HUMAN TERRAIN SYSTEM (HTS) – AFGHANISTAN
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Local Governance in Rural Afghanistan

Introduction

This paper is designed to act as a guide for working with local communities in rural Afghanistan at the *wuluswali* (district) level, primarily in the east and south. Afghan society has always been extremely diverse from district to district, requiring a flexible, multi-faceted approach to governance. This multi-faceted approach blended tribes, Islam and the state. The political upheaval of the past 40 years has disrupted Afghan society and the traditional structures which historically provided governance and social order, not just the Kabul-based government. It is important that the information in this guide is not seen as absolute or universally applicable, but rather as a baseline guide for understanding the complexities of local governance, or the lack thereof, in rural Afghanistan. There is no standard formula for success in Afghanistan due to its diversity; the only constant is the need for flexibility.

Historical Sources of Governance in Rural Afghanistan

In rural Afghanistan governance and social order has traditionally been derived from a combination of sources. Some have described this combination of power sources in rural Afghanistan as a "triad" which counter-balanced one another due to the various entities' competing interests. The competing entities of the "triad" are:

- Traditional Secular, Non-state Leadership – elders, maliks and khans
- Local Islamic Clergy – mullahs and other community-based, Islamic leaders
- The State (Kabul-based central government) – wuluswal (district governor)

The "triad" is often described as the traditional Afghan method for applying checks and balances to those wielding power in the community, similar to the checks and balances created by the three branches of government (executive, legislative, judicial) found in the Western democratic model. While the checks-and-balances concept is quite similar, the function and source of legitimacy of the different entities vary.[1]

Traditional Secular, Non-state Leadership

The traditional secular, non-state leadership structures are community-based. Membership in such a community could be determined by a geographic location such as a village or a kinship-based group such as a tribe or clan. It is important to recognize that tribes are not universally present in Afghanistan considering many of Afghanistan's ethnic groups do not have tribes or other such sub-divisions. In addition, Pashtun/Pakhtun[2] tribes behave differently and have various levels of significance depending on their geographic location (this topic will be covered in more depth later in the paper). Depending on the region and the

[1] Kilcullen, David. "Taliban and Counterinsurgency in Kunar," *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) 236.
[2] In western areas Pa**sh**to is spoken and in eastern areas Pa**kh**to is spoken; therefore, Pa**sh**tuns live in the west and Pa**kh**tuns live in the east. In Pakistan and India the term *Pathan,* a term from Hindi and Urdu, is often used by other ethnic groups to refer to Pashtuns/Pakhtuns.

power/relevance of the tribes, the power may reside with a leadership council called a *jirga* or be consolidated with a single leader called a *khan* (or sometimes a *malik*). The source of a tribal leader's legitimacy could be from state recognition or selection by a group of elders.

- *Jirga* – The term is most often used when discussing the tribal council or gathering of village elders. A *jirga* is used to settle disputes, make community decisions and conduct other affairs which impact the community as a whole. Decisions are made by applying a combination of Pashtun customs and Islamic law.[3] In some cases, in the absence of state-supported courts jirgas act as courts, especially in the areas where the role of the tribes is still strong. Although some will say that *jirga* and *shura* are synonyms, others will tell you that *jirga* is a secular Pashto word meaning circle while *shura*, a word borrowed from Arabic, has its roots in religious terminology. During the 1980s the anti-Soviet insurgents started utilizing *shura* in place of *jirga* more regularly to highlight the religious nature of their struggle. Some specialists have advised increasing the use of the term *jirga* in place of *shura* in order to emphasize the secular over the religious aiding the reestablishment of secular, non-state leadership in rural communities.

- Elders – Throughout Afghanistan elders (Pashto: *meshran*) play a role, but their significance and their titles differ. Elders are usually referred to as "white beards" in the indigenous languages of Afghanistan: *spin zhiri* (Western Pashto) / *spin ghiri* (Eastern Pakhto), *rish-e safed* (Dari/Farsi) and *ak sokal* (Uzbek & other Turkic languages). Traditionally the elders were key players in community decision-making.

