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RESPECTABLE WARLORDS? THE POLITICS OF STATE-BUILDING IN POST-TALEBAN AFGHANISTAN

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Respectable Warlords?

The Politics of State-Building in Post-Taleban Afghanistan

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The re-establishment of the Afghan state after the fall of the *Taleban* regime is proving a more complicated task than was originally expected. By mid-2003, press reports abounded about the resurgence of the *Taleban*, the permanence or even the strengthening of the warlords and the lasting influence of Islamic fundamentalists. While there is no denying that progress in the first 18 months of the post-*Taleban* period was modest indeed, a picture of complete stagnation would be misleading. Hamid Karzai and his circle of pro-western allies within the transitional administration, who identify themselves as the bearers of the interests of the central state, have been carrying out a slow but steady confrontation with the main warlords, trying to limit the warlords' power and increase their own. Because of Karzai group's limited resources and the unwillingness of its international patrons to commit much of their own, this has not been an open confrontation. There have been no decisive clashes, rather an ongoing arm-twisting over the balance of power within the administration and within the state. The confrontation is far from over and the future role of the warlords remains to be determined. Examining the background and the character of these warlords therefore appears all the more urgent. Is it useful to assume that they share the same aims? Do they have the same potential?

Definitions of warlordism and the debate about legitimacy

In recent years the term ‘warlordism’, initially used to indicate a specific period of the history of China, has been in vogue as a way of describing the competition between military factions in collapsed or crisis states. The term is not only popular in the press, but also among academics, especially Africanists. A special issue of the *Review of African Political Economy* launched the debate about the suitability of this term for use in the African context, giving a largely positive answer. J.A.G. Roberts, in particular, explained in what sense it is suitable. “The decay of nationalism into regionalism and sectarianism”, “the extent to which such provincial power centres link up with foreign interests”, “the disintegration of the military hierarchy and the rise of lower-ranked officer strata”, “the burdens imposed on civil society by the extortion and violence” it occasioned and “the obstacles it places in the way of political solutions to problems” were, in his judgement, all aspects of warlordism which made it applicable to Africa.¹

The debate and the research went on. Among recent contributors, W. Reno aroused a significant interest when he identified the main distinction between states and warlords as one of “collective versus private interests”, or in other terms, of “the triumph of informal (shadow state) networks to the near exclusion of state bureaucracies”. Warlords, therefore, “resemble a mafia rather than a government”. “Collective authority and private authority may, by coincidence, resemble one another on occasion”. But “the critical difference between this style of organisation and a conventional state, even if very weak, lies in the fact that the inhabitants do not enjoy security by right of membership in a state”. Importantly, the violence of warlords “is not rebellion”, but

¹ J. A.G. Roberts, ‘Warlordism in China’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 16:45/46 (Summer 1989), pp.26-34. See also in the same issue R. Charlton & R. May, ‘Warlords and Militarism in Chad’, pp.20-21.

“reflects manoeuvres on the part of politicians and ‘marginalized’ to renegotiate (and force) their position in the state, not some version of a state-society struggle that will lead to reform”.²

For our purposes, the definition supplied by J. MacKinlay is even more interesting. In his view:

[D]espite their abuse of power and at times unattractive behaviour, local rulers also performed important social functions, supporting religion, culture and encouraging some aspects of a primitive form of civil society. The warlord by contrast was a negative phenomenon. Although, like the baron and the chieftain, his power rested on the possession of military forces, he occupied territory in a strictly predatory manner and his social activities seldom enriched the lives of civilian families in his grasp. Warlordism involved the use of military force in a narrower, more selfish way than the baron or the chieftain. It implied protectionism, racketeering and the interception of revenues, without any mitigating cultural or religious commitments and was not a concept that became intellectually developed in our culture.³

The reason why this definition is particularly interesting is that it appears to look at the issue of warlordism in a historical perspective, implying that even European history has seen the presence of warlords as well as of ‘barons’ and legitimate ‘local rulers’. The real issue seems to be how ‘warlords’ develop a kind of legitimacy and become accepted as ‘rulers’. Inevitably this can be only a slow process, in which events such as key victories over their enemies would then allow them to enlarge their revenue base and to spare resources for purposes other than war, and/or the establishment of political alliances.⁴

As defined in this paper, a warlord (a term which is not meant here as derogatory) is a particular type of ruler, whose basic characteristics are his independence from any higher authority and his control of a ‘private army’, which responds to him personally. A warlord who accepts subordination to another warlord becomes, in this definition, a vassal or a client warlord. Less essential, but still important characteristics are that his power is overwhelmingly based on military strength and/or charisma and that he lacks full ‘legitimacy’ among the civilian population of the area that he controls.

Within this definition, we might identify several types of warlords. A more sophisticated type of warlord may develop some form of partial legitimacy and transform his dominion into a ‘proto-state’, that is a structure featuring some sort of civilian administration and providing at least some services, such as education, policing, electricity and other supplies, public transport, etc. The least sophisticated warlords, especially in remote and isolated areas, may never go beyond purely military organisation, living off the region they control and providing the local inhabitants with little in exchange, except possibly for some security from other warlords and bandits. Whatever legitimacy he might have, therefore, will always be precarious at best. Others may develop what have been called “political complexes”, which could be described as structures, which, beyond the purely military aspect, include economic and political interests.⁵ Indeed, the main issue in the debate on warlordism in Afghanistan is whether the warlords are susceptible to developing into a

² W. Reno, *Warlord politics and African states*, Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 2-3; and also his more recent ‘The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States’, *Development and Change*, 33:5 (November 2002), p. 852. Reno’s definition of warlordism has however been criticised in some quarters for being too wide. See Marc Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, review of *Warlord Politics and African States* by William Reno, *Politique Africaine*, 73 (March 1999).

³ John MacKinlay, ‘Defining warlords’, *International Peacekeeping* 7:1 (2000), p 49.

⁴ My approach is roughly, although not entirely, consistent with C. Tilly’s original approach, as stated in ‘War making and state making as organized crime’, in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Theda Skocpol (ed.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

⁵ M. Duffield, ‘Social Reconstruction and radicalisation of development’, *Development and Change*, 33:5 (November 2002), p. 1061, uses this expression with a somewhat different, but not incompatible meaning.

more benign type of ruler, maybe within the context of an embryonic state, playing the role of ‘regional leader’ or ‘vassal’ of a central ruler. A degree of legitimacy would in this case derive from the recognition coming from the central government. Eventually, the warlords would be completely absorbed into the national feudal structure and cease to be considered warlords altogether.

In this model, following the collapse of a state all local and regional military leaders who do not put forward a credible claim to the control of the state as a whole, are warlords. A warlord whose claim to have seized control of the state, or to have created a new state of his own, gets wide acceptance, ceases to be a warlord and becomes a prince, or a president. By contrast, in a weak, recently established and unstable polity, even the most advanced type of organisation that the warlord can develop (that is, a proto-state) has only limited resources available and they have to be devoted to military expenditures, due to the competition of warlords among themselves. Therefore little is left for strengthening the warlord’s legitimacy as a ruler through what I would call ‘public relations’ expenditures, such as the provision of services to the civilian population, the support of the arts, etcetera. At this stage, it does not matter yet whether the warlord is sensitive or politically wise enough to understand that in the long run his legitimacy will not depend only on his military strength. He first has to ensure his own survival and that of his new polity.

