidram [sic] to cobble together opposition alliance", *Pajhwok*, 1 October 2014, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/03/10/pidram-cobble-together-opposition-alliance>.

¹⁶² See also Antonio Giustozzi, "Ethnicity and Politics in Afghanistan: The role played by Setam-e Mellī," in Micheline Centlivres-Demont, ed, *Afghanistan: Identity, Society and Politics since 1980*, London, I.B. Tauris 2015, 151-3.

Hezb-e Ensejam-e Melli (National Harmony Party) was established by Sadeq Modaber when he was head of the influential *edara-ye umur* (Office for Administrative Affairs, a quasi-prime ministerial office) during the later Karzai years. It attracted members from the new Hazara intelligentsia, many of them in governmental functions, as well as a number of MPs. In the Wolesi Jirga, it linked up with the remnants of 1980s Hazarajat *Shura-ye Ettetfaaq* (Unity Council). The council leader's son, Sadeqizada Nelli, has been an MP in both post-2001 parliaments.¹⁶³ *Ensejam* has stepped up its activities after the change of government on the ground and in the social media. It also activated its provincial branches. Despite its ethnic background, it is, like *Afghan Mellat*, part of a still diverse opposition camp around former President Hamed Karzai who reportedly plots a comeback.¹⁶⁴

Other active Shia parties include *Hezb-e Mellat-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Nation Party), the originally pro-democratic *Hezb-e Kar wa Tausea* (Labour and Development Party/LDP) that maintains pockets of influence, mainly in Daykundi province and *Hezb-e Nokhbegan-e Mardom* (People's Elite Party). Particularly the LDP, in its initial years, went to great lengths to mobilise a cross-ethnic membership, but ethnic stereotypes prevailing in the Afghan society largely prevented non-Shias to join a party launched by Shiites. As a result of Taliban anti-Hazara violence in southern Afghanistan, but also of its leader Zulfeqar Khan Omid having lost its government position, it has adopted more ethno-nationalist tones of late. *Hezb-e Mellat* split off Modaber's *Ensejam* before the 2009 presidential election in order to support Ghani, while *Ensejam* continued to back Karzai. In 2014, Zalmay Rassul came first and swung back to Ghani in the second round. However, after some months after the establishment of the NUG, *Hezb-*

e Mellat leader, MP Jafar Mahdawi, started opposing it in parliament.

Although, Modaber was a front commander during the anti-Soviet struggle, these comparatively new parties do not have a *tanzim* structure. They still rely, at least in part, on patronage networks, particularly when linked to (former) government power, such as *Ensejam*.

3.2.3 The strands of the Leftists

3.2.3.1 The Afghan Maoists: from revolutionary Marxism to social-democracy

The two major leftist strands that emerged in the 1960s and dominated much of the political struggles of the following decades have long fragmented. This included: the Maoists – locally known as *Sho'layi*,¹⁶⁵ after their short-lived but influential newspaper, *Sho'la-ye Jawid* (The Eternal Flame); and, the pro-Moscow strand, mainly represented by PDPA. After their defeat in the 1980s (the Maoists) and 1992 (the PDPA), both reorganised after 2001, although not in their old party structures. Most of those parties dropped revolutionary Marxism as their ideology, transforming into 'social-democrats.' They opted for multiparty democracy as the 'next-best option,' adopted a rights orientation and continued to opt for a 'progressive' (ie non-Islamist) form of government.

After 2001, most surviving Maoist groups abstained from registering as parties but tried to regroup. This included *Sazman-e Rahayibakhsh-e Khalqha-ye Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Peoples' Liberation Organisation – mostly known as *Rahayi*) with strongholds in Western Afghanistan, Kandahar and Kunar.¹⁶⁶ Former *Rahayi* activist Rangin Dadfar Spanta had been active for several years in setting up a social-democratic party, based on *Paiman-e Kabul* (Kabul Accord), a six-party alliance established in 2002. This included northern

¹⁶³ The Council was established in the early 1980s after the liberation of almost the entire Hazarajat from Soviet and PDPA forces in order to administer the area. It was eliminated by the Khomeinists. Niamatullah Ibrahim, "The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State: Hazarajat 1979-1984," London School of Economics, Working Paper 6 (2), September 2006, http://www.afghandata.org:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/azu/15229/azu_acku_pamphlet_ds374_h3_i27_2006_w.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. MP Muhammad Akbari had been part of the council himself.

¹⁶⁴ Karzai denied such ambitions. See eg Jan Alekozai and Zarif Nazar, "Amid Rising Political Tempers, Afghans Question Karzai," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 8 June 2015, <http://gandhara.rferl.org/content/afghanistan-karzai-criticism/27060589.html>.

¹⁶⁵ The apostrophe in *Sho'la(yi)* is important; dropping it would turn the name into the rice dish *shola* – a popular joke about the Afghan Maoists.

¹⁶⁶ For more detail Hafizullah Emadi, *Politics of the Dispossessed: Superpowers and Developments in the Middle East*, Newport and London, Praeger 2001; Niamatullah Ibrahim, "Ideology without Leadership: The Rise and Decline of Maoism in Afghanistan," AAN, Thematic Report 3/2012, <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/09/Nibr-Maoists-final.pdf>; Enrico Piovesana, *Shùlai: Il movimento maoista afgano, raccontato dai suoi militanti (1965-2011)*, Reggio Calabria, Città del Sole Edizioni 2012; Ibrahim, "Divide and Rule" [see FN 121].

and even Pashtun ethno-nationalists. They called themselves “constitutionalists” in a reference to their 20th century forerunners. These activities fizzled out when Spanta joined the Karzai government in early 2005.

Also, *Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Mardom-e Afghanistan* (People’s Liberation Organisation of Afghanistan/SAMA) went the way of ‘social-democratisation.’ This was often labelled Maoist, but was rather an unorthodox leftist organisation that led a successful guerrilla war against the PDPA government. *Hezb-e Hambastagi-ye Melli-ye Aqwam-e Afghanistan* (National Solidarity Party of Afghanistan’s Tribes/NSPAT), led by former SAMA commander Muhammad Zarif Naseri, had established a legal party in 2002. Part of the SAMA leadership did not trust the post-2001 democratic development and preferred to stay in exile. At a congress in mid-2007, NSPAT united with another SAMA offshoot, *Hezb-e Azadikhwahan-e Mardom-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan People’s Freedom-Supporters Party). They shed its revolutionary Marxist orientation and registered under the latter party’s name, the acronym of which (HAMA) resembles that of SAMA. Naseri remained its leader.

3.2.3.2 The former pro-Soviet Left: fragmentation through unification

The PDPA (renamed *Hezb-e Watan*, Fatherland Party in 1986) fragmented into dozens of groups after its loss of power in 1992. Life in exile and differences about the past political course, mainly about their different relationship with the Soviet Union, revived the party’s two old major factions, *Khalq* and *Parcham*.¹⁶⁷ The *Khalqis* accused the *Parchamis* of having invited in the Soviets, while styling themselves as Pashtun nationalists who opposed the 1979 military invasion.¹⁶⁸ The

¹⁶⁷ They had emerged soon after the party was founded in 1965 and were only glued together under Soviet pressure in 1977. After the 1978 coup, both factions started purging each other again. First, *Khalq* (People) – ruling from 1978 to 1979 under presidents Nur Muhammad Tarakai and Hafizullah Amin (the former killed by the latter in 1979 and the latter by the Soviets in the same year) – sidelined *Parcham* (Banner).

Parcham returned with the Soviet invaders jail many leading *Khalqis* in turn. This ended only in the late 1980s when Najibullah released them as part of his national reconciliation policy and in order to strengthen his own base before the hoped-for reconciliation with some *mujahedin* and groups.

¹⁶⁸ Which is partly correct, as the invasion engineered their fall from power and put many of its leaders in jail for more than half a decade, until their release under Najibullah’s post-1986 national reconciliation policy.

Parchamis split into ‘Najibists’ and ‘Karmalists.’ The former continue to celebrate former President Najibullah (killed by the Taleban in 1996) and his post-1986 national reconciliation policy – and stick to the name *Hezb-e Watan*. Meanwhile the ‘Karmalists’ called it a ‘sell-out of the PDPA principles’ (their leader Babrak Karmal had been replaced by Najibullah on the insistence of the Soviets in 1986). More splits occurred. There are at least six parties registered now when in November 2015 there were still nine, which can be traced back to the former PDPA. (A dozen more are active without registration.) These parties claim that they have left their Marxist past behind. Some even say that they never really were communists, but rather ‘patriots.’ All refer to themselves as ‘progressive’ or ‘social-democrats’¹⁶⁹ and maintain a secular outlook.

On the former *Parchami* side, the main parties are *Hezb-e Muttahed-e Melli-ye Afghanistan* (National United Party of Afghanistan/NUPA) and *Nohzat-e Faragir-e Taraqi wa Demokrasi* (Broad Movement for Progress and Democracy). The NUP was set up in 2003 by Nur-ul-Haq Ulumi, a Kandahari Barakzai Pashtun and former general who, in the early 1990s, was a major implementer of Najibullah’s national reconciliation policy. As this was before the political parties law was passed, the MoJ (dominated by Ulumi’s former *mujahedin* foes) threatened him with jail. Ulumi was elected MP in 2005 and became one of the most vocal ones. In what was seen as a political about-face, even by close allies, he led his party as a junior partner into a coalition with *Jamiat-e Eslami* and Dr Abdullah’s NCA in the presidential campaigns of 2009 and 2014. He briefly became interior minister in 2015/16 on Abdullah’s ticket. Other post-PDPA parties blamed Ulumi for the failure of an attempt to bring most of them into a unitary party in 2003

They also refer to the fact that their leader Hafizullah Amin was killed during the Soviet invasion. Initially, also the *Khalqis* had asked for Soviet military support against the *mujahedin* insurgency. When in power, they also had styled themselves as the ‘better Marxist-Leninists’ in the PDPA and declared Afghanistan the country of the ‘second model revolution’ (after the Soviet October revolution in 1917). This will be discussed in another separate AAN paper.

¹⁶⁹ Eg Graeme Smith, “Afghans may vote in Communists they drove out,” *Globe and Mail*, 22 September 2005, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/afghans-may-vote-in-communists-they-drove-out/article585767/>; “A snapshot of National Progress Party”, press release, [Kabul, Nov 2004]; “De yauwali pe lur” [On the way to unity], joint declaration of the ex-*Khalqi* parties *Melli Yauwalai*, *Hezb-e Melli* and *De Sole Gurdzang*, 21 Assad 1384 [31 July 2005], author’s archive.

by prematurely starting the NUP.¹⁷⁰ The party is present in large parts of the country. Former 'Karmalists' as the inland wing of an exile movement have initially set up *Nohzat-e Faragir*, with the aim of bringing together "national and progressive" parties including, but also beyond, groups originating from the PDPA. Since 2010, as a first step towards that aim, it has been working to merge with Ulumi's NUP. Briefly before the planned unification congress in spring 2012, *Nohzat* itself ran into an internal leadership dispute¹⁷¹ – and split as a result. One wing registered the party under a new name, *Hezb-e Mardom-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan People's Party). *Nohzat* lost its registration. In 2009, Habib Mangal, a former PDPA polit-bureau member close to *Nohzat*, ran for president as an 'independent', but received less than one per cent of the overall vote.¹⁷²

The 'Najibists' relaunched *Hezb-e Watan* in 2014 with a congress in Kabul. They also set up a Najibullah Foundation, both headed by Sherullah Jabbarkhel.¹⁷³ When it applied for registration under the name of Najibullah, the MoJ asked it to be changed. It now goes under the name of *Hezb-e Melli-ye Watan* (National Fatherland Party).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Interestingly, the first Afghan Marxist party, the PDPA, founded in 1965, also was the result of a failed attempt to set up a broader left-wing organisation, working title *Jabha-ye Muttahed-e Melli* (National United Front) in 1963. Note the similarity to the name of Ulumi's party. Kosimsho Iskandarov, *Politicheskie Partii i Dvizhenie Afganistana vo vtoroi polovine XX veka* [Afghanistan's political parties and movements in the second half of the 20th century], Dushanbe, 2004, 144-6.

¹⁷¹ Two contenders for the chairmanship – Sher Muhammad Bazgar and Muhammad Daud Rawesh – were almost on par after the vote but there was an excessive number of votes cast, so the conflict went to the MoJ which decided in favour of Rawesh's group. Bazargar's group alleges that a bribe was paid. Apparently, the son of deceased PDPA leader Babrak Karmal, Kawa Karmal, living abroad, made an appearance at the congress and unsuccessfully tried to take over the party with the slogan "neither Bazargar nor Rawesh."

¹⁷² Astonishingly, Tanai received half of his vote from the Ismaili community in Badakhshan; one of his deputies Muhammad Jan Pamiri, comes from there.