- *Khan* – The term khan generally refers to a tribal leader. Khans are bigger notables who have large followings and significant economic resources. These tribal and/or community leaders may have inherited the position or derived their legitimacy from the elders. In some cases, the khan's ancestors received a government appointment and the position and title have been passed down over the course of time. An important role of the traditional khan was to maintain relations with the government and with other khans.[4] The role of a khan differed from region to region. For example, in parts of the South, khans became powerful landowners who acted more like feudal lords than heads of egalitarian tribes. The term *khan* is often associated with powerful landowners and not tribal leaders. Many of these khans were co-opted by the government and appointed as government representatives who would collect taxes and carry out other duties for the state. In addition, the khans of egalitarian-minded tribes are relatively weak due to the strength of the multi-member jirga.[5]

- *Malik* (*arbab*, *karyadar*) – The term is usually used to denote the leader of a small community such as a village. In general, maliks are smaller notables with small clienteles ranging between 5-70 men. Maliks also act as intermediaries between the village and the state (provincial and district governments).[6] Additionally, maliks traditionally have served as *de facto* arbitrators of local conflicts, tax-collectors, heads of village councils and delegates to provincial and national *jirgas*. The term

[3] Sherzaman, Taizi. Jirga System in Tribal Life. University of Peshawar (April 2007), 7.
[4] Giustozzi, Antonio. "Tribes" and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1985-2006. Crisis States Research Centre (Sept 2006), 3.
[5] Giustozzi (2006), 4.
[6] Thomas, Vincent and Mujeeb, Ahmad. "A Historical Perspective on the Mirab System: A Case Study of the Jangharoq Canal, Baghlan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (March 2009), ii.

karyadar is used most frequently in the northern Persian-speaking districts, considering the word *karya* means village in Persian.[7] The term malik was borrowed into Pashto, Uzbek, Urdu and Dari/Farsi from Arabic so it has been used throughout Central and South Asia for various leadership positions, but may differ in its meaning. The key take-away is that a *malik* is a secular, community-based leader who derives his legitimacy from non-religious sources.

- *Mirab* – Each village usually has an official, the *mirab*, who regulates the sharing of water resources among the community members. Some sources have the term *mirab* translated into English as water-master. The *mirab* manages irrigation and other water-related aspects of the community. This person is typically selected by the elders or the village council.[8] The *mirab* system varies from region to region.[9] Considering the water shortages which effect Afghanistan's agriculturally-based economy, the *mirab* wields a tremendous amount of power within rural communities.

- *Sayed* – Sayeds are believed to be the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad. Sayeds exist throughout the Muslim world, not just in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan *Sayed* acts as an ethno-religious identity. Traditionally Sayeds have been respected members of communities due to their heritage and higher levels of education. As a result of this respected status, communities have sought their guidance for dispute resolution. In addition, the non-Sayed Afghan Arabs, whose ancestors came to Afghanistan several centuries back, also have a more respected position in society and are often looked to for guidance on dispute resolution matters.

In addition to the leadership positions and governing bodies mentioned above there are other terms and concepts related to secular, non-state governance in rural Afghanistan. The following are just a few secular, non-state concepts which play a role in maintaining social order in rural Afghanistan (mainly the east):

- *Pakhtunwali* - The Pakhtun tribal code known as Pakhtunwali is an unwritten code for regulating the lives of Pakhtuns. The code differs from tribe to tribe and from region to region, but does have some core concepts. A few of these core concepts are honor (*nang*), revenge (*badal*) and hospitality (*melmastiya* / *melma-palana*).[10] Within Pakhtun tribal society one does not just speak Pakhto, one actually *does* Pakhto, meaning following the regulations of the unwritten code. Doing Pakhto is important for properly conducting one's life. Living by the code is living honorably, but one can be considered *be-Pakhto* or without Pakhto, meaning without honor. In the absence of governance from state institutions, Pakhtunwali has played a stronger role in the more tribal areas along the Durand Line. In modern times the tribal code has played a more significant role in the lives of Eastern Pa**kh**tuns, while the Western Pa**sh**tuns have strayed away from the code. The code has been stronger among the mountain Pakhtuns where the reach of the state's power and influence has been limited while weaker in the flatlands and closer to commercial centers such as Kandahar.[11]