It is exactly on the possibility of this transition from warlord to politician that this paper will focus. The purpose is to show how the originally relatively undifferentiated mass of the warlords progressively saw the emergence of some players distinguished by greater political skills and intelligence, although not necessarily superior moral qualities, and how some of these warlords made significant efforts to build political structures alongside military ones as soon as they had the opportunity to do so. In other words, I believe that the often agreed upon statement that “Afghan warlords were not proto-state builders driven by an ideological project” is not entirely satisfying, for two reasons.⁶ The first is that ideology is not necessarily a feature of proto-state builders, as European history demonstrates. The second is that not all the Afghan warlords were, or are, completely indifferent to ideology. The ways in which ideology can play a role in influencing the conduct of a warlord are more complex than that of a direct, personal and total commitment to some form of transcendent belief, as I will try to show later. The ability of these ‘enlightened’ warlords to establish some form of legitimacy is a matter of everyday debate in and around Afghanistan, but it is useful to discuss their potential.

The issue of “beneficiaries of war economies” who could “resist central interference and control” is often pointed to as key in recent analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan.⁷ Certainly, some economic interests that grew during the war, such as the opium trade to name but one, have already shown how resilient they can be. However, it is significant that the more warlords became involved in the narcotics trade, the more peaceful they became. I found little proof of allegations that warlords, at least in Afghanistan, see war as a tool to enrich themselves.⁸ I believe that these warlords are more akin to politicians than to businessmen, in that what they are looking for is power rather than money as an end in itself. In a context like the Afghan one, social status derives from the control of security rather than of money. There is, of course, an economic foundation of warlord power, which is essentially depredation, but warlords do not compete with each other primarily in terms of their efficiency in extracting resources. The structures of their polities are too primitive to allow much manoeuvre – the warlords use what they can find. Therefore, focusing on war-making as a form of accumulation would not be very productive in terms of analysis. Unless warlords start to develop

⁶ Most recently, C. Cramer & J. Goodhand, ‘Try again, fail again, fail better? War, the state and the ‘post-conflict’ challenge in Afghanistan’, *Development and Change*, 33:5 (2002), p. 896.

⁷ Cramer & Goodhand (2002), p. 889.

⁸ In this regard, I would agree with R. Marchal’s and C. Messiant’s critique of P. Collier and others. See ‘De l’avidité des rebelles’, *Critique Internationale*, 16 (2002), pp. 58-69.

state structures, their ability to have a positive impact on economic development is necessarily limited.

On the other hand, after 1992, Afghanistan's structures, which could be exploited to develop proto-state features, were widely available for warlords to use. The bureaucratic structures of the Afghan state survived to some extent. Throughout 1992-2001 many central and local bureaucrats remained in their place, despite not being paid.⁹ They did not do much work (at least not in their offices), but would have been available to whoever wanted to employ (and pay) them. Moreover, some party structures also survived, at least in the form of educated and trained officials bound in groups that were used to working together. The warlords adopted different approaches to using these available human resources and had varying degrees of success in implementing their choices.

Warlords and civil society: two opposite poles?

Despite their lack of legitimacy and popularity, it would be a mistake to isolate warlords from the general pattern of Afghan society and present them as rogue military leaders clearly distinguishable from a civil society that supposedly despises them. According to UN estimates, the warlords' armies numbered 750,000 men after the fall of the *Taleban*, of which perhaps a third were full-time soldiers, the remainder being part-time militiamen. As in some cases more than one man may be provided by a single household, it could be estimated that at least 500,000 Afghan households have something directly at stake in the warlords' armies. However, even this simple statement does not do justice to the complex system of intertwined interests and relationships. As Michael S. Drake pointed out in a recent book,¹⁰ the importance of patron-client relationships in the creation of personal armies should never be underestimated. Even if the economic side of warlordism is very important, the "precarious benefits" drawn by sectors of the population "from being bound in exploitative and coercive relationships" with the warlords are not their most important or durable link with society.¹¹ The deep roots of warlordism in Afghan society are first and foremost explained by the strong demand for security by the population, especially in the villages.¹² A look at the origins of the current warlord system in Afghanistan makes this point easier to understand.¹³

The first village-based armed groups appeared in 1978-1979, as an armed insurrection against the newly established leftist regime spread around the countryside. At the same time, the Islamist parties were infiltrating armed guerrilla units from Pakistan, while the decline in the capacity of the government to police the countryside led to the spread of banditry. Weapons began to be imported from Pakistan, while others were trickling down to the village level due to army/police losses and desertions. The trickle became a flood when in 1980 the US and a number of other countries began to supply huge quantities of weapons to the opposition parties based in Pakistan. Weapons became a political currency in the Afghan context, as parties were trying to buy influence through the supply of arms and ammunition. However, it is important to stress that a driving factor leading to the arming of Afghan society was internal demand. Only a small part of such demand was primarily driven by the desire to fight the leftist government and the occupying Soviet forces. More important when trying to explain the exceptional spread of firearms across the country is the villagers' desire to ensure their own protection. Demand for protection increased exponentially as a number of

⁹ Personal communication from Andrew Wilder, May/June 2003. See also AREU/World Bank Joint Study, *Assessing Sub-National Administration in Afghanistan*, Kabul, 2003.

¹⁰ Michael S. Drake, *Problems of Military Power*, London: Frank Cass, 2001.

¹¹ Cramer & Goodhand (2002), p. 891.

¹² B. Glatzer makes a similar point in 'Selbstzerstörung eines Staates. Afghanistans Warlords – Kriegstreiber und Stifter örtlichen Friedens', *der überblick*, 2 (1995)

¹³ The following paragraphs are based on my previous research on the 1978-1992 period. See A. Giustozzi, *War, politics and society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000; and 'La resistenza afghana: rivolta tradizionalista e movimenti politici moderni', *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (1991).

villages established their own militias, and a variety of armed groups, ranging from anti-government guerrillas to bandits, started roaming the countryside. Soon most villages felt the need to establish an armed group to guard themselves from strangers or even from armed neighbours who might try to steal land or cattle.