¹⁷³ There are, though, several small 'Najibist' splinter groups that did not join.

¹⁷⁴ The background for the refusal might be that the PDPA and *Hezb-e Watan* were banned after the *mujahedin* takeover in 1992. Justin Burke, "Afghan Communists Flee Despite Amnesty Offer," *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 May 1992, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1992/0520/20031.html>.

On the former *Khalqi* side, there are three main parties: *Hezb-e Melli-ye Afghanistan* (National Party of Afghanistan/NPA)¹⁷⁵ led by Abdulhai Malek, *De Afghanistan Sole Ghurdzang* (Afghanistan Peace Movement) of former defence minister Shanawaz Tanai¹⁷⁶ and *De Melli Yauwali Gund* (National Unity Party) led by Abdulrahim Salarzay. Tanai also ran in the 2009 presidential election and remained under the one per cent threshold.¹⁷⁷

In 2013 and 2015, three leftist parties merged in a two-phase process. First, *Khalqi Hezb-e Melli* and *Hezb-e Taraqi-ye Melli* (National Progress Party/NPP), itself a merger of 17 groups (including former Maoists and leftist ethno-nationalists) united. Then, it came together with the People's Party, choosing the name of *Hezb-e Melli-ye Taraqi-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan* (National Progress Party of Afghanistan's People/NPPAP).¹⁷⁸ But, as participants of the process said, party organisations in some provinces and abroad rejected the unification. There were problems with transparency. This applied to finances, membership figures of individual parties and ethnic tensions. Some party leaders, they say, seek closer relations with Russia and have adopted a more pronounced anti-western course; although these activists themselves are critical of the West's role in the country and its state of democracy.

Despite these problems, the new party pushed for a broadening of the merger. A decision was taken in November 2015 in the *Etelaf-e Ahzab wa Sazmanha-ye Dimokratik wa Taraqikhwa* (Coalition of Democratic and Progressive Parties and Organisations/CDPPO) – with now over a dozen includes leftist and non-leftist member-parties – to merge all of them into a united party. The commission was launched in April 2012 but suffered a serious setback when *Hezb-e Paiwand* of Ismaili leader Naderi (see under ethno-nationalists) pulled out. It had promised to fund the alliance, but dropped the project when it joined the Ghani camp for the 2014 presidential elections.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ This party used the old name PDPA until 2003.

¹⁷⁶ Tanai unsuccessfully attempted a coup against Najibullah in 1990 and subsequently fled to Pakistan where many of his Pashtun cadres joined the Taleban.

¹⁷⁷ Tanai received half of his vote from the Ismaili community in Badakhshan; one of his deputies Muhammad Jan Pamiri, came from there.

¹⁷⁸ "Kanferans-e Wahdat-e Hezb-e Melli-ye Taraqi-ye Mardom," [Unity Conference of the National progress Party of Afghanistan's People], <http://milli-payam.com/>.

¹⁷⁹ Mangal Mustafa, "Democratic parties' coalition formed", *Pajhwok*, 25 March 2012,

The situation is further confused by a number of other on-going unification projects in which membership often overlaps. This includes *Shura-ye Tafahom-e Niruha-ye Melli wa Demokratik-e Afghanistan* (Coordination Council of National and Democratic Forces, established in 2007) and the new *Harakat-e Niruha-ye Melli-ye Nejat* (National Forces Salvation Movement) and *Ettefaq bara-ye Taraqi-ye Afghanistan* (Coalition for Progress in Afghanistan).

Overall, no viable single successor has yet emerged amongst the post-PDPA parties that would be a force to reckon with in Afghan politics. At the same time, there are still a large number of former PDPA members and sympathisers; together with its mass organisations (trade unions, women, youth and professional organisations) the party had some two million members in the 1980s. They stick to the diverse post-PDPA parties or are locally and loosely organised, including in rural areas.

Together they constitute a vast potential network and significant vote bank. Sympathisers abroad add intellectual power and some financial means.

In general, the parties of leftist leaning were as divided as all other parties about which candidate to support in the 2014 presidential election. The *Azadegan* did not choose a preference. Many of its leaders had a tendency towards Abdullah. Other parties rejected him as a “*tanzim* candidate.” HAMA, NPPAP and some other 20 parties from the leftist (but also ethno-nationalists and new democratic) spectrum opted for Ghani and signed individual “memoranda of understanding” about cooperation before and after the election. The Abdullah camp also offered cooperation, including the financing of offices for one year.

3.2.3.3 A neo-leftist group: Solidarity Party

Meanwhile, a new type of radical left-wing party has emerged with *Hezb-e Hambastagi-ye Afghanistan* (Solidarity Party of Afghanistan). The party had already existed before. The initial leadership was ousted in 2010 by young party activists in a vote. A number of the party’s activists seemed to have a background in the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA);¹⁸⁰ former vocal MP Malalai Joya – expelled from parliament in 2007 for her criticism of warlords – belongs to its broader periphery. Now the party presents itself as fundamental opposition to the current government, the Taliban, the former

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/03/25/democratic-parties'-coalition-formed>.

¹⁸⁰ Itself the remnant of (one wing of) a former Maoist group, Rahayi.

mujahedin and the PDPA successors. It regularly takes to the streets. It is the only party that dares to openly challenge the glorification of the jihad and the jihadi leaders’ self-mythologisation. It espouses a radical anti-war course and demands an immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all western troops and rejects the US-Afghan security agreement. It maintains some contacts with like-minded leftist parties in the region and Western Europe including Pakistan, Sweden and Germany.¹⁸¹

The party is officially registered, mainly to be able to be publicly active. It does not believe in the democratic character of the current political set-up. In 2012, it became the target of the only attempt since 2001 to ban a registered party for “insulting the jihad and its participants.” The case was not followed through but, consequently, it was never closed. This permanently jeopardises the party’s existence.¹⁸²

Apart from the above, there are an active and growing scene of exile-and internet-based radical leftist groups, including the *Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan* (Radical Left of Afghanistan/RLA) formed in 1996 and *Hezb-e Kamunist* (Maoist)-e Afghanistan (Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan/CMPA), established in 2004 that have resumed publishing the Maoist flagship *Shola-ye Jawed*.¹⁸³ The influence of these groups inside Afghanistan is unknown.

3.2.4 Pro-democratic parties: further marginalised and struggling

3.2.4.1 From the underground

The enthusiastic attempts to create a broad front of new pro-democratic forces immediately after the fall of the Taleban regime, including former leftists and moderate *mujahedin*, have meanwhile stalled. Its main proponent, *Jabha-ye Melli bara-ye*

¹⁸¹ See eg Muhammad Hassan Khetab, “Hundreds attend anti-US/NATO rally in Kabul,” *Pajhwok*, 12 October 2014, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/10/12/hundreds-attend-anti-usnato-rally-kabul>; “Pakistan and Afghanistan: Conference of progressive parties’ joint declaration,” 26 December 2011, <http://links.org.au/node/2677>.

¹⁸² Mir Agha Samimi, “Senate panel seeks SPA suspension,” *Pajhwok*, 5 June 2012, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/06/05/senate-panel-seeks-spa-suspension>.

¹⁸³ An overview is provided by: Darren Atkinson, “The Left Radical of Afghanistan [*Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan*]: Finding Trotsky after Stalin and Mao?,” *Samaj*, June 2015, <https://samaj.revues.org/3895>. On the CMPA, see <http://www.sholajawid.org/>.

Demokrasi (National Front for Democracy) established in 2003 (its predecessor *Shura-ye Mudafe'an-e Solh wa Demokrasi*, or Council of Defenders of Peace and Democracy, had come into being in May 2002), has ceased to exist all but on paper. Also an attempt by former left-wing intellectuals to set up a new “non-tribal, all-Afghan [social-] democratic party” had stalled by early 2006 when its main proponent, Dadfar Rangin Spanta, joined the government. It had been based on *Paiman-e Kabul* (Kabul Accord), a six-party coalition of former leftist and leftist ethno-nationalists groups that call themselves “constitutionalists” in a reference to earlier democratic periods, founded in the late summer of 2002.

The parties in this part of the spectrum suffer from political disillusionment and financial depletion. Working openly has become dangerous, if not impossible in many provinces. This is not only because of Taliban activity, but because many local powerholders’ dislike non-*mujahedin* competition. The same is the case for leftist parties.

An exception is *Hezb-e Jamhurikhwahan* (Republican Party of Afghanistan/RPA). Tired of NFDA’s internal quarrels, it left early, and decided not to join coalitions anymore, but rather concentrate on party-building. In 2012, it was severely hit by the death of its leader Sebghatullah Sanjar in a traffic accident. It fell into crisis when key male party leaders challenged his deputy, Adela Bahram, who had taken up the leadership. She fought off this challenge at an extraordinary party congress in 2013 where she clearly won the leadership election and became the only woman¹⁸⁴ to be running a registered Afghan party. She also avoided a major split when a group of members joined the Abdullah camp in 2014. They claimed to represent the whole party – which had decided to support Ghani. The dissidents were expelled. Afghan party observers confirmed that the party has consolidated since and even gained more

¹⁸⁴ Up to 2010, there were three registered parties run by women, but they did not return after the first re-registration drive. See eg Farangis Najibullah, “Afghanistan: New Party To Focus On Women's Rights”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 20 February 2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079510.html>. Currently, there is also *Harakat-e Melli-ye Afghanistan-e Wahed* (National Movement of United Afghanistan) led by Princess Hindia, a daughter of King Amanullah, founded in 2013. Javed Hamim Kakar, “New political party comes into existence,” *Pajhwok*, 4 September 2013, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/09/04/new-political-party-comes-existence>; also: the party’s (mainly empty) website: http://harakatmilli.af/Index_dari.

members. This makes it probably the most successful of the pro-democratic parties founded around 2001.

None of the new democratic parties was able to field a presidential candidate in 2014. The only one that tried, the Labour and Development Party, saw its candidate disqualified for formal reasons. In contrast to the 2009 presidential election, the leftists and the secular ethno-nationalist parties played no independent role, deterred by higher financial and bureaucratic hurdles to register: ie submitting the names, voter card numbers and fingerprints of 100,000 supporters and a deposit of one million Afghani (USD 20,000) which would only be repaid if the candidate received at least ten per cent of the vote in the first round.

A number of pro-democratic parties cooperated with Ashraf Ghani in the 2014 presidential election. One of his mobilisation tools was to build a party coalition. This was based on written memoranda of understanding with individual parties with his focal point for parties. Before the first round, activists from new democratic parties ran his campaign contact office with political parties. They saw in Ghani a better choice compared with Abdullah whom they considered a ‘*tanzim* candidate.’ The democrats were sidelined in round two when a number of *tanzim* heavyweights joined the Ghani campaign – similar to what happened in 2009.

Other pro-democratic parties inside and outside the NDFA have entirely dissolved or found a new place. *Hezb-e Dimokrat-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Democratic Party) led by Abdul Kabir Ranjbar, a lawyer and MP from 2005 to 2010 who was part of attempts to set up *Khat-e Sewum* parliamentary group, joined the new Rights and Justice Party (see below) in 2011. The leader of *Hezb-e Refah-e Mardom-Afghanistan* (Afghanistan People’s Welfare Party of Afghanistan), Mia Gul Wasiq, was appointed the Ghani government’s contact point with political parties in the Office for Administrative Affairs. The party seems to have become inactive thereafter.

Reasons for the general failure of the pro-democratic parties to play a bigger role in the post-2001 era were diverse. One author called these: “one of the very few positive prospects for a political future in Afghanistan that does not return to the violent past.”¹⁸⁵ Some were homemade: the lack of experience in open political work, organisational abilities, stamina and own financial

¹⁸⁵ Ashley Elliot, *Political Party Development in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities*, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University 2009, 22.

means. At the same time, they were targeted by threats, bribes, infiltration, and takeover attempts by the *tanzims*. Although these parties initiated coalition building in a broader spectrum, ideological hurdles stood in the way of parties that came from a history of violent conflict, particularly between former PDPA members and the *Sho'layi*. There were also high hopes for support from democratic countries or from parties that did not materialise. Even the most basic material support was not provided, with the argument that neutrality must be kept. As a result, the pro-democracy parties were sidelined from the new, supposedly democratic system from its very beginning.¹⁸⁶

3.2.4.2 The Right and Justice Party

The most influential addition to Afghanistan's political party system since the legalisation of parties is *Hezb-e Haq wa Adalat* (Right and Justice Party/RJP). It was launched as a "reformist" and "constructive opposition party" in November 2011. It had the potential to fill the middle ground between Islamists and (former) leftists, even integrating some of them. The new party's emphasis was on reforms and rights issues. It favours electoral reform. It wants to change the "backward" system based on SNTV and to expand the role of political parties. The most vivid description of the party's *raison d'être* came from the youngest of its four speakers (the party has chosen not have a single leader): "If there were right(s) and justice in this society, there wouldn't be a need for a Right and Justice Party."