[7] Giustozzi, Antonio. "Tribes" and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1985-2006. Crisis States Research Centre (Sept 2006), 3.
[8] Rubin, Barnett. *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, (Yale University Press, 2002), 33.
[9] Thomas, Vincent and Mujeeb, Ahmad. "A Historical Perspective on the Mirab System: A Case Study of the Jangharoq Canal, Baghlan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (March 2009), 2.
[10] www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/pakistan/pashtunwali.htm
[11] Kilcullen, David. "Taliban and Counterinsurgency in Kunar," *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 234-5.

- *Arbakai* – Jirga members must have sufficient economic resources, manpower and social status to enforce the *jirga's* decision. In the Loya Paktia region (Paktia, Paktika and Khost) the tribes still utilize a form of tribal police called an *arbakai* to enforce the jirga's decision.[12] Each tribe and sub-tribe is expected to supply the *arbakai* with 5 to 10 men for every 100 in their community. Traditionally, according to the resolution of a *jirga*, the *arbakai* would punish someone by burning his house or executing him.[13] Outside of Loya Paktia, the arbakai system has faded due to a variety of factors and is non-existent in most of Afghanistan.

These elements, while influenced by religion, are secular, non-state elements of traditional governance in rural Pakhtun/Pashtun areas. The utility of these concepts has faded in much of the Pashtun areas of both Pakistan and Afghanistan, but people are still familiar with the terms and their meanings. The various leaders, from the khan to the mirab, exercise varying levels of authority and influence in rural communities. These leaders' power and legitimacy has shifted tremendously in the last 50 years and has been in a state of constant flux due to a variety of factors. As described previously, the situation in each district will depend on local factors such as population composition, proximity to urban centers and landscape.

The Mullahs & other Locally-based Islamic Clergy

The second element of the traditional, governance-providing "triad" has been the local mullah. The mullah has derived his authority from his position in the community as the one who sanctions social practices such as funerals and marriages, provides religious and educational services, and guidance with faith issues. The role and status of the mullah in rural society has varied from north to south and east to west. Usually mullahs do not come from elite families, but rather from the less-affluent, title-less families of commoners. In some areas the mullah has had little traditional prestige, but like most rural Afghan leaders he utilizes patron-client relationships with followers to increase his authority. Such patron-client relationships often provoke rivalries with tribal elders and other secular leadership in the community. The rivalry has been based in the fact that the mullah and the elder derived their authority and legitimacy from different sources.[14] In addition, as independent-minded individuals the traditional Pashtuns, in a counter-establishment stance similar to that of Martin Luther, felt that they had a direct line to God deemphasizing the importance of the Islamic clergy in their communities who were often economically and politically-minded.

The State

The third element of the "triad" has been the state. Historically the state, through its district-level representative, has provided limited governance to the periphery. The center-periphery split has always been a key element of Afghanistan's conflicts; the center has wanted more control while the periphery desired continued autonomy.