The matching of the demand for protection and the desire to expand political influence in the countryside led, over time, to the arming of the Afghan countryside through the establishment of a system of patronage between the regional leaders of the anti-communist resistance and the local population. Because the opposition parties had weak structures and few trained militants and given the difficult communications, the local commanders of the resistance had a high degree of autonomy, which was only strengthened by their ability to switch between parties in the attempt to gain leverage and increased supplies. The system was quite successful in rapidly bringing the armed resistance against the government and the Soviet Army to every corner of the country. Because of the rugged geography and the widespread character of the opposition, the government found it very difficult to re-establish its administrative structures and hence its influence over the countryside. By 1987, it had opted to fight the opposition groups with their own techniques and accelerated its investment of resources in the formation of rural militias that were often difficult to distinguish from those of the anticomunist resistance. More often than not, in fact, these militias were recruited from the ranks of the opposition. Like the opposition parties, the government was successful at expanding its influence in the countryside through these militias, but found it difficult to control them. The government first courted the smaller and least powerful armed groups, then, as the network of militias grew thicker, it increasingly targeted large formations. The imperative of weakening the armed opposition was so strong that in 1986-1989 the government restructured its whole military apparatus by upgrading a number of militia units to the status of regular army units and by giving more autonomy to the regional military commanders. Especially in Northern Afghanistan, former militia commanders and regional commanders were one and the same thing. The result, for example, was that General Dostum, formerly in charge of a militia unit, had control not only of his newly established 53rd Infantry Division but also of all military, police and security units within his area of responsibility.

Thus even before the collapse of the Afghan central state in 1992, military commanders on both sides were increasing their power at the expense of both government and opposition. The evolution (or involution?) of both the Afghan state and the opposition organisations towards a form of neo-feudalism highlights how such a pattern was rooted in the realities of an Afghan society that was reacting to the weakness of the state. A rugged geography and bad road links only compounded the situation. Following the removal from power of President Najibullah in 1992, what was left of a regular army disintegrated in a matter of months, if not weeks, while the Afghan air force broke down into a number of tiny air forces controlled by different groups. As a result, the power of local commanders further increased at the expense of that of their political patrons. Moreover, some commanders of the Afghan army set up their own private armies. The age of the warlords had finally begun, after a long preparation.

The model structure of warlordism

Thousands of small political and military actors on the Afghan scene could be described as warlords by the mid-1990s.¹⁴ However, only a few of them rose to prominence, succeeding in co-opting or forcing other, less powerful warlords into their own structure in a subordinate position. Through a

¹⁴ Unless otherwise stated, the following paragraphs are based on a reinterpretation of available literature and press reports. See, in particular: O. Roy, *Islam and resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; G. Dorronsoro, ‘Afghanistan: des réseaux de solidarité aux espaces régionaux’, in J. Jean and C. Rufin (eds.), *Économie des guerres civiles*, Paris: Hachette, 1996; G. Dorronsoro, *La révolution Afghane*, Paris: Karthala, 2000; and B. Rubin, *The fragmentation of Afghanistan*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.

network of client warlords and vassals, the big warlord could control vast regions (see map). It is important to point out that within these regions by no means all sections of the population, or even all local rulers and warlords, were necessarily allied to the dominant warlord. They would, however, either be subjected to his domination or forced to lie low. These big regional warlords owed their success to a number of factors, among which direct links to neighbouring states certainly played a key role. Their charisma as military commanders and their ability to wield alliances should doubtless be included among the other skills that turned out to be crucial in determining who emerged as a ruler in the different regions of Afghanistan. The direct control over a pool of disciplined and trained troops, possibly inherited from the extinct regular Afghan army, was also of major importance. By the mid-1990s, the typical structure of a warlord polity featured one of these big warlords at the top, capable of controlling several provinces. Below him, often in uneasy alliances, which sometimes erupted in open conflict, were usually a number of client warlords, each in control of tens or hundreds of villages. Each one of these, in turn, united under his leadership a large number of armed bands or village militias, mostly counting just a few tens of armed men.

These warlord armies, proto-states or ‘emerging political complexes’ were financed in a variety of ways. In some cases, of course, external help played an important role, but all the major warlords tried their best to develop their own sources of revenue. When available, customs provided a rich and relatively uncontroversial source, as their impact on the civilian population was only indirect. However, a few border posts in Afghanistan produced much income in taxes, notably on the road linking Herat to Iran in the West, at Spin Boldak and Torkham along the Pakistani border and at Hayratan on the Uzbek border. Elsewhere, warlords had to rely mainly on local taxation to fill their coffers. This was mostly levied on the roads, both because this was found to be the easiest way and because this option would shift much of the burden onto travellers from other regions. By 2002 it was estimated that tax collection (or extortion) in the villages amounted to around US\$40 million in the whole of Afghanistan, as opposed to between US\$500m. and US\$600m. collected in custom revenues.¹⁵ At that time road taxes were playing a much more modest role than earlier, but custom revenues had been boosted by the recovery of trade activities. In some regions smuggling, especially of opium, also provided a useful contribution. This was the case of Helmand Province in the south, but poppy fields also existed in other areas of the South, East, North and North-East.¹⁶ By 2003, UN agencies reported that poppy fields were appearing in the North-west too. The turnover of the poppy industry was estimated at US\$1.2 billion in 2002, although only part of this amount would be pocketed by the warlords.¹⁷

The direct control over economic activities was limited because of the dire state of the Afghan economy, although some warlords are known to have taken possession of some factories and one of them, the late commander Massud, controlled the gem mines of North-eastern Afghanistan. The ability of warlords to exercise a very strong influence on most aspects of life in the areas under their control, such as, for example, through their virtual control over the judiciary, was inevitably another source of economic benefit, forcing local businessmen and traders to conform to their wishes.

Given the absence of any formal and permanent agreement between them and the lack of any supervisory entity, inevitably the relations between the big warlords were quite conflictual. Two main types of conflict can be identified: those aimed at gaining territory from another warlord, including eventually the complete destruction of his polity, and those that can be characterised as competition for the seizure of central state power, i.e. in Kabul. While it may appear odd that the capital of a collapsed state could be the object of much desire, everybody has always been aware that whoever is in control of Kabul will be better positioned to claim international recognition and

¹⁵ Based on information provided by Eckart Schiewek (UNAMA), May 2003.

¹⁶ Even during the 1979-1992 war, the Afghan *mujahidin* found it difficult to raise much in terms of direct taxation. See Dorronsoro (1996).

¹⁷ *Eurasianet*, 6 June 2003.

receive a greater share of power in the event of a settlement. Conflicts aimed at territorial aggrandisement were more widespread and involved virtually all warlords, although not necessarily in the same measure. The need to increase revenue and the opportunity to maintain cohesion among one's own ranks appear to have been major causes of this type of conflict. Fighting for Kabul, on the other hand, did not interest every warlord, in part for geographical reasons. Ismail Khan, for example, who ruled (and rules) over most of Western Afghanistan, never showed much interest in what was going on in the capital. On the other hand, even those warlords who did take part in the fight over Kabul did not necessarily do it for the same reason. While Massud, for example, considered controlling the capital their main objective, for Rashid Dostum fighting for Kabul was only a means of forcing Massud to accept a settlement which recognised his control over Northern Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the continuous conflicts between warlords only had a modest impact on their relative strength, until, of course, the *Taleban* stormed onto the scene. A balance of forces had developed by the mid-1990s, in which the strength of the more resourceful warlords was generally offset by alliances among less powerful ones. The difficult communication and logistics also made it difficult for any of the warring parties to put together a force large enough to achieve decisive victories against any enemy.