The RJP attracted a membership from all ethnic backgrounds that is also reflected in its original four-member 'advisory (*mashwarati*) leadership'.¹⁸⁷ This included intellectuals (some formerly involved in pro-democratic parties) through to a former deputy Taleban minister (with a monarchist background). AIHCR chairwomen, Sima Samar, became an 'advisor' to the party.

¹⁸⁶ There were also strange episodes that highlight how less of a mutual understanding existed. Late RPA leader Sanjar told this author how he was invited to the US embassy in Kabul during a visit of then First Lady Laura Bush. When Sanjar raised some critical points about the US policy in Afghanistan during the meeting, the hosts were disappointed and realised that the Afghan Republicans were not a chapter of the US Republicans.

¹⁸⁷ Former MP Abbas Noyan (Hazara), former economy minister Hamidullah Faruqi (Pashtun), Assadullah Walwalji (Uzbek), an intellectual from the north, well-known for his opposition to Dostum, and Shujauddin Khorassani (Tajik), a university professor of economics. Former MP Khoda Nazar Sarmachar, a Baluch, is running the party's office.

Not everything went smooth. The party soon became known as the 'Hanif Atmar party,' although the interior minister who just had been fired by Karzai did not join the leadership body. Former intelligence chief, Amrullah Saleh, who had lost his position with Atmar and took part in preliminary talks to set it up, later parted company to set up his own Green Trend movement. In 2014, the RJP joined the Ghani campaign and became one of its main mobilising elements. In return, Atmar was appointed head of the National Security Council (NSC), while other party leaders belong to the (not very visible) core team of the new president. This, on the other hand, created a disconnect between them and those without a place in government. Some of the latter complained that, after the election, they had not heard from their own leaders, there were no party meetings anymore and that the party had fallen dormant. They also admitted deficits in building up provincial structures. So, there is still space in the void in the centre.

3.2.5 The remaining void in the centre

3.2.5.1 The (pro-)Karzai party that never was

There were earlier attempts to fill the gap in Afghanistan's political centre by a pro-government (pro-Karzai) party, but they failed. This was because, given Karzai's party allergy, it was never clear whether the initiators acted with his consent or only pretended to act in his name. This was the case on the first occasion when his brother, Qayyum Karzai, in 2003, tried to set up a political movement based on a "reform agenda" in late 2003. This non-party was supposed to be composed of tribal elders, democratic political forces and 'the youth' as part of the effort to win the coming year's first election. This initiative faltered after some preparatory meetings.

The monarchists in the first post-Taleban years still had considerable credit. They were anti-Karzai as he had outmanoeuvred the former King Muhammad Zaher during the ELJ. They later reconciled, but lost most of their influence after their defeat in the ELJ. This came after the death of the ex-King in 2007 and as a result of the King's eldest grandson Prince Mustapha's alliance with Dr Abdullah's coalition where they just played a fringe role. Abdul Hakim Nurzai's *De Afghanistan de Melli Wahdat Wolesi Tahrik* (Afghanistan National Unity Popular Movement) is still registered.

In April 2004, some 40 parties, groups and individuals created a pro-Karzai movement called *Majma-ye Melli* (National Gathering). This registered as a social organisation, but not as a

party. It participated in the election mobilisation in Karzai's favour. Many of its proponents later received key positions in the Palace or were supported when running for parliament in 2005, including Karzai's influential cultural advisor Zalmay Hewadmal and MP Shukria Barakzai.

In 2007, Zabihullah Esmati, a surviving activist of the 1964-73 decade of democracy, started *Hezb-e Jamhuriyat* (Republic Party) as an anti-corruption party. It was rumoured to enjoy the support of the president. After a 2007 meeting with US officials, Karzai was quoted as saying: "I will not be a political party man, but I will support parties," which the US side interpreted as "presumably referring to his rumored alliance with the newly formed Republican [sic] Party."¹⁸⁸ It was quickly hijacked by a number of government ministers; some of them accused of corruption. Esmati saw himself unable to block them. After his death in 2008, the party petered out and no longer is on the list of the registered parties.¹⁸⁹

The new pro-democratic parties could have provided a basis for a centrist pro-reform party. But Karzai was suspicious of the leftist background of many of their proponents. The party with the currently largest chance to fill the moderate void in the centre is the RJP (4.2.4.2).

3.2.6 Another new current: The neo-Islamists

For some years now, a number of radical, but unarmed, Islamist groups have appeared on the scene.¹⁹⁰ As they do not have armed wings, they might be distinguished from the Islamist *tanzims* as a separate, new fifth current, despite their partly similar ideology and political programme. These groups distance themselves both from the Taliban, *Daesh* and the former *mujahedin* (for their violence and 'deviation' from the 'right path'). They do follow similar aims, albeit with different means: to fully bring Islam back into every field of life. At the same time, they do not consider the current government (fully) Islamic. Therefore, the author calls them "neo-Islamist" – "Islamist" for

their aim of an islamisation of Afghan society; "neo" because they represent a new generation and a different approach to politics, particularly with their focus on the educated young.

They have gained substantial traction, particularly among sections of the educated and professional youth. Their members are characterised by

"strong passion and high levels of discipline, and are actively engaging in political discourse and reacting to current affairs. (...) The groups have adopted effective methods of recruitment and mobilisation, such as demonstrations, rallies, electronic media and, for three of the groups, a well-defined and well-followed membership process. They are politically active, socially connected and technologically media savvy. (...)

[T]o varying degrees and in different ways, [they] seek to change the country's political system, its legislation and the scope of its (current) civil liberties in order to make the state and its laws more compatible with Islam."

There are mainly three groups that span the spectrum from fully organised party to social organisation or religious network. The first is the Afghan chapter of *Hezb ul-Tahrir* (Liberation Party). This is a transnational party founded in 1953 that seeks a caliphate encompassing the whole Muslim world. As in many countries, it is banned in Afghanistan and works clandestinely. It might have come to the country as early as 2003, but became more visible in 2007-08. There are indications that the first cell was mentored from Afghans living in Europe. In Afghanistan, it is mainly active in institutions of higher education and circulates underground print media.¹⁹¹ By 2009, the group had carried out an anti-election campaign. This was answered by a crackdown of the security forces. In some provinces, like in rural Badakhshan, it operates publicly. Its flag has been shown in demonstrations in Kabul, Jalalabad and elsewhere; an emblem often confused with that of *Daesh*.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in a US diplomatic cable dated 10 July 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/121457>.

¹⁸⁹ NDI, however, still gave it nine MPs after the 2010 elections. "Political Parties in Afghanistan [see FN 5], 29. Eng. Habib was named as its leader.

¹⁹⁰ This chapter is mainly based on Borhan Osman, "Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism: Afghanistan's new generation of Islamic activists," AAN, Thematic Report 01/2015, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AAN-Paper-012015-Borhan-Osman-.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ Antonio Giustozzi, "Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul 2010, <http://www.areu.org.af/EditionDetails.aspx?EditionId=312&ContentId=7&ParentId=7>.

¹⁹² In 2015, the party organised protests in support of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Burma. "Pro-Rohingya protestors wave Daesh flags in Takhar," *Pajhwok*, 12 June 2015, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/06/12/pro-rohingya-protestors-wave-daesh-flags-takhar>.

Jamiat-e Eslah wa Enkeshaf-e Ejtemayi-ye Afghanistan (Society for Reform and Societal Development of Afghanistan), the largest among those groups, is a well-organised, grassroots-oriented, but an hierarchically structured organisation. It claims to be the Afghan wing of the worldwide Muslim Brotherhood. However, it insists that it is not a political party but might, in the future, decide to become one. The organisation has been active in Afghanistan since 2003. It claims branches in over 20 provinces with more than 1,000 members operating a rigorous recruitment process that can take several years. It started its work under another name back in the 1990s in Pakistan. It draws its membership also mainly from the educated youth, although the leadership members are from an older generation, with backgrounds in different *tanzims*.¹⁹³

Jamiat-e Eslah mobilises support through various means: free courses, religious competitions and charity work. It runs its own network of high schools, universities, teachers training institutes and even a network of radio stations and a TV station.¹⁹⁴ Its funding sources are unclear, although it insists that it relies on membership fees and donations by wealthy countrymen. It has a registered youth organisation¹⁹⁵ and claimed two members in the 2005-10 parliament. It banned its members from running in the 2010 elections.

Both *Jamiat-e Eslah* and *Hezb ul-Tahrir* recruit sympathisers in government institutions, but ban their members from holding senior positions. They

apparently want to avoid being seen as legitimising the current government.

There is also a re-energised Salafism that is non-political in essence. Its followers prefer the term *muwahedin* (from *tawhid*, “oneness,” also “monotheism”, the central dogma of the Muslims). They do not have a centralised structure and are organised around certain madrassas and mosques that support each other. In Kabul, Salafi sheikhs have registered a social organisation, which, as they say, protects them from harassment from security forces that accuse them of preaching radicalism.¹⁹⁶ It is called *Majma-ye Ehya-ye Sunnat* (Assembly for the Revival of the Sunna, the Islamic tradition). The Salafis recruit actively through mosques, madrassas and a number of publications. Their growth draws on many Afghans who have studied abroad at Wahhabi institutions and undertake *dawat* (mission) when they return home. There are indications that some young Salafis no longer identify with the more traditional local networks and have developed sympathies with *Daesh*.

With this position, they resemble another movement that has spread from the Indian subcontinent to Afghanistan, *Tablighi Jamaat* (Society for Propaganda, or Preaching). This non-militant movement usually propagates the return to a religious way of life. In Pakistan, its annual meetings find millions attending. Similar meetings are now also held in Afghanistan. These rarely find their way into media reporting. In rare exceptions, as in 2012, Afghan media reported a three-day meeting with 150,000 participants in Kunar and one with 100,000 participants in Khost.¹⁹⁷

There also is a tradition of political and of militant Salafism in Afghanistan. Salafi communities in Kunar and Nuristan joined the jihad against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Their local *tanzim*, *Jamaat ul-Dawa ila-l-Quran wa al-Sunna* (Society for the Invitation to the Quran and the Sunna), split after 2001. One branch registered itself as a political party (but did not re-register after 2010). While another one joined the insurgency. This was first a separate organisation and swore allegiance to Mullah Omar and the Taliban in early 2010 (and has not joined *Daesh*). Both use the

¹⁹³ This includes *Hezb-e Islami*, *Jamiat-e Islami* and *Ittehad-e Islami* (now *Dawat*). There is an element of intransparency; despite several attempts, this author was not granted an interview with any of the leaders; the youth leaders, in contrast, were accessible.

¹⁹⁴ For example, it mobilised support for communities after earthquakes and after the September 2015 Taliban takeover of Kunduz; thousands participated in a competition celebrating Prophet Muhammad, designed as a counterpoint to the worldwide “Je suis Charlie” campaign, after the 2015 terrorist attack in Paris. “24 injured at anti-Charlie Hebdo protest in Kabul,” *The Peninsula* (Qatar), 31 January 2015, <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/international/319506/24-injured-at-anti-charlie-hebdo-protest-in-kabul>. In 2013, it organised protests against the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (as a western plot to strip women of their Islamic dignity).

¹⁹⁵ It is called *Nehad-e Jawanan-e Musulman* (Organisation of the Muslim Youth); its acronym – Najm (Star) – is similar to that of Afghanistan’s first Islamist organisation in the 1960s, *Nohzat-e Jawanan-e Musulman* which was Muslim Brotherhood-inspired and featured Rabbani, Hekmatyar and Sayyaf among its leaders.

¹⁹⁶ Local sources reported from Nangrahar that the Taliban closed down a number of Salafi madrassas in February 2016, possibly to block IS recruitment.

¹⁹⁷ “De Kunar Tablighi ejtema pe hewad ki de telpate sole de du’a pay-ta wu-raseda [Kunar Tablighi gathering ended with a prayer for permanent peace],” *Pajhwok*, 14 April 2012; s-rohi.com, 3 November 2012, author’s archive.

original name. Although a recent publication claims that the Afghan/Pakistani chapter of Daesh has a “potential constituency in the remaining Kunar Salafis,”¹⁹⁸ there are no signs that the latter have switched their allegiance away from the Taliban.

The Salafis and *Hezb ul-Tahrir* consider democracy and multi-party politics as anti-Islamic. All these groups “seem poised to grow at a steady pace, both in terms of numbers and influence within public institutions, and to become an influential part of the country’s political landscape.”¹⁹⁹

An ideological bridge between the mainstream and the neo-Islamists is *Hezb-e Eqtedar-e Islami-ye Afghanistan* (Islamic Rule Party of Afghanistan). Sayyaf’s deputy, Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, set it up before the 2004 presidential election. He is a big property-owner in and around Kabul. He scored a marginal 0.8 per cent of the vote, boycotted the election and supported Ashraf Ghani in 2014. This has a flavour of tribal solidarity, as both are Ahmadzai Pashtuns.²⁰⁰ This flip-flopping shows that the party is not fully committed, but also not fully averse to pluralism and elections. It has engaged recently in joint mobilisation on issues also supported by neo-Islamist groups. This includes a number of public events and protest demonstrations against the US-Afghan security agreement, US bases and the military coup in Egypt and the subsequent suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood. There is more direct connection: Ahmadzai has been on the board of *Jamiat-e Eslah’s* predecessor organisation when it was still based in Peshawar.