- *Wali* – provincial governor
- *Wuluswal* – district governor
- *Alaqadar* – sub-district governor
- *Saranwal* – magistrate / criminal investigator / prosecutor

The wuluswal, the state's representative in the district, acted as the official face of the central government. The strength of a *wuluswal's* power tended to depend on location and proximity to an urban center, causing his role to be quite limited in some remoter areas, especially the

[12] Trives, Sebastien. "Roots of the Insurgency in the Southeast," *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 89-90.
[13] Sherzaman, Taizi. Jirga System in Tribal Life. University of Peshawar (April 2007), 7.
[14] Kilcullen, David. "Taliban and Counterinsurgency in Kunar," *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 237.

mountains. Some tribes, such as those in Loya Paktia, have resisted the influences of the state and historically desired for partial or total independence from government control.[15]

Under pre-2001 constitutions, the central government was responsible for making appointments to administrative posts in the provinces and districts. This meant that the provincial governor (*wali*), district governor (*wuluswal*) and sub-district governor (*alaqadar*) were appointed by elites in the center, not selected by the people in the provinces and districts. Historically district and province officials received orders from and reported back to the central government in Kabul.[16] Provincial and district government structures and procedures were modeled after those of the central government. Additionally, the Kabul-based government usually filled local-level posts such as the *wuluswal* (district governor) with non-natives of the areas. This imperial model ensured the loyalty of the wuluswal to the central government and allowed him to operate more independently of local influences such as tribal rivalries and family feuds.[17] Overall, the accountability within this system has been upwards to the head of state in Kabul, not downwards to the actual people being governed. The practice of appointing local officials continues, and remains to be a problematic aspect of local governance. For example, in some areas ethnic Tajiks have been appointed to govern predominantly Pashtun districts, an ethno-linguistic hurdle for not only achieving effective governance, but also for gaining approval from the local population.[18]

Territorial Divisions / Administrative Units

The limited state-supplied governance around the periphery of Afghanistan is better understood in the historical context of Afghanistan's development as a state. The administrative units in the form of provinces and districts have been constantly evolving. These administrative units through which the central government has attempted to manage have mainly been sub-dividing into smaller units over time. This attempt at stretching the state's reach into remote areas has had some success, but overall governance from state entities have mainly been limited to areas in close proximity to commercial centers.

- *Wiloyat* – province
- *Wuluswali* – district
- *Alaqadari* – sub-district

In the 18th century the territory of Afghanistan was divided into four regions: Herat, Kandahar, Turkistan and Qataghan-Badakhshan. These administrative units were autonomous and semi-autonomous with Kabul as their capital. Later in the early 1930s Afghanistan's territory was reorganized into 5 major and 4 minor administrative areas. In 1964 the country was divided into 26 provinces (*wiloyat*) and later into 32. Finally in 2004 the current administrative borders were drawn dividing Afghanistan into 34 provinces.[19] The most recent additions were: Sari Pul (March 1988), Nuristan (July 1988), Khost (1995), Daikondi (2004) and Panjshir (2004).[20] The creation of Sari Pul and Nuristan by the Najibullah regime in 1988 and the creation of Daikondi and Panjshir by the Karzai regime in 2004 appear to be the results of political maneuvering. For example, Daikondi's mainly Hazara population and Panjshir's mainly Tajik population had historically been at odds with Pashtun-led governments including the Taliban regime of the late 1990s.[21]

[15] Kilcullen (2009), 235.
[16] Malikyar, Helena & Rubin, Barnett. "Center-periphery relations in the Afghan State: Current Practices, Future Prospects," Center on International Cooperation, NYU (Dec 2002), 6.
[17] Malikyar (2002), 8.
[18] Malikyar (2002), 12-13.
[19] Emadi, Hafizullah. *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan,* (Greenwood, 2005), 7.
[20] RC-East Administrative Overhaul (Administrative_District_Overhal_J9HTAT_080628) HTS RRC (June 2008), 3.
[21] RC-East Administrative Overhaul (2008), 4.

