

# Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations

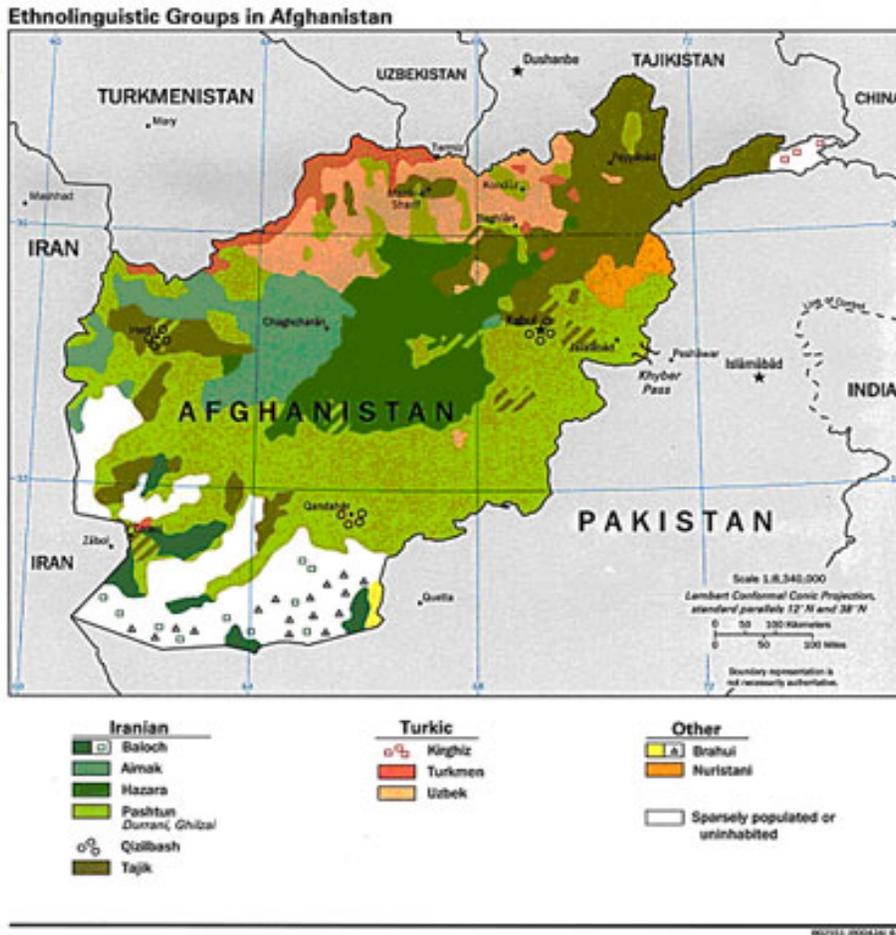
## Hazara in Afghanistan

### Summary of Key Issues

- The Hazara are concentrated in the Hazarajat, a mountainous area in central Afghanistan centered around Bamiyan province and including areas of Ghowr, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Ghazni province. Significant populations of Hazara are also in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Samangan province.
- The majority of Hazara are Shia Muslims, a small number are Sunni. The Hazara's Shia identity make them a minority in Sunni Afghanistan.
- The Hazaras are culturally and religiously linked to Iran. Almost all of Iran is Shia Muslim.
- The Hazara have experienced discrimination at the hands of the Pashtun-dominated government throughout the history of modern Afghanistan. Pashtun leaders, with occasional support from Uzbek and Tajik leaders, have denounced Hazaras as not real Muslims, due to their Shia faith, and as agents of Persian imperialism in Afghanistan. The Taliban government is accused of conducting massacres against the Hazara.
- The giant Buddha statues were in Bamiyan province, in the heart of Hazara territory. Although the Hazaras are Shia Muslims, not Buddhists, they identified with the Buddhas as a cultural symbol. The Taliban destruction of the Buddhas may have been partly directed against the Hazara.
- The Hezb-e Wahdat is the resistance party that represents the Hazara in Afghanistan. Karim Khalili is the political leader, and Mohammed Mohaqiq is the militia leader.
- Despite occasional persecution at the hands of Tajiks and Uzbeks, the Hazara joined the Tajik and Uzbek-dominated Northern Alliance in its struggle with the Taliban.

## Hazara Ethnic Group

The Hazara have lived in the territory of modern Afghanistan since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Hazara population is geographically divided between the Hazarajat Hazara, who live in the central Hindu Kush Mountains, and those living outside the Hazarajat. The majority of the Hazara live in the Hazarajat, also called Hazarastan. These Hazara are uniformly Shia Muslims. The Sunni Hazara, and some Shia Hazara, live outside the Hazarajat, or on its borders.