¹⁹⁸ Kevin Bell, “The First Islamic State: A look back at the Islamic Emirate of Kunar,” *CTC Sentinel*, February 2016, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-first-islamic-state-a-look-back-at-the-islamic-emirate-of-kunar>. This article, however, gives an excellent overview over the history of the Salafi movement in Kunar, its pre-Taliban Islamic Emirate and its unusual election policies.

¹⁹⁹ Osman, “Beyond Jihad and Traditionalism [see FN 190], 2.

²⁰⁰ Zubair Babakarkhel, “A second party boycotts elections,” *Pajhwok*, 16 July 2009, <http://e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allPrintDocs/11e51db60dc70a2c872575f7003ee21c!OpenDocument&Click>; Muhammad Hassan Khetab, “Ex-jihadi commander supports Ahmadzai,” *Pajhwok*, 23 May 2014, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/05/23/ex-jihadi-commander-supports-ahmadzai>. The Ahmadzai in the title of this article refers to Ghani. Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai’s party also ran under the name of under Islamic Front for Peace and Reconciliation (IFPR) in 2009, indicating it had linked up with other groups then.

3.3 Attempts for inner-party democratisation and leadership change: *Jombesh* and *Jamiat*

The only thorough attempt to internally democratise a *tanzim* happened in *Jombesh*. But it failed. Particularly between 2006 and the 2009 presidential elections, *Jombesh* reformers – mainly former leftists and secular intellectuals with a long party history – attempted to weaken the grip of founder-warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum and military commander networks on the party. A party congress to decide on the reforms was prepared since 2011. This had local branches holding conferences and electing congress delegates and pro- and anti-reform factions competing for the upper hand. This temporary opening became possible by several involuntary stints of Dostum’s absence from the country from 2006 onwards. This came about after internal fighting with obstinate commanders allied with the party and after a fallout with President Karzai, whose side he had joined after the 2004 election.

But the reform congress was never convened. Dostum was able to make a comeback. Twice, before the 2010 and the 2014 presidential election, he was brought home by the incumbent to secure the substantial Uzbek vote.²⁰¹ With access to power restored, he was able to obligate some of the younger reformers to himself, drive a wedge into the broader reformer camp and strengthen his grip on the party again. Officially, he had vacated the party leadership as early as in 2005.²⁰² For the time being, the democratisation drive in *Jombesh* has stalled, with Dostum as First Vice President of the country, the highest position an Afghan Uzbek has ever reached and a matter of substantial pride to both his friends and foes.

Jamiat, in contrast, has seen three attempts for inner-party changes aimed more at bringing in a new, younger generation of leaders to power. This also had a reformist, modernising aspect. The earliest and almost successful attempt happened

²⁰¹ “Dostum’s return sparks criticism in the West”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 August 2009, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/dostums-return-sparks-criticism-in-the-west.aspx?pageID=438&n=dostums-return-sparks-criticism-in-the-west-2009-08-19>

²⁰² After Dostum was appointed to the symbolic post of Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces in the Presidential Office in March 2005, he announced that he would step down as party head ‘in a couple of months’ and his deputy Seyyed Nurullah was made ‘caretaker’ leader. “Dostum [to] resign from his party”, *Cheragh*, 5 April 2005.

when the younger generation – represented by the ‘Panjshiri trio’: Dr Abdullah, Yunus Qanuni and late Marshal Fahim – took over the negotiations over the post-Taleban in Bonn in 2001. They effectively sidelined their historical leader, Ustad Rabbani, who was even forced to give up his presidency. Rabbani was able to hold on to the formal party leadership and consolidated his position when running successfully in the first parliamentary election in 2005. At that point, Qanuni had launched his own New Afghanistan Party outside *Jamiat* that participated successfully in the parliamentary election. When the *Jamiat* camp found itself in an opposition role after the election – although it managed to hold on to important position in government – this party and other groups returned into the mother organisation in 2005. This brought Qanuni Rabbani’s support for his successful quest to become the parliament’s chairman against a Karzai candidate.

In 2007, one of *Jamiat*’s leading ideologues, Abdul Hafiz Mansur, also set up his own party, *Hezb-e Mardom-e Musalman-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Muslim People’s Party).²⁰³ In an interview with the author in 2012, he linked his decision with inner-party democratic deficits, saying that he took it after “Ustad Rabbani took over the HPC leadership and appointed Ahmad Zia Massud, his son-in-law, as secretary general of the party”, without having called a party congress. “*Jamiat* is a party and everyone should behave as if it is a party, not a dictatorship”, he said.²⁰⁴

This was echoed by former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh who, after he was fired from his position by Karzai in 2010, turned himself into an opposition politician and set up *Rawand-e Sabz-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Green Trend). In a 2015 TV interview he said: “today’s *Jamiat* is not the historical *Jamiat* anymore... Its leadership has not

been established by a congress... but in a small room.”²⁰⁵

While Saleh cut his ties with *Jamiat* (although still supporting Abdullah in the 2015 presidential election), Mansur admitted that his party was designed more as a avant-gardist pressure group that would push new political ideas onto *Jamiat*’s agenda from the inside. To leave the party fully would result in losing access to power and resources available through it. Mansur also continues to work as editor-in-chief of *Jamiat*’s weekly newspaper *Payam-e Mujahed*. Mansur described the ambiguous relationship between *Jamiat* and himself as: “not that strict to say that if a *Jamiat*-affiliated person registers a new party, the leader had separated from *Jamiat* and is no more a *Jamiat*.”

Another attempt in 2011 to bring about generational change at *Jamiat*’s top happened at a planned congress. This fell victim to Rabbani’s assassination in September that year. Earlier, in January that year, Rabbani had talked about giving a larger role to the youth in the future of party.²⁰⁶ Now the party saw itself forced to look for a new leader. It failed again due to the competition between large numbers of ambitious leaders – mainly the surviving Panjshiri leaders Fahim, Qanuni, Abdullah, two surviving Massud brothers, Ismail Khan (from the party’s western base in Herat) and Atta (as *Jamiat*’s leader for the entire north and northeast²⁰⁷). Even the strongest among them, Fahim and, after his death in 2014, Atta who reportedly financed much of Abdullah’s 2014 presidential campaign, were unable to overcome their competitors and the party’s paralysis. This left Rabbani’s son Salahuddin, junior by comparison, in office as a compromise figure – far beyond the deadline in the party’s own statutes. He originally had been chosen as interim leader for six months after his father’s death. His position was

²⁰³ This party was not Mansur’s first attempt at party-building. Being one of the main proponents of a parliamentary system and the leader of a boycott that brought the 2003/04 CLJ to a stand-still for several days, he started the *Jabha-ye Yazdah-e Jaddi* (11th Jaddi Front, named after the date the CLJ vote boycott commenced) immediately afterwards to coordinate those who had supported his stance. It included *Jamiat*, *Nohzat-e Melli*, *Afghanistan Newin*, the Shia *Hezb-e Wahdat* and *Harakat*, *Jombesh* and some smaller parties – resembling the old ‘Northern Alliance. It was later called *Jabha-ye Adalat wa Dimukrasi* (Justice and Democracy Front) but it was pulled into different directions and disintegrated in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election.

²⁰⁴ There is only one flaw in Mansur’s rendering. His party had already been set-up in 2007, and Rabbani became HPC head in 2010 only. But his argument is enlightening anyway.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Shamshad TV (Kabul), 6 August 2015, watched live by the author.

²⁰⁶ Abasin Zaheer, “JIA to see leadership changes: Faqiri,” *Pajhwok*, 20 January 2011, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2011/01/20/jia-see-leadership-changes-faqiri>; “Afghan party discusses reorganization, future role,” Noor TV (Kabul), 20 January 2011, quoted in *BBC Monitoring South Asia*.

²⁰⁷ See also: Philipp Münch, “Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention: A review of developments in Badakhshan and Kunduz provinces”, AAN, Thematic Report 3/2013, http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/20131110_PMunch_Kunduz-final.pdf.

strengthened by President Karzai appointing him as his father's successor at the helm of the HPC.

In contrast to *Jombesh*, *Jamiat* and most other *tanzims*, the three most influential non-*tanzim* parties – Afghan Mellat, NUPA and RJP – as well as a number of smaller parties (see more in section 3) already function differently. Their history is different as they emerged in peace times, either before the wars or after it was (supposed to be) over. Together with the absence of military networks from their structures and of military commanders from their leaderships has made them function in a much more 'party-like' manner. *Afghan Mellat* looks back at its largely stable existence of over six decades (notwithstanding a number of break-away groups), and also NUPA, with its source in the dissolved PDPA (having dropped the latter's revolutionary ideology), has proven sustainable with a countrywide presence. The same is true for the RJP; the only successful post-2001 attempt to organise a supra-ethnic, centrist, pro-rights party. Although there still are transparency issues, particularly on its presence outside larger cities and funding, in all three cases, these parties are what Afghanistan's laws demand: civilian entities.

However, this does not immunise them against what is the case with the *tanzims*: being turned into political vehicles for ambitious individual politicians and being sidelined when they are not necessary for election-related mobilisation anymore. Leaders of all three parties have accepted high-ranking government positions, either under Karzai or Ghani.²⁰⁸

3.4 The political parties in the second electoral cycle (2009/10) and the 2014 presidential election

The role political parties were able to play during the 2009 presidential (and provincial council) and the 2010 parliamentary elections did not differ from that during the first electoral cycle in 2004/05. Among the 32 presidential candidates in 2009 seven ran under their party label, more than in 2004.²⁰⁹ All but one remained marginal,

²⁰⁸ Former Afghan Mellat leader Anwar-ul-Haq Ahadi was finance and commerce minister under Karzai. The most prominent RJP leader (it has a four-member collective leadership to which he does not belong), Hanif Atmar, an interior minister under Karzai, currently heads the National Security Council. NUPA chairman Nur-ul-Haq Ulumi became interior minister, as a candidate of the Abdullah camp.

²⁰⁹ Shah Nawaz Tanai for the leftist Peace Movement; Mahbubullah Kushani for the leftist, Tajik ethno-

achieving less than one per cent of the vote. The only exception was Dr Abdullah. He ran under the ticket of the National Front of Afghanistan (NFA), a coalition of *Jamiat*, *Jombesh* and Mohaqqueq's *Wahdat* party. At that point, the NFA was already defunct in practice by *Jombesh* switching sides to Karzai. One year after the election, in December 2011, when Dostum was alienated from Karzai again, a new National Front of Afghanistan was created, combining the same three parties again.

The 2009 election was marred by political polarisation, massive fraud during and before the 20 August first round and the unwillingness of both the Afghan government and its international allies to deal with it. Its outcome was, in fact, decided in favour of the incumbent by a statement on 25 September 2009 by the US-led Friends of Afghanistan group.²¹⁰ Following this, Karzai's main contender Abdullah decided to withdraw from the second round, as he believed that it would be a foregone conclusion.²¹¹ Karzai was declared winner by default.

Karzai drew his own conclusion from the fraud accusations directed at him during the 2009 election and focused on top-down electoral 'reform,' in order to make sure he had control over who would become his successor in 2014 since then the constitution did not allow him to run again after two tenures. He basically completely ended the independence of the election institutions by 'Afghanising' them. The SNTV system was not touched, cementing the marginal role of the parties.

As a result, Afghanistan's parties played an even more marginal role during the second

nationalist *Azadegan* Party; Latif Pedram and Bashir Ahmad Bezhan for two factions of the Badakhshani Tajik ethno-nationalist National Congress Party; Zabihullah Nuristani for the small Justice and Development Party. Some others also had party affiliations. Habib Mangal, a former PDPA leader ran for a merger of PDPA successor parties (*Nohzat-e Faragir*, the Broad Movement) that, however, had not been registered yet and therefore took the label 'independent.' Nejrabi, from Independence Party, ran again but could not use his party's label as it had not been able to re-register by then.

²¹⁰ They said, even before there was an official result, that Karzai "would probably 'continue to be president,' whether through a runoff or as the legitimate winner of more than 50 per cent of votes cast." Karen DeYoung, "NATO Officials Say They Will Back Afghan Effort to Turn Insurgents Against Taliban," *Washington Post*, 28 September 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/27/AR2009092703155.html>.