The number of districts in Afghanistan is constantly in flux. The central government recognizes 398 districts (sub-provincial administrative unit), but this number is hard to track considering new districts have been formed while existing ones have been abolished, fused with neighboring districts, split apart and/or moved to other provinces. There is no overarching strategy for district administration; it is often unclear which districts are recognized as legitimate administrative units and which are not.[22] Despite the confusion, it is clear that local political factors are a driving force behind the changes to district boundaries. In recent years a number of realignments have taken place in Kandahar. In 2005 Nesh district was transferred from Uruzgan province to Kandahar province and Miyan Nasheen district was created from Shah Wali Kot district. Perhaps the most important district realignment was applied to Mullah Omar's former home base, Kandahar's Panjwai district; the result was the formation of Zhari district which was created from parts of Panjwai district and Maiwand district. Additionally, some districts have been given new names while retaining their same administrative borders (e.g. Kakar/Khaki Afghan district, Zabul).

In Loya Paktia (Paktia, Paktika & Khost) tribal politics have been playing a key role in the creation of new districts. Some new unofficial district boundaries have been declared based on tribal lines. In Paktia unofficial districts that more accurately respond to sub-tribal divisions exist with the recognition of the provincial government. Reporting shows the existence of at least 8 unofficial districts in RC-East:

- Paktia Province - Gerda Serai, Mirzaka
- Paktika Province - Bak Khel, Charbaran, Shakhelabad, Kushamond
- Ghazni Province - Khogiani
- Nangarhar Province - Spin Ghar[23]

In 2007 President Karzai created the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) to address the sub-national administrative issues related to unofficial districts and other district-level boundary issues. According to sources, regulations related to the creation of new districts did not exist in 2007, but the IDLG had been mandated to tackle many issues related to sub-national administrative units in order to help improve local governance. [24] Understanding a district's administrative history is important for understanding local dynamics, especially within the context of the traditional governance triad. Many new districts have had little to no prior influence from the state's portion of the governance triad. Due to the government's limited history in some of these districts, it is natural that other powerbrokers and power-wielding groups have filled the void.

Role of Identity

Afghanistan is one of the most diverse countries on earth. Unfortunately, we as Westerners often fail to grasp the complex nature of Afghanistan's society and the dynamics which drive its conflicts. Identity, whether ethnic, geographic, or linguistic, has played a central role in the many insurgencies which have impacted the region. There are numerous dichotomies within Afghan society which have influenced the dynamics of the various conflicts:

- center-periphery split
- urban-rural split
- modern-traditional split
- Dari-Pashto split
- minority-Pashtun split / North-South split

[22] RC-East Administrative Overhaul 2008), 2.
[23] Unofficial Districts in RC-East (Unoffical_Districts_J9HTAT_080725_U), HTS RRC (July 2008), 4.
[24] Unofficial Districts in RC-East (2008), 4.

These divides within Afghanistan's diverse population are extremely important. These dichotomies show how identity manifests itself into competing views and interests. It is impossible to nail down what an "Afghan" thinks because there is no such thing as a generic Afghan. The opinion of a Kabul resident and that of a villager in Zabul are likely to be as different as night and day. The issues and players involved in localized conflicts will vary depending on the province and district. The issues are often related to resource allocation while the players are often determined by an Afghan's multiple identities. For example:

- In central Afghanistan conflicts may involve settled Hazara residents and nomadic Pashtun *kuchi*s whose continuous feuding is centered around land usage. The groups' ethno-religious identities get pulled into the conflict as the settled Hazara are Shia and the nomadic Pashtuns are Sunni.
- In Afghanistan's east disputes often occur between local communities and the Kabul-based central government over lucrative timber rights. Such resource-based conflicts are examples of how the center-periphery split plays out in rural communities.
- In the South and East where the Pashtuns are the dominant majority the role of tribes is a key element of local dynamics. Some of the strongest feuds can be those between cousins, a concept called *"tarboorwali"* in Pashto.

The issues in each district are usually extremely localized; therefore, it is important to understand them through a local lens without applying broad, macro-level generalizations.

The Role of the Tribes

Pashtuns, unlike some of Afghanistan's ethnic groups, are divided into tribes. The two main macro-level tribal groupings are the Durrani and the Ghilzai. The Durrani are sometimes referred to as Abdali. Some have used the term confederation when discussing the two macro-level groups. Although these two tribal confederations comprise the majority of Pashtun tribes, there are other macro-level tribal groupings such as the Karlani Confederation which is mainly in the east. In addition, although tribes can be categorized and classified, as with anything, there are anomalies.