From warlord to politician: four different types

What type of warlord is more likely to make the successful transition from violent to (relatively) peaceful competition? If in order to lead his troops a warlord needs organisational skills, the ability to enforce discipline and at least some charisma, political success requires additional qualities. Among them, the ability to establish alliances and an understanding of the international system, which is key to establish durable links with foreign sources of support. A warlord might benefit in this regard from the advice of people in possession of a wider vision and experience than his own, like intellectuals, businessmen, etcetera. Another characteristic that any warlord willing to upgrade his status would need is the ability to take care of his own image and to present it in the best possible light, which often in the modern world translates into being able to deal with the press and other mass media. In other words, the warlord would need a good 'public relations' department, and generally be able to manipulate ideology, religion and culture as legitimising tools for his own power. Here again the advice of intellectuals and other people used to dealing with foreigners and the press would probably help. This task would also be made easier if the warlord could attract or create a credible political organisation to support his ambitions. Ultimately, however, the ability to command a sizeable and recognisable constituency would still represent a major incentive for any interlocutor to take seriously the claim of a warlord to a share of political power.

At the price of some simplification, we can identify some individual military leaders as representative of four main types of warlords in Afghanistan, ranging from a former military officer to a tribal leader, an Islamist militant and a conservative Muslim who tried to recreate an Islamic emirate.

***The military man: Rashid Dostum*¹⁸**

Although Dostum has often been criticised and even mocked because of his limited formal education, which does not extend beyond a few years of primary school, he did show some political skills, probably helped by the advice of other former members of *Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq* (People's Democratic Party), with whom he surrounded himself. Nevertheless, his ability to establish stable relations with neighbouring countries cannot be described as particularly

¹⁸ This section is mostly based on A. Giustozzi, 'The demodernisation of an army: northern Afghanistan 1992-2003', forthcoming.

impressive. His links to Iran were never as fruitful as those of his allies of *Hizb-i Wahdat* (Unity Party) or of his rivals of *Jamiat-i Islami* (Islamic Society). This could be explained in part by the fact that the leadership of the other two parties are Persian-speaking, while the mother tongue of Dostum and of most of the leadership of his party, *Junbesh* (National Movement), is Uzbek. His secularism might also have not been too appealing to the Iranians. More likely, the Iranians privileged *Jamiat-i Islami* at a crucial time because they identified in it the most solid group, sacrificing even their relationship with *Hizb-i Wahdat*. Significantly, Russia too in the end opted for *Jamiat-i Islami* and in particular for the *Shura-i Nezar* faction as its privileged ally in Afghanistan, which on the surface might look more surprising since Dostum and many of his associates had been supporters of the communist regime and certainly must have maintained links with the Russian state. However, neither Dostum nor any of the generals working with him had ever been at the top of the Afghan communist military hierarchy, or had been part of the general staff, contrary to many Tajik generals that in 1992 realigned themselves with *Jamiat-i Islami*, bringing with them their Russian contacts. In reality, geopolitical considerations would have favoured *Jamiat* in the eyes of the Russians anyway, due to the fact that this party controlled the regions bordering Tajikistan, where Russian influence and presence are very strong.

What is surprising is the inability of Dostum to secure a stable and reliable alliance with Uzbekistan, considering that, apart from the ethno-linguistic links, that country was clearly always interested in maintaining some stability south of its border and that Dostum had proved his ability to deliver it. Given its own economic difficulties, Uzbekistan could not have provided the same amount of help as Iran or Russia. However, the conflict between Dostum and Abdul Malik, which resulted in a weakened ability of *Junbesh* to maintain control of Northern Afghanistan, caused the Uzbek leadership to lose faith in Dostum and abandon him to his fate. Significantly, when in 1998 Dostum was fleeing the successful offensive of the *Taleban*, he was denied asylum in Uzbekistan and was only allowed through in order to reach another country (Turkey). Later, as we have seen, Uzbekistan and Dostum became allies once again at the end of 2001, when not only did Uzbekistan start to supply Dostum's men with arms and ammunition, but also apparently sent their own troops to fight alongside *Junbesh*. After the fall of the *Taleban*, Dostum's bodyguard was formed by soldiers from the Uzbek army.

Dostum's real weakness, however, always lay in his 'public relations'. Although it is still open to debate to what extent he was directly engaged in carrying out atrocities against the civilian population,¹⁹ he never did much to hide the extreme means he employed to maintain discipline amongst his troops. It is unlikely that his ruthlessness in enforcing discipline was seen in negative terms by the civilian population of the areas under his control, who were more likely to be worried about the behaviour of his troops when he was not as keen on maintaining order. However, in terms of his acceptability as a political partner in Afghanistan as a whole, his readiness to shed blood and, most importantly, his less than modest efforts at hiding such readiness, has clearly been more of an obstacle. Having realised to what extent his reputation was going to be a shortcoming, in 2002 he symbolically exchanged his military dress for a suit, organised a second congress of *Junbesh* and set out to become a leading player in the Afghan political game. However, Dostum remains today deeply unpopular among the non-Uzbek sections of the Afghan intelligentsia and, perhaps as important, among the international community of journalists, NGO activists, human rights advocates and officials of international organisations.

On the other hand, Dostum did better in his attempts to establish *Junbesh* as a credible political party after 2001. His past in the *Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq* clearly helped in this regard, as did the presence of many other former members of that party in *Junbesh*. It is important to point out that Dostum's membership of the *Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq* had not been a matter of mere

¹⁹ The evidence against him are gathered by Andrew Bushell, 'Uzbek warlord remains enigma to outside world', *The Washington Times*, 23 February 2002

opportunism, as it had been for many other military officers. He had joined the party in his youth, when he was still a factory worker. During the *Loya Jirgah* of June 2002, the party emerged as the most disciplined. The only other party worth the name, *Jamiat-i Islami*, is by contrast now split into three different wings. Dostum appears to have commanded, at least initially, large support among the Afghan Uzbek intelligentsia, which is in itself not very strong numerically, due to the long-standing exclusion of Uzbeks from higher education, but which represents a key to gathering the support of the Uzbek ‘man in the street’. Although Dostum’s continuing reliance on armed strength to maintain his position in the end alienated many educated Uzbeks, he continued to show an ability to position himself as a reference point for important social groups well into 2002-2003. By pressing for the appointment of ministers such as Nur Mohammad Qarqin,²⁰ or favouring the elevation of Nematullah Shahrani to vice-president,²¹ he succeeded in expanding his influence, despite continuing criticism for the unruliness of some of his troops.