²¹¹ In fact, there even had been speculations about the formation of a "National Unity Government."

parliamentary elections in 2010. Only 32 of the 2,556 candidates (for 249 seats) wanted their party affiliation reflected on the ballot papers (1.2 per cent), although 84 parties were registered then.²¹² The lack of declaration of affiliation did not mean all parties were fully invisible. The *tanzims* were able to spend significant amounts of funds, relying on their top candidates' and their own name recognition. The same went for *mujahedin* commanders who were in much higher numbers than in 2005 and were able to win seats in their local strongholds.²¹³ Karzai had watered down the provisions against links with illegal armed groups during his election 'reform.' NDI observed much more campaigns spending than in 2005 and "more organized campaigns..., including door-to-door canvassing, rallies and meetings by provincial level party offices."²¹⁴

In general, though, party representation in parliament sunk between 2005 and 2010. According to NDI, 21 political parties are represented in the 2010 Wolesi Jirga with 85 seats (34.1%). Among them are 13 *tanzims* or *tanzim* splinter groups (with 68 seats=27.3%), one former leftist (NUPA), one ethno-nationalist (*Afghan Mellat*) and one centrist (Republic Party) each, but no new democratic party. Three parties are difficult to characterise (NSM, *Hezb-e Mosharekat, Ensejam*) (see section 3).²¹⁵ For the *tanzims*, results were mixed. Those with larger representation in the 2005 Wolesi Jirga lost (*Jamiat, Jombesh, Dawat*). Smaller ones (Khalili and Mohaqqueq *Hezb-e Wahdat* factions, NIFA, *Harakat*) gained, but on a

low level.²¹⁶ The biggest winner was *Hezb-e Eslami*. They were considered to have the single largest group of MPs, around 35. Karzai appointed several members as ministers, including the party's registered wing's leader Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal; Wolesi Jirga speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy who is also a member of this party.

Almost all of the pro-democratic MPs and independent, liberal ones dropped out, including main proponents of the initially very vocal and pro-democratic *Khat-e Sewum* (Third Way) parliamentary group.²¹⁷ They were simply outspent, as new actors joined the fray: owners of big construction companies, banks and other businessmen, relatives of high-ranking government officials and governors. Many businessmen see their mandate as a political insurance for their economic interests. They also have robust networks within the executive, among the jihadi-commanders and in the foreign-funded world of contracting, even though the external resource flows have decreased. A candidate from Nimroz province told AAN that: "The main way that the majority of candidates in this province believe they can win is not by campaigning, but by fraud."

A number of young candidates made it through who do not strongly define themselves as proponents of any political group or trend. They emphasise a point that a change from the failed elites to fresh personalities is required in the longer term. As a result, the new parliament is both less experienced, less 'political', while the role of political parties has declined further.

An important trend of the 2014 presidential election was that heavyweight party leaders came under increasing scrutiny by an increasingly critical and educated public. The first round showed that young, better-educated voters decided not to stick to candidates from their own ethnic group. This indicated that, despite all stagnation, 'traditional' patterns of loyalty could start breaking up in a more open environment. This trend also became visible when, after the large demonstration held on 11 November 2015 in Kabul to protest against the killing of seven Hazara travellers by insurgents in Zabul province, influential Hazara leaders came

²¹² Babak Khalatbari, "Parlamentswahlen in Afghanistan: Demokratie ohne Parteien?," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, September 2010, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_20497-1522-1-30.pdf?100917085032, 4.

²¹³ Including Amanullah Guzar from Kabul, Nangrahar's Hazrat Ali and Haji Abdul Zaher (from the Arsala family), Qazi Kabir and Mutaleb Beg (both from Takhar), Haji Almas (Parwan), Hazrat Ali (Nangrahar), Mohaqqueq, Mulla Ezzat and Anwar Khan Oryakhel (Kabul), Abdurrauf Ibrahimy (Kunduz), Alam Khan Azadi (Balkh), Shahzada Shahed (Kunar), Eng. Qarar (Laghman), Iqbal Safi (Kapisa), Zalmai Mojaddedi (Badakhshan), Dr. Malekzada (Ghor), Mulla Tarakhel (Kabul kuchi), Fukkuri Beheshti and Sadeqizada Nili (from Baiman and Daikundi) plus the *tanzim* leaders Qanuni and Sayyaf. Finally two key *Jamiat* ideologues made it this time, Mohiuddin Mehdi (Baghlan) and Abdulhafiz Mansur (Kabul). Many of them are related to *Jamiat* or *Hezb-e Islami*, smaller numbers to *Dawat, Jombesh* and Shia parties.

²¹⁴ "Political Parties in Afghanistan" [see FN 5], 27.

²¹⁵ "Political Parties in Afghanistan" [see FN 5], 29-30.

The figure included for *Hezb-e Eslami* (1!), though, seems to be much too low.

²¹⁶ "Political Parties in Afghanistan" [see FN 5], 29-30. Same trend found by: Andrew Reynolds and John Carey, "Fixing Afghanistan's Electoral System: Arguments and Options for Reform," AREU, Briefing Paper, July 2012, 10, <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1211E-Fixing%20Afghanistans%20Electoral%20System%20BP%202012.pdf>.

²¹⁷ This group, however, was never registered, as it failed to cross the initial (now reduced to 15) 21-member threshold.

under criticism for their attempts to instrumentalise the protest.

A similar pattern had already become visible during the 2009 presidential election. Then, MP Ramadan Bashardost (re-elected to parliament in 2010) scored an unexpected 10.5 per cent of the vote with an original, partly populist, but almost single-handed, anti-Karzai campaign.²¹⁸ Also, after each presidential election, there were tangible fluctuations in the mood of certain ethnic or sub-ethnic groups, particularly the Hazara and the Panjshiri Tajiks. This resulted in ups and downs in the popularity of certain leaders. Those who chose to join or remain in government (for example, Fahim 2004-09, or Khalili 2005-14) slumped. They were accused of 'not doing enough' for their communities. While those in opposition gained (for example, Mohaqqeq 2004-09).

3.5 Re-registration and (attempted) de-registration of parties under Karzai (2009 and 2014)

Government's attempts to further reduce the number of parties by administrative means continued. In 2009, the non-party parliament, in conjunction with the government,²¹⁹ passed a new Political Parties Law. This law substantially increased the hurdles for party registration and forced all 110 parties recognised at that point to re-register.

A party now needed at least 10,000 members to register, compared to 700 before. Membership had to be proven by signed membership forms that included the member's ID card numbers. Party founders were now required to have an academic degree; a BA at least. Although this provision might never be implemented (but then, why include it?), it added to those measures that could be employed to shut down a party at any point at will. On the positive side, parties now were able to state their candidates' affiliation on ballot papers. Parties were now allowed to be active outside the country, as long as their main office was in

Afghanistan. This made sense, as millions of Afghans live in the diaspora, many of them associated with parties and supporting their fellow members financially. However, formal offices abroad remained banned. The law increased the donations allowed by a single donor from two to five million Afghanis (at that point around 100,000 USD). This would not be easy to monitor. A proper mechanism to oversee party financing was still missing. The resulting inequality usually favours already stronger formations. The NDI, in its last report, called "the lack of a sustainable or reliable source of funding ... the most debilitating of all administrative obstacles facing parties and their potential institutionalization."²²⁰

The law came into force on 9 September 2009, just before the one-year period began during which changes in election-related legislation are constitutionally ruled out. This was a procedural trick. What were, in fact, changes of the old law were declared completely new ones and its provisions were made to apply retrospectively. All old parties were required to re-register according to the raised hurdles.

The new law gave the parties six months to comply; ie until 8 March 2010. For technical reasons, the ministry granted an additional grace period of three months; ie until 5 June 2010. This moved the entire exercise dangerously close to the candidates' registration deadline on 21 June the same year. As a result, the parties were kept busy with bureaucratic issues.²²¹ This prevented them from concentrating on campaigning. Whether this was intended or not, it negatively affected their ability to play at least their limited role in the second parliamentary election in a row.

Hurdles were increased even more by a "Regulation on establishment and registration of political parties". This came into force in June 2010 by presidential decree.²²² The regulation required that parties be registered for five years only, when they would have to renew their registration; whilst having to pay fees both for the initial registration

²¹⁸ This author heard from many young Kabulis of non-Hazara background that they supported Bashardost as a protest vote.

²¹⁹ Justice Minister Sarwar Danesh was quoted in Kabul daily *8 Sobh* that the new law is supposed to "prevent the creation of very many parties". "Danesh: Har siasigund bayed 10,000 gheri wu-lari" [Danesh: Each political party must have 10,000 members], *8 Sobh*, 22 Qaus 1388 [13 December 2009], http://8am.af/oldsite.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8109:1388-09-22-04-16-56&catid=42:2008-10-31-09-36-17&Itemid=469.

²²⁰ "Political Parties in Afghanistan" [see FN 5], 42.

²²¹ The MoJ insists on checking 18 different data on every of the 10,000 required members of each party, not just their copied voter cards. Even in 2013, the ministry had only full-time six staffers for this job. "Afghanistan's Parties in Transition" [see FN 78], 6.

²²² The official text of the regulation is not dated, see eg in the AREU online library:

<http://www.nzdl.org/gsdImod?e=d-00000-00-...00--off-0areu--00-0---0-10-0---0--0direct-10---4----dte--0-1--11-ps-50--20-about--00-0-1-00-0-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-00-0-0-11-10-0utfZz-8-10&cl=CL5.13&d=HASH01ed69bdf1edf37440007a89&x=1>.

and the re-registration. It also contained a provision that the application for registration of a party had to be signed by party members from at least 20 provinces. This seemed to have become the basis for a later requirement that parties must have offices in at least 20 of the country's 34 provinces,²²³ or else risk losing their registration. In order to comply, the parties had to introduce in writing their respective provincial officials to the provincial branch of the justice ministry. They, in turn, would send the information to the MoJ in Kabul.

While most of the parties conformed to the re-registration requirement, they also criticised the legitimacy of the measure, as well as the collision with the electoral campaign. Many party leaders saw this as the government's ill intent towards them. They also shared the widespread belief that this measure was part of the government's plan to manipulate the election's outcome in favour of loyalist candidates.

Again, only five of Afghanistan's previously 110 registered political parties had their registration renewed in time to field candidates under their logos in the 2010 elections. Only 31, out of a total of 2500, candidates were official party candidates; down from 226 of 36 parties initially. The other 31 parties withdrew their candidates' party affiliation from being registered so as not to jeopardise their registration. When the election campaign started, even the number of the registered parties was unclear; differing between 20 (IEC) and 22 or 23 parties "have met the conditions" for re-registration, according to different MoJ officials on different days.

In spring 2013, the MoJ attempted to start a second re-registration drive less than one year before the presidential election scheduled for April 2014, and only one year after the disputed first re-registration drive ended. This time, the focus was on lowering the number of parties by using the provision of the above-mentioned regulations on provincial offices. At that time, 56 parties were registered. Government official stated that their "goal was to drastically reduce the number of parties" and "weed out fake parties and those without insufficient support."²²⁴

The new de-registration drive reflected the Karzai government's uneasiness about the political parties' upsurge of activity prior to the 2014 vote in the framework of the CCPPCA coalition. This

election-reform oriented alliance of 21 parties caused Karzai's concern, as it included pro-government parties. It constantly criticised the president's election-related decisions: that the UN-appointed international members in the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) were abolished; that later the ECC was removed altogether; that the re-use of the old and easy-to-forge voter cards was pushed through; and the attempt to install a chairman of the IEC that would be more to his liking. The government was also uneasy about a simultaneous IEC proposal to switch to a mixed electoral system. By subjecting the parties to a new re-registration exercise, they were again kept busy at a crucial time, further limiting their role in the elections and, as a result, over the following legislative period.

When a local TV station broke the news about the re-registration, it reported that the MoJ considered all the parties to be 'informal' from then on because none of them have a sufficient presence in the required minimum number of 24 provinces.²²⁵ The head of the MoJ's political party registration department confirmed in April 2013 that the government wanted "to make the parties nationwide rather than to keep them in tribes, provinces or families. ... We do not ask them to have high buildings; an apartment is enough to be an office." According to him, no party had a presence in more than 12 provinces then. (The Afghan Senate quoted the same official that 16 parties had told the MoJ that they had offices in 15 provinces, but that a MoJ evaluation had found that 15 of those only had an office in Kabul. None of that was ever officially published.) It was even unclear what, for example, the ministry considered a 'party office.' (There was no legal definition.) According to the ICG report,

... a government official proposed a four-part test: 'One: is there anything at the physical address, with a signboard? Two: do they have a paid membership? Three: is the party applying its own rules about internal organisation and mission? Four: is there any written record of meetings, decisions, attendance?' ... The rule's application did not become clear until almost a year later, when the justice ministry started sending warning letters, stating that a one-year grace period would expire on 4 April 2013.