- Durrani Confederation – Durrani tribes typically are found in the southern lowlands
- Ghilzai Confederation – Ghilzai tribes typically are found in the eastern highlands

Linguistically, the Durrani in the west generally speak Pashto (Western dialect) and the Ghilzai in the east generally speak Pakhto (Eastern dialect); that is why, in the west they call themselves Pa**sh**tuns while in the east they call themselves Pa**kh**tuns. On a macro-level these two tribal confederations have been rivals with the Durrani tribes typically controlling national-level power; most of Afghanistan's dynasties were from Durrani tribes. Within these two tribal confederations there are smaller sub-groups, often described as tribes and sub-tribes. These tribes and sub-tribes usually end with the suffix *–zai* (son of) or *–khel* (branch). The Durrani Confederation is comprised of two main groups, the Zerik and the Panjpai:

- Zerik **-** Achekzai, Alikozai, Barakzai, Popalzai
- Panjpai **-** Alizai, Ishakzai (Isakzai, Sagzai), Nurzai, Khugyani (Khawkwani), Maku

Like the macro-level Durrani-Ghilzai split, the Zerik-Panjpai split impacts the situation in the south as the tribes have competing positions within southern Pashtun society. These tribes have more divisions with sub-tribes and smaller sub-tribes of those sub-tribes. For example, the Muhammadzai are an important sub-tribe of the Barakzai. The Ghilzai are even more diverse and have even more tribes and sub-tribes than the Durrani Confederation.

Pashtun tribes and sub-tribes have their own traditions, interests and reputations. There are too many Pashtun tribes and sub-tribes to cover their characteristics in depth, but the key take-away is that Pashtun tribes are as diverse as Afghanistan's many ethnic groups. Applying blanket descriptions to Pashtun tribes is as dangerous as applying blanket descriptions to all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups. Although the tribes play some kind of role in the lives of Pashtuns all across Afghanistan's east and south, the significance of that role varies from province to province and district to district. The tribes have different histories and have arrived at their current position as a result of numerous factors which differ from tribe to tribe. The most central factor to a tribe's development has been geographic location.

Highland Tribes & Lowland Tribes

A tribe's geographic location is a good indicator of how relevant a tribe is and how much the tribe will adhere to traditional "Pashtun" customs and traditions such as Pashtunwali. Two geographic elements have helped determine the relevance of a tribe; these elements are:

- Landscape – Geographic features such as mountains have isolated Pakhtun tribes from one another and from the influences of the state. The Pakhtun tribes in the mountains of the east tend to live together as tribal units, while lowland villages in the south often are intermixed with different tribes and sub-tribes. Tribes living in the mountains tend to follow the traditional Pakhtun ways such as Pakhtunwali more closely than the tribes living in the low flatlands where commercial centers have developed and the state's reach has been more widespread. The mountain Pakhtuns historically have been more egalitarian as they have tended to utilize the jirga system for governance purposes. In general the tribes of the east tend to fit the traditional notion of egalitarian "Pashtun" tribes due to their location in mountainous areas.

- Proximity to urban/commercial centers – Tribes in close proximity to commercial centers (i.e. Kandahar) tended to be more heavily influenced by the state. Most often these commercial centers have developed in lowland plains. Historically the tribal leaders (khans) were attracted to the urban centers and over time became disconnected from their rural tribesmen. Many tribal leaders and other elites ended up relocating to Kabul where their descendants became Dari-speaking Kabuli residents, becoming completely removed from tribal life in the distant provinces. In addition, as a result of their proximity to Kandahar the southern tribes historically were the ruling tribes throughout Afghanistan's history.