The warriors: Rasul Pahlawan and Padsha Khan

Dostum’s performance in transforming himself into a credible politician looks quite mediocre. By the standards of the average Afghan warlord, however, his achievements appear rather more remarkable. His old rival within *Junbesh* in 1992-1997, Rasul Pahlawan, who no doubt saw himself as progressively expanding his own power and influence and possibly one day becoming a leading warlord in his own right, and nobody’s client, certainly lagged behind him in terms of political skills and wisdom. An uneducated man and one with little sympathy for intellectuals, Rasul owed his power entirely to his charisma as a military leader.²² His effectiveness on the battlefield gave rise to numerous stories about how his enemies used to flee or surrender just as they heard that Rasul was marching against them. Indeed, several hostile commanders in his stronghold of Faryab surrendered to him during the 1990s. Others he had assassinated. He was also able to command the loyalty of men through the traditional patterns of influence. For example, he had a significant influence in Ghor province, due to his links with a popular Pir of that region. In strictly political terms, however, Rasul was no match for Dostum. His own personal involvement in the mistreatment of civilians, ranging from rape to murder, was certainly no great advertisement, but the fact that on at least one occasion he had a rival assassinated after having invited him for negotiations must have been particularly worrying for his potential allies.²³ Moreover, his attempts to establish direct links with external powers proved quite clumsy and appear to have been spotted either by Dostum’s intelligence or more likely by that of Dostum’s patrons. His limitations in building up political alliances repeatedly frustrated his efforts to expand his area of influence. Apart from his own fief of Faryab province, Rasul fought for the control of the neighbouring provinces of Ghor and Baghdis, but never succeeded in consolidating his military gains, nor in expanding beyond the bordering districts.

Rasul Pahlawan did not survive long enough to be faced with the problem of preparing himself for a post-war environment, since he was assassinated in 1996, possibly following the discovery of his plot to stage a coup against Dostum. However, many other Afghan warlords, mostly local ones, are ill at ease with the complexities of metropolitan politics. Nevertheless, they will have to decide which way to go in post-civil war Afghanistan. Few of those, if any, will be interested in a slice of power at the centre, but some of them have been competing for local positions of power during 2002. The example of Padsha Khan Zadran is quite illustrative.²⁴ A leader of the Zadran tribe based

²⁰ Nur Mohammad Qarqin enjoys a significant influence among Afghanistan’s Turkmens.

²¹ Formerly aligned with conservative politician Rasul Sayyaf, Nehmatullah Sharani might represent a bridge between Dostum and conservative Uzbeks of north-eastern Afghanistan.

²² This paragraph is based on an interview with H. Sorkhabi, October 2002.

²³ The commander of *Jamiat-i Islami* for Almar district, Hafiz Artab, was killed in October 1992 in Maimana while negotiating with Rasul his rallying to *Junbesh*.

²⁴ This paragraph is based on press reports and interviews with UNAMA political officers, January, April and May 2003.

in the Khost major district, Padsha Khan did not play a major role in the war against the Soviet Army and the Afghan communists, but emerged as a powerful regional warlord at the time of the US war against the *Taleban*, due to plentiful American support. Lacking in wider political experience, as well as in good advice from people with knowledge of Kabul politics, Padsha Khan made several mistakes in his attempt to secure the position of governor of Paktya province from the Karzai administration. After being initially granted the position, he was easily tricked into a trap by some local commanders affiliated to the Minister of Defence, Marshal Fahim. After having been ambushed and having lost several men, Padsha Khan took a radical opposition stance against the whole government, which led to several more clashes. The move cost him American support and destroyed any chance of ever re-gaining that governorship. As he persisted down his road of violent confrontation with the government, he was increasingly locked into a conflict that he could ill afford, given the cut in American assistance. As a result, his armed force, once maybe 3,000 strong, rapidly waned, as some of his men went over to the government, lured by the promise of material gain, and others simply went back to their villages. Soon, Padsha Khan even lost control of his own fiefdom in Khost. As a demonstration of the extent to which he was out of tune with the emerging reality of his own region, he was replaced by a sociology professor sent by Kabul, who raised money from local businessmen tired of lawlessness. With this new army, he seized control of customs, Padsha Khan's main remaining source of revenue.

The militants: Ahmad Shah Massud and his successors²⁵

The one Afghan warlord who was rarely dubbed as such was Ahmad Shah Massud, a popular romantic hero even in some quarters in western countries, especially France. A member of *Jamiat-i Islami*, a moderate Islamist party with a clerical background, Massud and his fellow commanders derived much legitimacy, especially in the beginning, from the support of a network of mullahs and *ulema*. This, to some observers, was enough to grant him a higher status than that of warlord, although his own personal position grew increasingly solid due to his own charisma, earned through his battlefield performance. His determination to "get to Kabul first" and re-establish the Afghan state, which may have had some ideological foundations, also makes him stand out from the majority of his fellow warlords, although *Jamiat*'s claim to the Afghan state lost its credibility as Kabul was rapidly transformed into a battleground. Finally, his adoption (whenever possible) of meritocratic methods in the selection of his field commanders certainly makes him look more 'modern' than the average warlord. In particular, when he embarked upon the creation of a central strike force of a few thousand men, he made sure that the selection of his commanders rested exclusively on his own judgement. However, if we stick to the definition of warlord that I outlined at the beginning of this paper, we see Massud in a different light - the structure behind Massud and other military leaders of *Jamiat* in North-eastern Afghanistan does resemble that of the other warlords.

Massud's commanders still had their own areas of influence and could not really be compared to the officers of a regular army. He was unable to eliminate this 'semi-feudal' feature even after taking over several units of the former communist army and intelligence service in 1992. While the numerical strength of his central force was boosted to an unprecedented 20,000 men, the structure changed little and former regular army units witnessed a degrading of their command structure. As late as 1994, when he was fighting on three fronts against *Junbesh*, *Hizb-i Wahdat* and *Hizb-i Islami*, his 'army' was still mostly only nominally organised in units such as battalions, regiments and divisions. Such units were only names attributed to pre-existing *mujahidin* groups, without a real centralised organisation.²⁶ It might have been, in part, this residual 'feudal' character, even of Massud's central force, that caused his conduct on the battlefield to be mostly very cautious.

²⁵ This section is based on Giustozzi (1991) and available literature, most notably Dorronsono (2000), as well as on a series of interviews carried out in 2002 and 2003.

²⁶ T.A. Davis, 'Massoud builds Afghan power base with national army', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 20:14 (October 2, 1993); Anthony Davis, 'The Battleground of Northern Afghanistan', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 6:7 (July 1994).

Massud was often accused of missing strategic opportunities, especially at the time of the Soviet withdrawal and afterwards. The fact is, however, that he was not in a position to afford heavy casualties in his small ‘army’, since although he had the power to decide who could be admitted into it, he did not have the authority to keep his men there.

The next component of Massud’s military system was the *Shura-i Nazar*, a coordinating council of small and medium warlords of North-eastern Afghanistan. In this case the structure was much looser than that of the central force, being in fact weaker than both Ismail Khan’s and Dostum’s systems. Despite its loose character, some *Jamiat* commanders of the North-east still refused to join it, as in the case of Basir Khalid, who controlled a third of Badakhshan province and resented Massud’s growing power.