A 2013 survey in the four major cities Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad found only five parties had offices in all four cities (Republican Party, *Harakat-e Eslami*, *Jamiat*, *Hezb-e Eslami* and

²²³ Ministry of Justice, *Rasmi Jarida* [Official Gazette], no 1075, 3 April 2012.

²²⁴ "Afghanistan's Parties in Transition" [see FN 78], 6.

²²⁵ *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, 12 April 2013.

Afghan Mellat). It was concluded, “even major parties appeared to have trouble meeting the requirements.”²²⁶

But this time, the government’s initiative triggered more widespread criticism and counter-action than the 2009 parties law. Some larger parties, including pro-government ones as *Afghan Mellat*, *Hezb-e Wahdat* and *Jamiat-e Eslami*, publicly challenged the MoJ figures. Abbas Noyan, a former Kabul MP and member of the Rights and Justice Party’s leadership, admitted that many parties did not meet all requirements, but pointed out that political parties in Afghanistan should not be compared “with political parties in advanced countries.” Asef Baktash, the leader of the left-leaning *Hezb-e Taraqi-ye Watan* (Homeland Progress Party), claimed it had offices in all 34 provinces, but was critical as “while government officials live in heavily guarded houses because there is no security, [the MoJ] is asking us to open offices in 20 provinces.” He calculated that running even minimally established offices would amount to USD 120,000 in annual costs for each party, a prohibitive amount for the smaller ones.²²⁷

Muhammad Zarif Naseri, the leader of *Hezb-e Hambastegi-ye Melli-ye Aqwam-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Tribes’ National Solidarity Party),²²⁸ said the MoJ’s announcement “was a plot of the warlords and those rich MPs who have gained immense sums of money in the last ten years to exclude their poor rival parties.” However, the position of the ministry was that, because “our security forces control all provincial centres”, there should be no problem to open offices anywhere. This showed that the criteria in the Political Parties Law did not correspond with the country’s reality. As soon as the MoJ’s drive became public, it was abandoned – temporarily, as it turned out (see 3.5).

On top of all this, the political parties’ right to field candidates is even not mentioned directly any more in the penultimate version of the Election Law that had been in force since 6 August 2014²²⁹ and which had only been amended again in

September 2015. The only mention of parties is through their right to register election monitors (called “candidates’ agents”), file complaints against violations – and, in the section about fines: in case of violations, political party candidates (so they must be legal) are fined double the amount than independent candidates, although their status is legally the same. This amounts to another discrimination against political parties.

4. THE FIRST GHANI YEARS

4.1 A reversal of political party marginalisation?

One of President Ghani’s first statements after he assumed the presidency in September 2014 announced that he planned to strengthen the role of political parties. This was preceded by a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between the Ghani campaign and individual parties about pre- and post-elections cooperation. In the campaign, a focal point for parties was appointed. Members of those parties staffed Ghani’s campaign offices and mobilised their own members and sympathisers to vote. This happened particularly in the first round of elections, when the bigger *tanzims* were still opting for other candidates. This coalition building nurtured the hope among political parties of what one leader called “a fifth democratic period.” (This characterisation also implied that he saw the Karzai years as a failure in this respect.)

A first setback came during the second round run-off when a number of *tanzims* joined the Ghani camp and took over much of the campaign. After the election, Ghani followed up with the message that “we need to move from quarrelling with the parties to strengthening the parties.”²³⁰ This came in a meeting on 5 October 2014 with representatives of the Rights and Justice Party. This party had a key role in his electoral campaign and their leaders received some key posts in his administration. The meeting was part of a series involving delegations from civil society, youth and women organisations, as well as other parties. The meetings focussed mainly on the issue of talks with

²²⁶ “Afghanistan’s Parties in Transition” [see FN 78], 6, 7.

²²⁷ The average annual income is USD 528, “one of the world’s lowest.” “Afghanistan Economic Update, October 2012”, The World Bank, <http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-economic-update-october-2012>.

²²⁸ Now merged into *Hezb-e Azadikhwahan-e Mardom-e Afghanistan* (People’s Freedom Seekers Party).

²²⁹ *Election Law, unofficial translation* (but published on the official website), 15 Assad 1392 [6 August 2014], http://www.iec.org.af/pdf/legalframework/law/electoral_law_eng.pdf.

²³⁰ “Rais-jamhur ba aza-ye Hezb-e Haq wa Edalat didar kard” [The President met with members of the Right and Justice Party], website of the Office of the President, 15 February 2015, <http://president.gov.af/fa/news/37115>. The highest ranking RJP member is Hanif Atmar as NSC chairman. One of the party deputy chairmen, Sardar Roshan, and another prominent member Hamidullah Faruqi are key advisors at the Palace.

the Taliban; the declared priority of Ghani's first six months in office.

As with the RJP, those parties deemed more important met the president in separate meetings. This included a coalition of 40 Pashtun nationalist parties, groups and councils, led by former Wardak governor, Halim Fedai.²³¹ A group of 15 mainly pro-democratic party leaders was received *en bloc* on 15 February 2015. According to participants of the meeting,²³² the president spoke most of the time. Only one of the participants was given the chance to speak in the name of everybody; the others were asked to submit further comments in writing. The issue of the forthcoming parliamentary elections (at that point, still due latest by 23 June 2015) remained almost unaddressed. Therefore, the meetings took on more the character of the president briefing the parties, rather than consulting them.

Since then, contacts have decreased. There were a few follow-up meetings at a working level and one with Vice President Sarwar Danesh, but not on the highest level anymore. The opinion of the party leaders interviewed was that the working level meetings were not useful. This was because participating officials did not appear briefed on government policy and had no specific instructions on practical cooperation. This mirrors the president's increasingly top down management style. Those leaders are also frustrated by Ghani's appointment policy. This, despite his pre-election announcement to switch to a merit-based system, continues to keep 'traditional' *tanzim* fiefdoms in certain ministries and provinces. Some of these parties are still sticking to their choice of supporting Ghani's declared pro-reform course. This is the case mainly that there is a lack of an alternative. Others have given up, saying that the President had reneged on his "oral promises" of enhanced cooperation with the parties. (They also admit that there were no concrete agreements about governmental positions in the MoUs.) One party leader described Ghani's approach as

"inclusiveness during the election campaign, exclusion after the election victory."

4.2 Managing political parties top-down: another de-registration campaign

There are also increasing indications that there are ideas of 'managing the parties' top-down in the presidential camp. President Ghani has told visiting party leaders and members of his staff that, as far as he is concerned, there were too many political parties and that it would be better to have only "four" of them.²³³ A member of Ghani's entourage indicated in March 2015 that, if the existing parties did not merge voluntarily, the president's apparatus would set up the desired four parties on its own.

Subsequently, new moves have been made by the Justice Ministry to reduce the number of parties based on the disputed provincial offices clause in the Political Parties Law by de-registering parties. This happened in two stages that appear somewhat random. In February 2015, a local newspaper reported (not fully correctly) that the ministry had already suspended "nearly twenty parties."²³⁴ Parties started protesting, though. When this author contacted the responsible MoJ official in May 2015, he confirmed the plan, but added that the measure still awaited the minister's final confirmation. For the time being, the initiative fizzled out. The number of registered parties even increased slightly from 65 in February 2015 to 67 by late July 2015.

Then, between November 2015 and mid-January 2016, the number of registered parties suddenly dropped to 56 (by some 15 per cent). In May/June 2015 parties that the MoJ reckoned had less than 20 provincial offices were notified that they did not meet the requirement. They were given a deadline to comply and those unable to do so would be taken off the list by January 2016. Implementation was not consistent. One leader told this author that his party had been able to re-register after paying a bribe. Another reported that his party was re-registered based on a personal relationship, despite an insufficient number of offices, but later taken off the list anyway. The drive for de-registration coincides with the run-up to the

²³¹ Malaiz Daud, "Afghanistan's Presidential Election of 2014: Who is leading?," Heinrich Boell Foundation, 21 March 2014, <https://www.boell.de/en/2014/03/20/afghanistans-presidential-election-2014-who-leading>. Another meeting – with *Hezb-e Paiwand-e Melli* – was briefly mentioned in *Hasht-e Sobh* (Kabul), 13 October 2014, author's archive.

²³² "President Ghani Receives the Heads and Representatives of Political Parties", website of the Office of the President, 15 February 2015, <http://president.gov.af/en/news/41836>.

²³³ It is unclear what assumption this particular figure is based on.

²³⁴ "Fa'aliyat-e nazdik ba bist hezb-e siyasi ba halat-e taliq dar-amad" [Activities of nearly 20 political parties suspended], *Hasht-e Sobh*, 3 Hut 1393 [21 February 2015], <http://8am.af/activities-nearly-twenty-political-parties-suspended/>.

planned parliamentary elections. Although the measure is formally lawful, it again keeps the parties busy with bureaucratic measures in a crucial time when they should be mobilising sympathisers and voters. It remains in the hands of the MoJ to finally determine which parties will be allowed to field candidates in the upcoming elections. Those disqualified include several leftist parties, one pro-democratic and one left-wing ethno-nationalist party each and one *tanzim* splinter group.

4.3 Excursus 2: Beyond parties: jihadi councils and a new front

A number of *tanzim* leaders, who had initially supported President Ghani, started distancing themselves from him. This occurred with the NUG coming under increasing criticism for its inability to overcome conflict over key appointments and the turn towards trying to solve the crises in the security and socio-economic situation, as well as the resulting refugee crisis. The same happened with key *Jamiat* allies of CEO Abdullah.

Eight *tanzim* leaders set up a new umbrella organisation in late August 2015, called *Shura-ye Ali-ye Ahzab-e Jihadi wa Melli-ye Afghanistan* (Supreme Council of Jihadi and National Parties). Of the big *tanzim*, only *Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami* and Sayyaf's *Dawat* were missing; as were parts of *Hezb-e Eslami* and *Jamiat*. Only *Hezb-e Eslami*'s 'Council' faction took part, and from *Jamiat* only Ahmad Zia Massud. *Jombesh*, with its non-jihadi past, was not invited. Again, this Council is more an alliance of the leaders than one of their whole parties. Despite its members' alliance with Ghani, it calls itself 'independent.'²³⁵ It is motivated by their perception that the '*mujahedin*' are under-represented in Ghani's cabinet and is supposed to act like a pressure group. It explicitly did not present itself as an "opposition" alliance, but one that would "strongly oppose wrong doings [in the government]", whilst supporting it where it did a good job. This is another typical attempt of a quasi-opposition force, while retaining lucrative positions inside government, blaming it for mistakes, but taking credit when it succeeds.

In December 2015, Sayyaf set up *Shura-ye Herasat wa Sebat-e Afghanistan* (Afghanistan Protection and Stability Council). This also claimed it was not an "anti-government body", but pushing for

²³⁵ Khwaja Basir Ahmad, "Key parties form supreme council against challenges," *Pajhwok*, 27 August 2015, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/08/27/key-parties-form-supreme-council-against-challenges>.

"fundamental reform" and the government to "use the *mujahedin*" in its fight against the Taliban, as they "reflect the concerns of the Afghan people." In this council, individuals from different factions of *Hezb-e Eslami* and *Jamiat* participating in Mojaddedi's council appeared, including *Jamiat*'s Qanuni and Ismail Khan, Wolesi Jirga speaker Abdul Rauf Ebrahimi and Omar Daudzai, a Karzai ally and former interior minister (both *Hezb* members).²³⁶

Like the CCPPCA, these councils and fronts tend to be single-issue alliances and survive for only a limited life-time, but without ever being officially dissolved. They are far less stable than political parties. Possibly there are much more influential as they focus the influence of several party leaders.²³⁷

In January 2016, *Afghan Mellat* leader Ahadi and *Harakat* leader Qalamuddin followed with their *De Afghanistan Newey Melli Jabha* (Afghanistan New National Front). This went head-on into opposition, attacking the government as a "failure" and "no longer credible." It demanded an interim government and new presidential elections simultaneously with the planned parliamentary polls. The new front claimed the support of "six formal and 11 informal [not registered] parties."²³⁸ However, this course, caused splits in both parties, with pro-government factions rejecting to join. In *Afghan Mellat*, parts of the leadership, including the new general secretary Abdul Qayum Aref, accused Ahadi of acting unilaterally and treating the party as his "personal property."²³⁹

²³⁶ Humayoon Babur, "Afghanistan's old guard set up opposition party," AP, 18 December 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghanistan-old-guard-set-up-opposiyion-party/3108633.html>; Siyar Sirat, "Newly Established Council Seeks Reforms, Stability," *Tolonews*, 18 December 2015, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/22868-newly-established-council-seeks-reforms-stability>.

²³⁷ Similar shuras were already established during the Karzai years, including De Fekr au Amal Jerga (Thinking and Action Jirga) that tried to build consensus around a joint Pashtun candidate for the 2014 election. Javed Hamim Kakar, "Another grand electoral alliance in the offing," *Pajhwok*, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/09/05/another-grand-electoral-alliance-offing>. Ghani sympathisers, including pro-democratic parties, set up *Ejma-ye Melli* (National Gathering) during the 2009 presidential campaign. It was discontinued.

