

# **Factional politics and state re-building in Afghanistan**

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## *Outline*

Most of the analysis currently produced on Afghanistan views the Afghan predicament as an issue of state versus bad warlords. But is it correct to view the state as an impersonal actor, necessarily playing a positive role? The recent discussion of the new constitution highlights a number of issues: it is strictly tailored on the figure of the transitional President, Hamid Karzai. It could lead to the creation of an authoritarian state if Karzai turns out to be not as tame as many assume him to be, or if somebody else will replace him. Also, many Afghans belonging to ethnic minorities believe that the constitution suits an ethnic group in particular, the majority Pashtuns. Moreover, the consolidation of the state administration is taking place around a number of key personalities, each with his own agenda. The performance of the ministries appears often to be very much dependent on who is at the top and ministers almost always have their own plans. The assumption that the central state is always synonymous with progress and that local powerbrokers are always reactionary and inward looking is partially belied by the example of Herat, which has a much more efficient administration than the central government despite being controlled by warlord Ismail Khan. International donors are becoming increasingly aware that relying on the central government does not always work, after large sums of aid money disappeared in the ministries without reaching their intended target.

Another example of how it is difficult to separate state consolidation from particular political interests is the recent case of Balkh province, where the appointment of a new chief of police, Pashtun and pro-Karzai, was perceived by the northern Uzbeks and Tajiks as an attempt to re-establish Pashtun supremacy over the region. The question here is in what sense and to what extent the strengthening of the state is a process which goes beyond the strengthening of the individual actors or parties/factions behind it.

In the case of administration, for example, is accountability in the interest of everybody? Patronage politics is more likely to be the norm. Only opposition and central government are interested in the accountability of provincial administrations, as seen for example in the example of Balkh, where the faction opposed to the governor, a member of Jamiat, demanded a neutral governor. The central government is corrupt too, and provincial authorities complain and ask for a more accountable, transparent and honest administration. However, such a central administration would limit the ability of the central government to use patronage as a political tool.

Similarly, the ability of the state to maintain order within its territory is one of its prerogatives, but repression of insurgency and armed opposition can also be used as an excuse to silence or weaken opposition. For example, in the conflict against the Taleban some anti-government groups that are not active militarily and seek to establish party organizations have been targeted nonetheless by the security services, keen to eliminate potential political rivals.

In sum, actors within the state structure have little interest in promoting the cause of transparency, accountability and administrative efficiency. They might have an interest in promoting the cause of a stronger state, but they might not necessarily use such greater strength to positive ends or in the interest of the general population, although it is true that this is a precondition for reconstruction and development. Looking at the Afghan case, to the extent that a consolidation is taking place, it is mainly the outcome of pressure from below. Various groups of the population who do not have access to local authorities, be they elders, the intelligentsia, the traders or any other group, often exercise pressure on Kabul in order to obtain the appointment of new district managers, chiefs of police or even provincial governors. An extreme case is that of the 25<sup>th</sup> Div of the AMF, the most discipline within the AMF, which was originally created following a subscription by traders of the Khost area. Much more common is the case of petitions and appeals being sent to Kabul, asking the replacement or reinstatement of some administrator. More in general, the elders and the notables always make their opinion

heard about the performance of the administrators and are sometimes successful in getting them replaced, when there is no major force supporting the corrupt ones. In the countryside, even peasants sometimes actively complain, when roads and bridges are not repaired or health care is not available. In a number of cases bad administrators have been chased away by the population, although this is admittedly rare. More in general, the central government, eager to get the support of voters as presidential and parliamentary elections are approaching, is increasingly inclined to replace local administrators, although most of the time corruption at the ministry and lack of information prevent the new appointments from representing an improvement over the previous ones.

The strengthening of the state itself, in short, is no guarantee of sustainable or durable development and while it is a precondition, a strong state ending up in the wrong hands might actually have a disastrous effect. The experience of the communists in the late 1970s and in the 1980s demonstrates this well. The strengthening of the state needs to move hand in hand with the establishment of some forms of genuine accountability and democratic representation, especially at the local level, in order to guarantee that fiscal revenue and international help reaches the intended targets.

Powerpoint slides

### **The factions**

- *Warlords (Ismail Khan, Dostum?, smaller ones)*
- *Tribal leaders*
- *Political parties of the intelligentsia (Nehzat-i Milli, Ittehad-i Milli, democratic parties...)*
- *Religious parties (Hizb-i Islami, Jamiat-i Islami, Ittehad-i Islami, Shura-i Adolat)*
- *Traditionalist parties (Mahaz, Wahdat-i Milli)*
- *Ethnic/regional parties (Hizb-i Wahdat, Junbesh, Afghan Millat ...)*

### **The elites**

- *The “commanders”*
- *Traditional notables*
- *Ulema*
- *New and old “aristocracy”*

### **Social groups**

- *The “warriors”*
- *The peasants*
- *Urban strata*
- *Intelligentsia*
- *Mullahs*
- *Women*

### **The actors**

- *Political factions*
- *Elites*
- *Social groups*

### **Phases of state-rebuilding in Afghanistan**

- *1) feudal state – cooptation of warlords into state structure*
- *2) consolidation of the centre – capacity building in ministries, army, police*
- *3) expansion towards the periphery – reining in warlords within the state, replacing them?*

#### **1) feudal state – cooptation of warlords into state structure**

- *Ministers*
- *Governors*
- *District managers*
- *Military and police commanders*
- *Heads of department*
- *Employees, soldiers, policemen*

#### **2) consolidation of the centre – capacity building in ministries, army, police**

- *recruitment of professional people*
- *training of existing staff, including warlords’*
- *creation of ANA and consolidation of police*
- *restructuring and accountability, advising from external sources*

**3) expansion towards the periphery – reining in warlords within the state, replacing them**

- *shifting administrators around*
- *selecting deputies and other professional people to replace heads*
- *recruiting entirely new staff*
- *deploying national police and ANA to the provinces, international troops, DDR*