Most importantly, as his own personal power grew, Massud himself increasingly refused to be subjected to party discipline. As the captor of Kabul, he became the strongman within the *mujahidin* governments that were formed in Kabul starting from 1992. Soon the rivalry with the political leadership of *Jamiat-i Islami* became increasingly explicit, especially after *Jamiat*’s leader, Burhauddin Rabbani, became president and settled in Kabul. The new generation of young military leaders, which formed under the protective wing of Massud, supported his bid to replace the old generation of politicians, often accused of corruption. The influx of former members of left-wing parties and of former officers of the communist armed forces, who joined *Jamiat* because of common Tajik ethnic background, contributed to strengthening Massud’s faction within *Jamiat* and to diluting its ideological Islamism, which remained instead the banner of Rabbani and his supporters. His faction within *Jamiat* became known as the *Panjsheris* (from the name of Massud’s base area) or *Shura-i Nezar*, from the name of the coordinating council that he had created.

Here we see one of the main weaknesses of *Jamiat* in general and of Massud in particular, that is the lack of a reliable party organisation and shared ideology. The clerical network, while very resilient, did not guarantee an acceptable degree of efficiency and flexibility, a fact that must at least in part have caused the rift between the old generation of party leaders with a clerical background themselves, and the younger members of the intelligentsia who resented the often not very professional and inflexible approach of the *ulema* to political issues.

During the 1990s the split never became too explicit, despite at least one armed clash between supporters of the two factions being reported. The military situation remained difficult for *Jamiat*, which defeated a number of challenges from Dostum, Hekmatyar and *Hizb-i Wahdat*, only to be faced with the threat of the *Taleban*, who in 1996 succeeded in forcing Massud out of the capital. It was hardly the time to squabble with the old party leaders, especially since Rabbani’s own main base of support, Badakhshan, was key to the survival of Massud himself. However, the situation changed with Massud’s assassination in September 2001 and with the military defeat of the *Taleban*. No longer restrained by Massud, who always tried to avoid breaking up completely with Rabbani, and emboldened by their re-occupation of Kabul as the *Taleban* fled, the *Panjsheris* imposed their power during the negotiations in Berlin, which led to the formation of the interim government. No ‘old politician’ of *Jamiat* received a post, while three *Panjsheris* were given top positions, such as the ministries of defence, foreign affairs and interior. Significantly, the ministry of defence went to General Fahim, who had already been chosen as military leader after Massud’s death. Even after having grabbed the key positions in government, the *Panjsheris* hardly displayed much sense of restraint or balance. They began staffing the bureaucracy, the police and the new army in the process of being created with their own men, upsetting all the other parties and alienating potential future support. Overconfidence in their own military strength led them to rely exclusively on that and to neglect political alliances.

When he was the strongman in Kabul in the mid-1990s, Massud demonstrated that his skills as a political leader were not matched by his capabilities as a military commander. The unruly behaviour of his troops might have been difficult for him to prevent, but he did order his troops to fire their cannons on inhabited areas of Kabul, causing a long-standing hostility against *Jamiat* among many Kabulis. On another occasion, he unleashed his anti-Shia allies of *Ittehad-i Islami* against the areas of the capital inhabited by Hazara Shias, with much loss of life. This was in revenge against *Hizb-i Wahdat*, a party rooted among the Hazara community, which had switched over to the anti-Massud alliance in January 1994. This move made a bitter enemy of *Hizb-i Wahdat*, a party that might otherwise have been brought back to Massud's side with some concessions.

Nevertheless, of all the Afghan warlords, Massud excelled in the art of 'public relations', especially towards the international press and public opinion, but until 1992 among Afghans too. Others had done well, such as Amin Wardak of Wardak province or Abdul Haq of Nangrahar, but they had little else to rely on apart from public relations in order to play a major role in Afghanistan as a whole. Massud, by contrast, could back up his friendliness and charm with a strong armed force and a wide network of alliances. Much of that effectiveness in public relations survived his death and not surprisingly a member of his faction, Abdullah, was appointed foreign minister in the interim government of Hamid Karzai. As a result, *Jamiat* made many friends, especially in the academic community concerned with Afghanistan, and traditionally tended to get a good press and a positive assessment by scholars.²⁷ During 2002 *Jamiat*'s success in doing so diminished somewhat, as the absence of Massud's charisma began to be felt. Mohammed Fahim, appointed his successor, is not charming at all and is on the receiving end of growing criticism from the international press. While military strength and geography were key to *Jamiat*'s occupation of Kabul and its ministries at the end of 2001, other, more political qualities will in the long term determine the fate of *Jamiat-i Islami* and of the factions of which it is composed.

The traditional ruler: Ismail Khan²⁸

Ismail Khan, a commander of *Jamiat-i Islami*, who by the early 1980s controlled most of western Afghanistan, soon started showing signs of being independently minded. Despite efforts by party stalwarts, such as the Afzali brothers and the grass-roots militants who were active mainly in the refugee camps beyond the Iranian border, to pressure Ismail Khan into re-aligning himself with the leadership of *Jamiat* in exile, his distance from it only grew with time. After the fall of the communist regime in 1992, Ismail Khan became a virtually independent leader of western Afghanistan and maintained a de-facto independence from the new government in Kabul, despite the fact that the latter was dominated by his own party, *Jamiat-i Islami*. His personal rivalry with *Jamiat*'s other leading commander, the late Ahmad Shah Massud, only compounded this difficult relationship. Among other things, Ismail Khan could rely on substantial revenue from the customs posts along the Iranian border.

A large majority of the local commanders responded to him and nobody else. Ismail, however, faced problems similar to those met by Dostum in dealing with his own commanders, who controlled smaller portions of western Afghanistan. Even if he tried to develop a centralised army, including resorting to conscription, which made him unpopular among the inhabitants, he was only able to enforce his direct rule on the central parts of Herat province, with outlying areas subjected to the control of allied warlords. However, the collapse of what was effectively his small emirate in 1996 at the hands of the *Taleban* was as swift as that of Dostum's, which it preceded by a couple of years. Following a military defeat in Southern Afghanistan and the alleged bribery of some of his

²⁷ Mainly O. Roy, whose book published in 1985 (Roy, 1986) familiarised the public with *Jamiat-i Islami* and commander Massud, first in France and then in the English-speaking world after it was translated.

²⁸ This section is based on available press reports and literature, including Rubin (1995), Roy (1986) and M. Griffin, *Reaping the whirlwind*, 2nd edition, London: Pluto Press, 2003, supplemented by interviews carried out between October 2002 and June 2003.

commanders, in a few days his once powerful emirate had disappeared. He then made some attempts to start a guerrilla war against the *Taleban*, with little success, until he was captured by them and held prisoner for three years. After his escape, once again he became engaged in small-scale military activities against the *Taleban*, but until the start of the American bombing campaign he had not managed to build his force beyond the relatively modest strength of 3,000 men. In other words, he did not succeed in attracting the local warlords back to his side, except in Ghor province, where hostility to the *Taleban* was especially high and the difficult geography made guerrilla warfare easier. With the start of the bombings in 2001, everything changed. After Dostum took Mazar-i Sharif, events developed so rapidly that it did not take much fighting for Ismail Khan to retake Herat and the surrounding areas, while his armed forces swelled to many thousands. His can be seen as a further confirmation that warlord patronage systems can in their own way be quite resilient, once the right conditions are in place.