²³⁸ Despite several requests, it failed to provide a list.

²³⁹ Tariq Majidi, "Ahadi Launches New Party, Says NUG Has Failed," *Tolonews*, 14 January 2016, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/23292-ahadi-launches-new-party-says-nug-has-failed>; Navid Ahmad Barezai, "Afghan Millat party denies backing Ahadi's

5. CONCLUSIONS: PARTIES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

Afghanistan's political party system – using Niedermayer's definition²⁴⁰ – is still a system in the making, as inter-party relations and particularly inter-party competition are still limited to pre- and post-election alliance building. But parties cannot fully participate as such in – particularly parliamentary – elections. That limits the necessity to for inter-party competition.

Afghanistan's real political party paradox is, therefore, that, while the parties are a reality politically as well as legally and the political system is constitutionally designed as democratic, with a multi-party character, they cannot compete for power in a democratic way. Legally, they are inside the political system, but practically outside it, or at least relegated to the sidelines.²⁴¹ And because of the emergence of a parallel, non-constitutional political system established between 2001 and 2014, where the real political perks are distributed, it matters more to be part of this than of the constitutional system.

5.1 Political parties and currents: thriving in fragmentation

The years since 2001 constitute the longest period in Afghanistan's history during which political parties have been able to operate openly. For the first time parties are fully legal. Despite many shortcomings, they have become a reality within the polity of current-day Afghanistan. Countering widespread assumptions, parties also have constituencies in rural areas, although the degree of formal organisation there is low. This does not necessarily mean, however, that party loyalties are loose.

party," *Pajhwok*, 14 January 2016, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/01/14/afghan-millat-party-denies-backing-ahadi's-party>; Azizullah Hamdard, "Unity govt no longer legitimate, says Ahadi," *Pajhwok*, 19 January 2016, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/01/19/unity-govt-no-longer-legitimate-says-ahadi>; Fitri, "Personal interests" [see FN 148].

²⁴⁰ See FN 10.

²⁴¹ The phrase "parties 'inside' and 'outside'" has earlier been used by AREU's Anna Wordsworth in a 2007 paper, "A Matter of Interests: Gender and the Politics of Presence in the Wolesi Jirga" but only for parties in relation to parliament. I expand its use to the overall political system.

A number of parties and the three ideologically distinguishable historical political currents (Islamists, leftists, ethno-nationalists) have proven relatively stable, to differing degrees. In fact, parties and currents have proven more stable than other, at times more influential but often short-lived forms of political organisation, such as shuras, jirgas, coalitions or politically involved civil society organisations. This cannot be said (yet) for the two new currents, the new democratic parties that openly emerged immediately after 2001 and the neo-Islamist groups that later became more prominent. A high degree of fragmentation makes Afghanistan's political landscape particularly complicated.

Nevertheless, the post-2001 years could be dubbed – in reference to the democratic periods of 1947-52 and 1963-73 – Afghanistan's "third democratic period." But much of the democratic potential, particularly embodied in the political parties as a reflection of the country's political diversity, has remained unused or even blocked. This is another similarity with the 1947-52 and 1963-73 periods.

The Islamist *tanzims* and some ethno-nationalist parties rely on their constituencies developed during the struggle against the Soviets and the Taliban. Their positions in all branches of the state are consolidated, as is their economic power. The only new party that shares some of these features (particularly a strong position in the current government) is the RJP – although, similar to the *tanzims*, more through a small number of leaders than as a party as such.

The Islamist *tanzims* have further increased their dominance among the existing political currents. The leaders are strong, almost untouchable, despite well-founded accusations of continuing links with illegally armed groups and of past crimes and abuses. Having been involved in armed struggles for decades, they have yet to buy into the democratic rules of the game. The on-going war with the insurgency continues to provide a pretext to carry on their armed 'politics.'

The ethno-nationalists have been able to maintain their local or regional power bases as they are considered defenders of minorities' rights in the context of the on-going war and re-ethnicisation of Afghan politics.

The leftists have de-revolutionarised and social-democratised themselves. They are plagued by their own parochialism, old-style politics and pre-1992 leaders sticking to leadership positions blocking the way for younger activists and fresh thoughts. Attempts to re-unify have been ineffective, rendering almost all individual parties

in this part of the political spectrum insignificant. Based on their opposition to religious rule in favour of modern forms of government and their comparatively bigger openness to rights issues, however, a larger, re-united party of that colour could potentially constitute an attractive political offer for a clearly defined, significant constituency – secular-minded Afghans.

The new democrats in particular have suffered under the enduring general marginalisation of parties and have lost impetus, deprived as they are of means and energy. But there are exceptions, the Republican Party being the most visible among them. There are signs that some parties are dissolving into other currents, particularly Hazara parties into the ethno-nationalist one.

The neo-Islamists are clearly on the rise, particularly among the youth where they have already shown a capacity to mobilise large numbers around ‘soft’ (cultural, religious and educational) issues. In fact, the emergence of this current reflects disillusionment among Afghans with the flawed, heavily western-influenced post-2001 democratisation process. With the exception of the illegal *Hezb-e Tahrir*, these groups insist that they are not parties – but might later decide to become parties.

The void in the centre – ie the lack of a moderate, pro-government or pro-reform party – remains glaringly unoccupied. There is no sign that President Ghani is planning to base his policy on a party or a coalition, as assumed by those parties who entered into agreements with him before the 2014 election. The RJP still has the biggest potential to fill this void. It is part of the government (Ghani’s camp). Its biggest challenge is to overcome a tendency of being dominated by personalities and of ignoring the party’s internal leadership bodies. It further risks being turned into a patronage vehicle singularly focused on obtaining government positions.

With *Jamiat* and particularly Abdullah’s alliance, there is an organisationally distinct political opposition. This political camp, however, often refuses to act as such, trying to avoid losing access to government positions and resources. The party-less character of Afghanistan’s electoral system enables these political forces to avoid a clear decision between being opposition or being in the government. Instead they straddle both positions, with the consequence of becoming opportunistic and unclear on their political aims.

The personality-oriented character of parties, the almost complete exclusion of parties from a meaningful role in the elections and their full exclusions from parliament, on balance,

strengthens other patterns of mobilisation, particularly along ethnic lines. Upsurges of ethnal mobilisation and polarisation have occurred throughout the 15 post-Taleban years. The latest one started during the second round of the 2014 elections and is continuing under the – internally quarrelling – National Unity Government composed of two mainly ethnically self-defined camps.

5.2 The legal framework: more hurdles than incentives for parties and their democratisation

Afghanistan’s laws regarding political parties and their participation in elections are highly ambivalent. The Electoral Law in particular de facto revokes rights provided to parties by the constitution, by not clearly reiterating them. This is bolstered by a widespread popular attitude that ‘what is not explicitly allowed, is forbidden’. This is also reflected in the de facto ban of parliamentary factions organised along party lines which was never laid down in any law or by-law – but is effective anyway as a result of former President Karzai’s dislike of parties, which keeps parliament party-less, fragmented, susceptible to manipulation and more often than not ineffective. Additionally, the SNTV system used in parliamentary elections also discriminates against parties as it deprives them of presenting themselves with clearly distinct party lists of candidates. It also weakens party-MP relations.

These regulations affect less the parties’ role in presidential elections. They do encourage old-style coalition building, however, where parties may temporarily split for tactical reasons and where only their leaders count while members remain outside any decision-making process.

While the government has used Afghanistan’s laws pertaining to political parties and elections as a tool to hinder political party activity, it has not implemented existing regulations that could have helped parties become more democratic. The government has claimed that it is the high number of parties that is the problem, not their lack of internal democratic functioning. As a result, it has tried to reduce their number through administrative means such as re- and de-registration campaigns. It is striking that these attempts have always taken place right before parliamentary elections, looking like deliberate moves to hinder party activities precisely when they should be concentrating on presenting their political platforms to voters. In that sense, the

political parties law has been turned into a party prevention law.

Particularly the non-implementation of the disarmament clause during the earlier elections (it has meanwhile been almost fully dropped) and of financing regulations for political parties has made the playing field between the various parties lopsided. This has unilaterally favoured the *tanzims*. They that were left in command of their military networks, giving them power of coercion and violence vis-à-vis the electorate. The establishment of numerous new paramilitary pro-government armed forces (Afghan Local Police, so-called uprising forces etc) significantly exacerbates this problem. On the financial side, an unqualified ban on all foreign party funding was upheld against the option of organising transparent mechanisms of party financing, with equal access according to certain criteria. All this does not only reflect the weakness of the rule of law in Afghanistan, but at times an unwillingness to implement certain laws because of perceived political priorities, including by Afghanistan's allies. For example, fighting the war against the insurgents became more important than establishing a democratically function system of institutions.

Under these circumstances, the level of political maturity, organisational stability and democratic nature of Afghanistan's political parties remains low, even in comparison with those in neighbouring regional countries, such as India, Pakistan and Nepal with their decades-old party systems. The parties remain vertically structured, personality-oriented, often non-participatory and lacking in transparency, *mutanafezin* ('dignitary') parties – not membership parties. This is particularly the case with the *tanzims* that are dignitary parties *with armed wings*.

Another consequence of this legal and political situation is that the strength of the individual political parties has never been measured by their full and unhindered participation in elections (which would also have required these being more free and fair than previously, in order to give a realistic picture). This has prevented any 'natural selection' based on voter mobilisation and the number of votes received that usually curbs the number of political parties.

5.3 The parallel political system

A second major cause of the stagnation of Afghanistan's political party system is the parallel political system built during the Karzai years that has not constitutional legitimisation. This has only partially changed under the NUG, with "the

Palace" continuing to play a central role in decision-making, sidelining even the cabinet. This puts selected party leaders into positions of power, but limits the political space for parties in general.

5.4 Emergence of a two-class party system

The combination of the factors mentioned above, despite some stabilisation and formalisation, has altered the balance within Afghanistan's political party system since 2001. In the few years immediately following the regime change in 2001, the political party system appeared more open. The dominance of the *tanzims* that resulted from the decades of war was challenged by new, more progressive groups that wanted to move beyond these conflicts and mobilised a lot of Afghans to join political parties in order to participate in making Afghanistan a more democratic country. These hopes, however, faded soon and descended into a period of stagnation²⁴² that is not over yet.

The start of the 'Ghani years', or rather, of the National Unity Government (NUG), heralded fresh hope. Early promises to enhance the role of political parties have not been fulfilled, however. Electoral reform – including of the electoral system to one that could give more space to parties – is bogged down in the mutual blockade between the presidency and parliament, a legacy of the Karzai years. The NUG has not been able to move beyond this as it is bogged down itself in internal rivalries. After the 2010 parliamentary elections, a KAS paper had warned that "the next four years will show whether the political damage done [by the inadequate electoral system and the fraud] will lead into a façade democracy threatened by collapse or lost time can be made up."²⁴³

As a result of the *de facto* exclusion of political parties from at least the parliamentary elections and open parliamentary activity, as well as the involvement of many party leaders in old-style non-democratic politics, parties continue to constitute only one 'dimension' in Afghanistan's complicated web of power structures and socio-political relationships. This partial exclusion not only undermines the letter of the Afghan constitution, it also limits the rights of those

²⁴² According to Hossain Ramuz in 2006, an Afghan activist who worked with NDI and the AIHRC in Kabul, the post-Taleban period has started with a phase of "optimism about a developing party pluralism" (2001-2004), and a subsequent phase of disillusionment.

²⁴³ Khalatbari, "Parlamentswahlen in Afghanistan..." [see FN 212], 7.

Afghans who consider parties a useful means of self-organisation and participation in the political decision-making process. The weaknesses of the party translate into a weak parliament, which, in turn, weakens the checks-and-balances in Afghanistan's centralised system that strongly tilts toward the executive.

A two-class party system has thus emerged, with some parties (or rather their leaders) within this parallel system where positions of power and access to resources are distributed. Within this system, armed Islamist parties dominate. Other parties remain outside of it, excluded by ambiguous laws and often non-democratic means.

The marginal state of Afghanistan's political parties is one factor that reflects the current state of the country's democracy.²⁴⁴

Afghanistan's state system is presidential, civilian, electoral, pluralistic and competitive. The president, a parliament and provincial councils (as well as district councils and mayors, but so far only theoretically) are regularly elected. There are legal opposition parties and a legislative. This belongs to the "minimal procedural standards" for a system to be called democratic.