Generalizations based on the work of Western anthropologists (Barth and Anderson) among the eastern Pakhtuns are problematic because they fail to recognize that the Pashtun tribal system varies from region to region and from tribe to tribe. Another anthropologist (Ahmad), through his research among Pashtun tribes, discovered that social differentiation exists within Pashtun tribes. He described two types of social organization among the Pashtun:

- *Nang* Pashtuns – Honor-bound Pashtuns, who still abide by the tribal code (Pashtunwali) in full and whose society is fragmentary (more common in highlands)

- *Galang* Pashtuns – Pashtuns characterized by a hierarchical social structure, where Pashtunwali plays a more modest role and where patron-client relations are dominant (more common in lowlands)[25]

[25] Giustozzi, Antonio. 'Tribes' and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1985-2006. Crisis States Research Centre (Sept 2006), 3.

Soviet anthropologists in the 1980s took Ahmad's assessment to another level and described a process of feudalization among some Pashtun tribes. This process of feudalization was most advanced among the tribes living closer to the commercial centers and those closest to the monarchy, such as the Durranis in the south. In this context landlords used their resources to strengthen their influence in order to turn into full time 'leaders'. As a result of this process, the state co-opted tribal leaders and appointed them as local representatives, in charge of gathering taxes and duties from fellow tribesmen. The process increased the hierarchical character of these lowland societies and started feudalization. Another anthropologist (Katkov) distinguished between three types of tribes:

- *Qaumi* – egalitarian; leaders do not have real power and have to depend on jirga
- *Rutbavi* – hierarchical, with the tendency towards feudalization and usurpation of the tribesmen's power by the leader; these leaders are able to influence the orientation of their followers allowing the leader to maintain influence even if he resettles in the city
- *Kuchi* – nomadic and very egalitarian[26]

In general egalitarian *qaomi* tribes are more prevalent in the mountainous east while the leader-centric *rutbavi* tribes are generally more prevalent in the flatter terrain of the south. In the 1970s there was reportedly a shift in the role of tribal leaders away from lineage solidarity towards seeking personal or factional advantage. The tendency towards feudalization supports this as there was an increasing reliance on sharecroppers as a source for power and revenue, especially in Afghanistan's south. Feudalization creates an environment more socially conducive to consolidation of power by rulers. The feudalization contributed to a shift towards a more hierarchical tribal system. The city attracted the hereditarily-determined khans, or tribal leaders, into the city. Establishing connections with the city, gave access to financial resources allowing khans to expand their power.[27]

As mentioned previously, there have been many generalizations applied to both Afghans and the Pashtun tribes. Often Westerners have tried to apply the traditions of *qaumi* Pashtuns and the terms describing those traditions in areas dominated by *rutbavi* Pashtuns and sometimes in areas dominated by non-Pashtuns. Applying macro-level generalizations indiscriminately to any province, district or tribe in Afghanistan is extremely problematic.

For example, much of what is considered "Pashtun" in the western mind is limited to a region of Afghanistan known as Loya Paktia. Loya Paktia, located on the Durand Line, consists of Paktia, Paktika and Khost provinces and numerous *qaumi* tribes. It is in Loya Paktia where the tribes have retained the power and influence among the tribesmen as well as their Pashtun-ness about which much has been written. Loya Paktia remained under special tribal administrative status until recent times because the tribal structures there remained strong and the penetration of state power remained weak. The traditional Pashtun practices, such as *Pakhtunwali*, the *jirga* and the *arbakai* system are strongest among the tribes of Loya Paktia, but due to the terrain (plains), proximity to a commercial center (Ghazni city) and the influence of the state, the significance of the tribes in neighboring Ghazni province is much weaker than in Loya Paktia.[28] Pushing concepts such as *Pakhtunwali*, *jirga* and *arbakai* outside of Loya Paktia, especially in the south and west, could prove to be difficult.

Conclusion

Over the past century Afghanistan's society has been in a constant state of flux. In the mid 20th century tribal leaders and other rural notables were drawn into the cities, especially Kabul, slowly becoming estranged from their rurally-based tribes and ancestral communities.