His ability in establishing himself as the patron (or, as he would rather say, “Amir”) of smaller warlords is shown by the fact that by the beginning of 2002 Ismail controlled Herat, Baghdis and parts of Ghor, Nimruz and Farah, relying on a number of warlords, some relatively big, such as Dr. Ibrahim and Fazul Karim in Ghor province, and others small, such as those sharing control of Farah province. However, Ismail’s influence suffered from his inflexibility towards former enemies. A Tajik, after his return to Herat at the end of 2001 his relationship with the Pashtun population of much of the surrounding countryside has been problematic. The realignment of Pashtun commanders with the *Taleban* in 1996 had been a key factor in his temporary demise. During 2002, there were complaints of ill treatment by many Pashtun villagers, who suffered revenge attacks by Tajiks for their earlier association with the *Taleban* regime. More importantly for the political future of Ismail Khan, he got locked in a confrontation with some Pashtun local commanders, such as Amanullah Khan in Shindand and Mohammad Kareem Khan in Ghurian. Given the links between the Pashtun tribes of Herat and those of Southern Afghanistan, such attacks contributed to the rapid deterioration of his relationship with Gul Agha Shirzai, the warlord in control of Kandahar. The hostility was also motivated by fears that Ismail Khan might have wanted to expand southward, as he already had tried to do before being defeated by the *Taleban*.

Ismail Khan, while not excelling at attracting external support, was not always an isolated warlord either. During the war against the Soviet Army, Ismail’s relations with Iran were not too friendly, as that country did not directly support him nor allow him to maintain bases in Iran. In part this was also already a consequence of Ismail’s unwillingness to tolerate independent commanders operating within what he considered his territory. The small pro-Iranian Shia groups operating along the Afghan-Iranian border were forced out of the scene by Ismail, a fact that certainly did not help to improve his relations with Teheran. After his defeat at the hands of the *Taleban* in 1996, however, both Iran and Ismail reconsidered their priorities. After his escape from a *Taleban* prison, Ismail Khan restarted his guerrilla operations from Iranian territory and with Iranian help. When, eventually, he recaptured Herat, the Iranians had decided that he could be their man in Afghanistan. Benefiting from the customs he levies at the border with Iran, where trade immediately started flourishing, and allegedly from the support of Iran, during 2002 he maintained possibly the largest warlord army in Afghanistan. Thanks to his resources, he could pay his troops a relatively good salary, which in turn allowed him to enforce standards of discipline higher than in most of the rest of the country.

Once again, however, his personal susceptibility landed him in trouble. Due mainly to his bad relations with the followers of the late commander Massud (the *Panjsheri* factions of *Jamiat*), he was excluded from the interim administration, although after his complaints his son received a ministerial post. Moreover, the new government seemed reluctant to recognise Ismail’s power over western Afghanistan and his appointment as governor was long delayed. A key feature of Ismail’s rule over Western Afghanistan was, however, his defiance of the central government. While

Dostum was ready to comply, at least formally, with requests coming from Kabul, Ismail often showed his defiance. Even after his appointment as governor, for example, he refused to recognise the appointment by the central government of local officials in the region he controlled. When, in December 2002, President Karzai ordered the warlords to choose between a position in the army or a position of political leadership, Ismail refused to comply (by then, he was governor of Herat as well as leader of his own militia). As of December 2002, he was also the only major warlord still refusing to allow the disarmament of his troops to be started, within the context of the general disarmament of the population.

After he recovered control of Western Afghanistan at the end of 2001, Ismail Khan developed all the characteristics and trappings of a traditional ruler, establishing a sort of court in Herat, from where he dispensed favours and gave orders. Even after his appointment as governor of Herat, he continued to be referred to as "Amir" and to claim control over the surrounding provinces of Western Afghanistan. His attitude towards the central government remained much more defiant than that of other warlords, even well into 2003. Contrary to some other warlords, he did not even pretend that he was respecting the superior authority of Kabul. Although he is still a member of *Jamiat-i Islami* and enjoys the support of the party militants in Western Afghanistan, he does not pretend to be a party politician, although towards the end of 2002 he showed signs of trying to build his own political organisation, separate from *Jamiat*. If he failed to build a credible political party, his position could be a lot weaker in a future Afghanistan, where regional power brokers might be able to play a role only by taking part in the political process. While he seems to understand the importance of having a good press, most of the time his efforts at this do not exceed a traditionally formal welcome to interviewers. His intolerance of other political organisations, even when they are obviously not much of a challenge to his power, and his relative neglect of how his own image is perceived beyond Western Afghanistan, reflect his weak sensitivity for 'public relations'.

Conclusion and perspectives

Once the big warlords are no longer free to use unrestrained violence to subjugate those sections of the population who do not maintain a client relationship with them, as happened during 2002 and the first half of 2003, their homogeneous area of control begins to break up. They tend to be subjected to a stricter scrutiny than their subordinate smaller warlords, whose behaviour represents less of a political issue both within and outside Afghanistan. There are several signs of this. Ismail Khan has been challenged in Western Afghanistan by a number of smaller Pashtun warlords and by some provincial governors who used to be his allies. In Northern Afghanistan, Dostum is being challenged by Mohammed Atta and several small groups, all of which now find it easier to recruit small warlords to their ranks. At the same time, several Uzbek and Turkmen warlords and notables of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan, once linked to *Jamiat-i Islami* or other *mujahidin* parties, are now edging towards Dostum's *Junbesh*. In the towns of Western, Northern and North-eastern Afghanistan, people appear tired of warlords of all sorts and are trying to establish their independence, sometimes forming new parties or revitalising old ones. However, it would be very premature to announce the end of the warlords. In the rural areas, their power remains real, despite their declining ability to control entire regions in a homogeneous way. The patron/client networks on which their power is based are still alive and well. Only the establishment of a reliable and neutral army capable of operating throughout the national territory would create the possibility of finally weakening the hold of the warlords over their followers, by reducing the demand for security among the population. However, such a development is going to take years and by no means can be taken for granted. In fact, some warlords have been trying to seize control of the new army since its formation.²⁹

²⁹ On this topic see A. Giustozzi, 'Re-Building the Afghan army, paper delivered at the symposium on State Reconstruction and International Engagement in Afghanistan', Bonn, 30 May – 1 June 2003, at

If we start from the assumption that, given Afghanistan as it is today, taking on the warlords as a whole is not a viable option, it makes sense to discuss the issue of which warlords are more likely to be recyclable in political or military roles in a pacified and at least relatively orderly Afghanistan. Most of the ‘vassals’ of the bigger warlords have already found their way into the provisional Afghan army,³⁰ which was formed in early 2002. They have been recognised as colonels and generals, often without any technical know-how, proper military training and not necessarily having shown great military skills. Their incorporation into the army was seen as the lesser evil for a country that first of all needs peace, although the troops of what is now known as the Afghan Military Force have often been involved in criminal activities and have contributed to undermining the security of the country. Their patrons, however, are unlikely to be satisfied with an appointment of that kind. In fact, since some of these ‘vassals’ have received grades as high as three- or four-star general, there is little room left in the military hierarchy to satisfy the ego of men used to absolute power. Unsurprisingly, therefore, such warlords have turned away from becoming part of the military hierarchy. Those who are formally members of the armed forces also occupy political positions: Rashid Dostum was appointed deputy minister of defence and Mohammed Fahim is minister of defence. Otherwise warlords have opted for the governorship of key provinces, such as Herat for Ismail Khan and Kandahar for Gul Agha Sherzai.