But there are certain shortcomings. Elections have rarely been held on time, and those of district councils and mayors not at all. More importantly, results – of presidential, parliamentary and provincial council elections – have regularly been challenged, ie in the eyes of key political actors they lack recognition and legitimacy. Particularly the 2014 presidential election ended without a clear result, and this shortcoming had to be patched over by the formation of a National Unity Government that brings together the two contenders of the run-off election. This – and the lack of a date for the parliamentary elections which should have constitutionally been held by June 2015²⁴⁵ – reflects a decline in the quality of the elections held since 2004/05 that went hand-in-hand with the increasing (and not full voluntary) withdrawal of the international community from

the 'political' aspects (in contrast to technical and financial ones) of those elections.

In the presidential system according to the constitution, the government is formed and its members appointed by the president. Parliament then individually gives a vote of confidence or of non-confidence to the members of cabinet. This tilts the executive-legislative relationship towards the former. In practice, this tilt is amplified by the frequent sidelining of parliament by the executive, for example through the emission of presidential decrees although they must be later approved by parliament.

The competitiveness of the electoral regime, however, is hampered by the limited access of parties as such (with visible candidates' lists) to parliamentary and provincial council elections and by the prohibition of party-based factions or groups in the elected bodies. Competitiveness is further threatened by the dominance of the mostly Islamist, armed *tanzims* and their religiously and historically legitimised claim to govern. These are elements of restricted contestation, of a "restrictive democracy." De facto, although not de jure, large parts of the population have been excluded from casting their votes by a decrease of polling centres, due to security problems, in practice limiting the suffrage, a feature of a "limited democracy." This is particularly the case for the female vote, where security reasons and conservative 'traditions' overlap as causes.

In order to follow Collier and Levitsky's advice to avoid "adjectives" with a "dismissive" character, Afghanistan could be called a weak, embryonic democracy. But it is almost more important to find out in what direction this democracy is moving – towards more or less democracy. Here, procedurally a gradual decline has occurred between the first (2004/05) and the so far incomplete most recent electoral cycle (2014/?). Electoral reform, including the envisioned strengthening of the role of the political parties, has not happened, so there is legal stagnation. Consequently, stagnation is the main feature to describe Afghanistan's democratic system, including its political party system.

²⁴⁴ As criteria, the author uses those compiled and annotated by David Collier and Steven Levitsky. "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics*, Vol 49, No 3 (April 1997), 430-51.

²⁴⁵ When this paper was finalised, the new date unilaterally announced by the country's controversial and still-to-be-reformed Independent Electoral Commission in January 2016 (namely 15 October 2016) was just one month away, with almost none of the necessary preparations done. When the elections can realistically be held, was completely unclear at that time.

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ANNEX 2: ABBREVIATIONS (WITHOUT POLITICAL PARTIES)

AAN: Afghanistan Analysts Network

AREU: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

BSA: bilateral security agreement

DDR: Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (programme)

ECC: Electoral Complaints Commission

ELJ: Emergency Loya Jirga

FN: foot note

HPC: High Peace Council

IDLG: Independent Directorate of Local Governance

IEC: Independent Electoral Commission

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force

KAS: Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Stiftung)

MoJ: Ministry of Justice (of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan)

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

MP: member of parliament

NDI: National Democratic Institute

NSC: National Security Council (of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan)

NUG: National Unity Government

SNTV: Single Non-Transferable Vote

UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan

ANNEX 3: REGISTER OF PARTIES AND COALITIONS

Each party or coalition mentioned in the text is listed with the original name and English translation. Names of historical parties appear in italics.

De Afghan Mellat Gund (Afghan Nation Party)

De Afghanistan de Melli Wahdat Wolesi Tahrir (Afghanistan National Unity Popular Movement)

Afghan Tolenpal Wuluswak Gund (Afghan Social Democrat Party), now Afghan Mellat (historic)

De Afghanistan Newey Melli Jabha (Afghanistan New National Front/ANNF), coalition

De Afghanistan Sole Ghurdzang (Afghanistan Peace Movement)

Aidan group, faction of Jombesh

Chap-e Radikal-e Afghanistan (Radical Left of Afghanistan)

Daesh (Islamic State Khorasan Province/ISKP)

Dawat-e Islami (Islamic Call), formerly Ettihad-e Islami bara-ye Azadi-ye Afghanistan

Ettihad-e Melli bara-ye Dimukrasi (National Union for Democracy) (historic)

Ettihad-e Eslami bara-ye Azadi-ye Afghanistan (Islamic Union for the Freedom of Afghanistan) (historic)

Ettihad-e Shuraha-ye Hezb-e Eslami (Union of Islamic Party Councils), faction of Hezb-e Eslami

Etelaq-e Ahzab wa Sazmanha-ye Dimokratik wa Taraqikhwa (Coalition of Democratic and Progressive Parties and Organisations/CDPPO), coalition

Etelaq-e Melli-ye Afghanistan (National Coalition of Afghanistan/NCA), coalition

Eslahat wa Edalat (Reform and Justice), Jombesh faction

Eslahat wa Mosharekat (Reform and Participation), Jombesh faction

Esteqlal wa Tajaddud (Independence and Renewal), Amanullah's political movement (after 1919) (historic)

Ettefaq bara-ye Taraqi-ye Afghanistan (Coalition for Progress in Afghanistan), coalition

De Fekr au Amal Jerga (Thinking and Action Jirga), coalition

Haftgana (Peshawar 'Seven'), coalition (historic)

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic Revolution Movement)

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (Mansur) (Afghanistan Islamic Revolution Movement – Mansur), see Harakat-e Newin-e Enqelab-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (historic)

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan (People's Islamic Revolution Movement)

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Eslami wa Melli-ye Afghanistan (Islamic and National Revolution Movement of Afghanistan) (historic)

Harakat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic Movement)

Harakat-e Eslami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan's People's Islamic Movement)

Harakat-e Melli-ye Afghanistan-e Wahed (National Movement of United Afghanistan)

Harakat-e Newin-e Enqelab-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (New Islamic Revolution Movement) (historic)

Harakat-e Niruha-ye Melli-ye Nejat (National Forces Salvation Movement), coalition

Hezb-e Afghanistan-e Newin (New Afghanistan Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Azadegan (Party of Free-Thinkers)

Hezb-e Azadi-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Freedom Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Azadikhwahan-e Mardom-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan People's Freedom-Supporters Party)

Hezb-e Dimokrat-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Democratic Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan/PDPA) (historic)

Hezb-e Edalat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic Justice Party)

Hezb-e Ensejam-e Melli (National Harmony Party)

Hezb-e Eqtedar-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (Islamic Rule Party of Afghanistan)

Hezb-e Eqtedar-e Melli (National Rule Party)

Hezb-e Ettihad-e Melli (National Unity Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Hambastagi-ye Afghanistan (Solidarity Party of Afghanistan)

Hezb-e Hambastagi-ye Melli-ye Aqwam-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Tribes' National Solidarity Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Haq wa Edalat (Right and Justice Party/RJP)

Hezb-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan – Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (aka HIG/Islamic Party of Afghanistan – Gulbuddin)

Hezb-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan – Khaled (Islamic Party of Afghanistan – Khaled)

Hezb-e Jamhuriyat (Republic Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Jamhurikhwahan-e Afghanistan (Republican Party of Afghanistan/RPA)

Hezb-e Kamunist (Maoist)-e Afghanistan (Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan/CMPA)

Hezb-e Kangara-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan (National Congress Party of Afghanistan/NCPA)

Hezb-e Kar wa Tausea (Labour and Development Party/LDP)

Hezb-e Mardom-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan People's Party)

Hezb-e Mardom-e Musalman-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Muslim People's Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Mellat-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Nation Party)

Hezb-e Melli-ye Afghanistan (National Party of Afghanistan/NPA) (historic)

Hezb-e Melli-ye Taraqi-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan (National Progress Party of Afghanistan's People/NPPAP)

Hezb-e Mosharekat-e Melli (National Participation Party)

Hezb-e Muttahed-e Islami-ye Afghanistan (United Islamic Party of Afghanistan)

Hezb-e Muttahed-e Melli-ye Afghanistan (National United Party of Afghanistan (NUPA))

Hezb-e Nokhbegan-e Mardom (People's Elite Party)

Hezb-e Paiwand-e Melli (National Accord Party)

Hezb-e Refah-e Mardom-Afghanistan (Afghanistan People's Welfare Party)

Hezb-e Sa'adat-e Melli wa Islami-ye Afghanistan (National and Islamic Prosperity Party of Afghanistan) (historic)

Hezb-e Serri-ye Ettehad (Secret Unity Party) (historic)

Hezb ul-Tahrir (Liberation Party)

Hezb-e Taraqi-ye Melli (National Progress Party/NPP) (historic)

Hezb-e Taraqi-ye Watan (Homeland Progress Party) (historic)

Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami (Islamic Unity Party)

Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Mardom-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan People's Islamic Unity Party).

Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Mellat-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan's Nation's Islamic Unity Party)

Hezb-e Wahdat-e Melli Eslami-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic and National Unity Party)

Hezb-e Watan (Fatherland Party)

Independence Party (Hezb-e Esteqlal)

Jabha-ye Islami-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan/NIFA)

Jabha-ye Melli (National Front) (historic)

Jabha-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan (National Front of Afghanistan (NFA), coalition of Jamiat, Jombesh and Wahdat (Mohaqqeq) (historic)

Jabha-ye Melli bara-ye Demokrasi (National Front for Democracy), coalition (historic)

Jabha-ye Muttahed-e Melli (National United Front) (historic)

Jabha-ye Nejat-e Melli-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan National Salvation Front/ANLF)

Jamaat ul-Dawa ila-l-Quran wa al-Sunna (Society for the Invitation to the Quran and the Sunna)

Jamiat-e Enqelabi-ye Zanan-e Afghanistan (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan/RAWA)

Jamiat-e Eslah wa Enkeshaf-e Ejetmayi-ye Afghanistan (Society for Reform and Societal Development of Afghanistan)

Jamiat-e Eslami (Islamic Association)

Jamiat-e Khuddam ul-Furqan (Association of the Servants of Providence)

Jerian-e Demokratik-e Newin (New Democratic Current) (historic)

Jombesh-e Melli Islami (National Islamic Movement)

Khalq, PDPA faction (historic)

Khat-e Sewum (Third Way), parliamentary group (historic)

Klup-e Melli (National Club) (historic)

Majma-ye Ehya-ye Sunnat (Assembly for the Revival of the Sunna).

Majma-ye Melli (National Gathering) (historic)

mashrutiat (constitutional movement) (historic)

Melli Inqelabi Gund (or Ghurdzang) (National Revolutionary Party, or Movement) (historic)

De Melli Yauwali Gund (National Unity Party)

Nehad-e Jawanan-e Musulman (Organisation of the Muslim Youth), youth organisation of *Jamiat-e Eslah*

Nohzat-e Faragir-e Taraqi wa Democracy (Broad Movement for Progress and Democracy) (historic)

Nohzat-e Hambastegi-ye Melli-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan National Solidarity Movement)

Nohzat-e Jawanan-e Musulman (Islamic Youth Movement) (historic)

Nohzat-e Melli (National Movement) (historic)

Paiman-e Kabul (Kabul Accord), coalition (historic)

Parcham, PDPA faction (historic)

Pasdaran (historic)

Rahayi (Liberation)

Rawand-e Sabz-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Green Trend)

Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Mardom-e Afghanistan (People's Liberation Organisation of Afghanistan/SAMA)

Sazman-e Enqelabi-ye Zahmatkashan-e Afghanistan (SAZA/Revolutionary Organisation of Afghanistan's Toilers)

Sazman-e Rahayibakhsh-e Khalqha-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Peoples' Liberation Organisation), see Rahayi

Settam-e Melli ([Against] National Oppression) (historic)

Sho'la-ye Jawid (The Eternal Flame) (historic)

Shura-ye Ali-ye Ahzab-e Jihadi wa Melli-ye Afghanistan (Supreme Council of Jihadi and National Parties)

Shura-ye Ettefaq (Unity Council) (historic)

Shura-ye Hamkari-ye Ahzab-e Siasi wa Etelafha-ye Afghanistan (Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions of Afghanistan/CCPPCA), coalition (historic)

Shura-ye Herasat wa Sebat-e Afghanistan (Protection and Stability Council), coalition

Shura-ye Mudafe'an-e Solh wa Demokrasi (Council of Defenders of Peace and Democracy), coalition (historic)

Shura-ye Nazar-e Shemal (Supervisory Council of the North)

Shura-ye Tafahom-e Niruha-ye Melli wa Demokratik-e Afghanistan (Coordination Council of National and Democratic Forces)

Tablighi Jamaat (Society for Propaganda, or Preaching)

Taghir wa Omid (Change and Hope), coalition (historic)

De Talebano Eslami Ghurdzang (Islamic Movement of the Taliban)

De Tore Bore Nezami Mahaz (Tora Bora Military Front)

Wulusi Mellat (People's Nation) (historic)

Young Afghans (Jawanen-e Afghani), pre-1919 reformist movement (historic)

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