[26] Giustozzi (2006), 4.
[27] Giustozzi (2006, 5.
[28] Trives, Sebastien. "Roots of the Insurgency in the Southeast," *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 89.

Even millions of nomadic *kuchi* shifted to either semi-nomadic or completely settled lifestyles during this time, despite retaining their identity as *kuchi*. The communist efforts in the 70's and 80's to remake Afghan society caused unprecedented upheaval. Many elites, such as those who had moved to the cities, ended up immigrating to the West while millions of rural Afghans migrated to refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. In the late 80's the communist government funded and supported tribal and ethnic militias whose leaders morphed into "warlords" after the fall of the communist regime in the early 90's. Depending on one's perspective, these militia leaders along with former Mujahedin commanders brought a combination of chaos and stability in the 90s. These militarized leaders were most prevalent in the non-tribal north and west, while "tribal entrepreneurs" claiming to be legitimate tribal leaders were prevalent among the *rutbavi* tribes of the Pashtun south.[29] Unfortunately, the "kalashnivkovization" of Afghan society has had irreparable consequences.[30]

The system of appointing provincial and district level officials, from ANP commanders to district governors, continues. In the past, including the 1980s, many district governors resided in provincial centers and in Kabul, not in the districts which they were supposed to be governing.[31] Unfortunately, this has occurred at times during the post-2001 era causing the state's side of the triad in some districts to be not much more than a symbolic gesture. During the post-2001 era the secular, non-state leaders in rural communities have acted as facilitators in the election process. Working as intermediaries between candidates and their constituents, maliks, khans and other elders have been politically active in many parts of Afghanistan. It appears that elections have empowered the traditional, secular powerbrokers in rural communities, shifting some power back to non-religious leaders helping bring the triad closer to its ideal equilibrium.[32] Despite the increased power the election process has brought to secular, non-state leaders, the process has also created new ways for these leaders to engage in corrupt, illegitimate behavior; the type of behavior that mullahs can preach about during their Friday sermons to delegitimize their traditional rivals in the triad.

In the power vacuum resulting from the state's collapse and the exodus of the secular, non-state powerbrokers from rural communities the mullahs began consolidating power. The environment was extremely conducive to this because the other power-wielding polls of the governance "triad" had been severely weakened during the 80s and 90s. Additionally, many mullahs increased their legitimacy on the battlefield fighting against the communists, while many secular leaders opted to avoid the battlefield altogether. One of the insurgents' tactics in recent years has been to target the traditional secular leadership to increase the mullahs' power in rural communities by eliminating their traditional rivals. This tactic has been utilized on both sides of the border to eliminate the non-state, secularly-based power of the triad. Even if some mullahs do not completely agree with the opposition groups on ideological grounds, many recognize that their standing in society will improve and their power will increase if the Taliban were to regain control. Lastly, the Taliban, due to their decentralized nature, have been extremely adaptive to Afghanistan's highly decentralized society making their mode of operation more flexible than that of the highly centralized Afghan state. The combination of historical realities, lethal targeting and bureaucratic inefficiencies has contributed to the mullah-centered insurgency's takeover of rural Afghanistan.

Afghan society is predominately rural, extremely volatile and ever-changing. With that in mind, the above data should be used as a rough guide for understanding the complexities of district-level governance. As there is no standard recipe for bringing governance and stability to rural Afghanistan, adapting a flexible approach based on local conditions will be extremely advantageous for achieving success.

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[29] Giustozzi, Antonio. 'Tribes' and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1985-2006. Crisis States Research Centre (Sept 2006), 5.
[30] Goodson, Larry. Afghanistan's Endless War, (Seattle: University of Washington, 2001), 97-100.
[31] Malikyar (2002), 9.
[32] Apathy, Fear & Hope: 2010 Election Atmospherics. HTS AF-TCE (Sept 2010), 10-11.