Determining the future potential of each one of the big warlords is made more complicated by the complex political games played at the centre. Seen from the point of view of the Afghan state, the ‘recycling’ of the warlords remains quite controversial. Gaining a place in the governance framework of a newly unified Afghanistan is not in itself a guarantee of the long-term political survival of any warlord, nor of the possibility that he may play a positive role of any kind. Given the lack of resources and structures, Hamid Karzai and his allies within the transitional government opted, in the short term, to create a ‘feudal’ state, coopting the warlords into a state structure with a variety of functions, ranging from military commander to minister. At the same time, it’s the transitional government’s medium and long-term plans are to try to weaken the power of the warlords using a wide range of tools. In December 2002, the government forbade the warlords from accumulating political and military positions, with the declared aim of de-politicising the army. If implemented, this would make it more difficult for the warlords to control their followers. In November 2002, the Karzai administration sacked a number of officials, mostly supporters of various warlords, to whom this was not only a warning, but also an attempt to hit the patron/client relationships that are at the heart of their power. There is nothing new in this policy. After all, this is what feudal states in Europe tried to do over the centuries. The degree of success will depend on the resources that the central state will have at its disposal in the future. Most importantly, the eventual consolidation of an Afghan state built on these premises requires considerable political skills and a unified centre, otherwise the warlords might succeed in manipulating different factions at the centre and prevent the progressive re-centralisation of the Afghan state in the medium and long term.

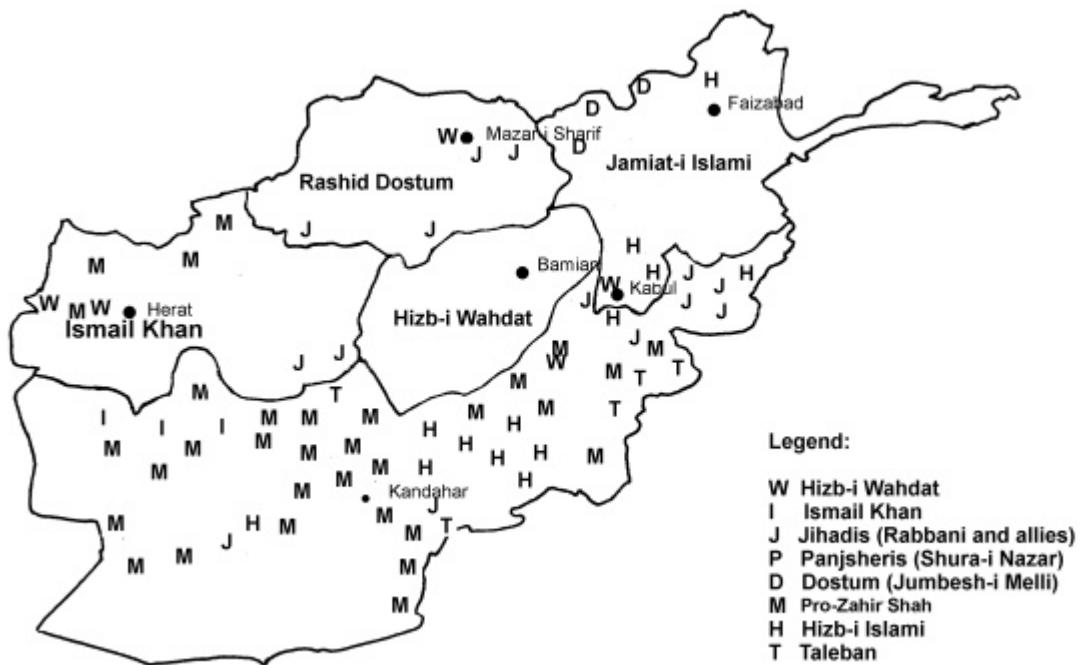
The interests of foreign powers contribute to complicate the picture further. For example, diplomatic and UN circles in Kabul confirm that General Dostum has been assiduously courting the favours of the US, with some success. On the other hand, Marshal Fahim is reckoned to maintain strict links with Russia and Iran. Together, all these factors have so far prevented the consolidation of a ‘feudal’ state in Afghanistan, as well of any other type of state. In terms of his relationship with the US, the UN and the moderates within the Karzai administration, Marshal Fahim could be said to have failed and Dostum to have ‘passed the exam’. But Fahim’s own resources, strengthened by outside support and by the weakness of his adversaries, keeps the

<http://www.crisisstates.com/News/afghanpapers.htm>, and A. Giustozzi, ‘Military reform in Afghanistan’, in BICC, *Afghanistan: assessing the progress of security sector reform*, Bonn, forthcoming.

³⁰ Not to be confused with the new army being trained from scratch by the US, French and British, to which I referred to in the previous paragraph.

confrontation between him and the ‘central state’ going. Over time, a line will increasingly be drawn between those warlords who succeeded in being integrated within the state structure on their own terms, maintaining their autonomous sources of power, and those who will by contrast be weakened by their inclusion in the state structure. In June 2003, Fahim stood out as the most successful warlord *vis-à-vis* the state, controlling the ministry of defence with almost complete autonomy. Other powerful warlords are still struggling to reach an accommodation with Kabul, which would not leave them powerless. This is the case of Ismail Khan and Rashid Dostum, who made concessions, but maintain substantial power bases. The clearest trend that is emerging is that warlords whose power is overwhelmingly based on tribal support, at the expense of political organisation (like Padsha Khan and Gul Agha Shirzai) are losing out and are either being marginalized or absorbed into the state structure in terms favourable to the Kabul government. Their autonomous power base is rapidly eroding, in contrast to those warlords who can rely for support on some form of political organisation , however primitive and patronage-based.

Map - The warlords' proto-states and the areas of influence of the political factions, late 2002



Glossary

- Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq:* People's Democratic Party, a Marxist party which ruled Afghanistan in 1978-1992.
- Hizb-i Islami:* Islami Party, a radical Islamist party with a story of hostility towards *Jamiat-i Islami*.
- Hizb-i Wahdat:* Unity Party, a ethnic-based party led by Hazara clergymen.
- Jamiat-i Islami:* Islamic Society, a moderate Islamist party which played a key role in the war.
- Junbesh-i Milli:* National Movement, a secularist party based in northern Afghanistan.
- Loya Jirga:* tribal gathering, assembly.
- Pir:* sufi leader.
- Shura-i Nezar:* Supervisory Council, a faction within *Jamiat-i Islami*, originally created by commander Massud.
- Ulema:* Islamic clergymen (doctors of the law).

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

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Research Objectives

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

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