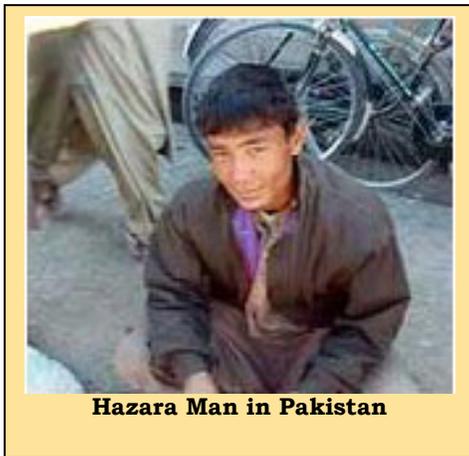
The Hazara living outside the Hazarajat can be found in the northern foothills of the Selseh-ye Safid Kuh (Paropamisus) Mountains in eastern Herat Province, in Herat city, as well as Samangan province.

There is also a significant Hazara population in Mazar-e-Sharif and the western districts of Kabul. The Shia Hazara of the Hazarajat are the more populous and politically significant of the overall Hazara population.

## Ethnic Description

### *Physical Appearance*

The Hazara are distinguished by Mongoloid (Asian) features. These features include broad faces, high and prominent cheekbones, slanted eyes and sparse beards. Most Hazara have black hair while their complexions vary depending upon the area where they live. Hazara living at higher elevation tend to have fairer complexions than Hazara in lower lying areas. There are differences in physical appearance between the various tribes of Hazara. Many Hazara are short due to lack of proper nutrition. European and Irano-Afghan facial features may also be found among the Hazara. As with all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, however, physical appearance alone is not always a conclusive and accurate indicator of an individual's ethnic identity.



**Hazara Man in Pakistan**

### *Cultural History*

There are different explanations about the origins of the Hazara. The most common explanation is that the Hazara are descendents of the Mongols and Ghengis Khan. Another theory contends that the Hazara are of Eastern Turkic origin. The competing theories are supported to varying degrees by Hazara physical appearance, and the use of Mongol and Turkic words by the Hazaras.

The origins of the ethnic name “Hazara” are also disputed. Some say that it is derived from the Persian (Farsi) word *Hazar*, which means “one thousand.” *Hazar* is a translation of the Mongol term for a unit of the Mongol army. Over time the term lost its military significance and became a designation for tribal groups. An alternate explanation for the term Hazara is that it is a derivation from a Persian word that means “the discarded.” The non-Hazara explanation of “Hazar” claims that it is a curse exclaimed by Ali (brother-in-law and companion of the Prophet Mohammed) against those who deserted him in battle. As Shia Muslims, the Hazara believe Ali is the successor to Mohammed. This non-Hazara explanation of the origins of *Hazar* is an example of the discrimination that Hazara have frequently faced as Shia Muslims in a majority Sunni state.

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Sharif and the western districts of Kabul. The Shia Hazara of the Hazarajat are the more populous and politically significant of the overall Hazara population.

The homeland of the Hazara, the Hazarajat, is centered around Bamiyan province. The Hazarajat also includes the areas of Ghowr, Uruzgan, Wardak and Ghazni provinces that border Bamiyan province.

Amir Abdur Rahman, who ruled from 1880-1901, consolidated the modern state of Afghanistan. As part of this consolidation, Abdur Rahman sought to bring the territory of the Hazarajat under central government control.

The Hazara resisted Rahman's attempts to impose centralized control on the Hazarajat, launching three uprisings against Rahman's army. Rahman weakened the Hazara uprisings by inciting the Sunni Hazara of the Shaikh Ali tribe to fight against the Shia followers of the same tribe.

By 1893, Rahman's Afghan forces occupied the entire Hazarajat. Rahman redrew the boundaries of the Hazarajat, significantly reducing it in size. This occupation severely restricted the autonomy of the Hazara, who were subjected to heavy taxation, enslavement, expulsion, and massacres. Continued harassment by Hazara irregular units eventually forced Rahman to withdraw his occupying forces from Hazarajat, in exchange for a Hazara pledge of allegiance to Rahman as the Amir of Afghanistan.

The historical events of the 1890s remain a large part of the modern Hazara culture and shape their concept of ethnic identity as one that is in opposition to the Afghan state. For example, in the 1890s the presence of Rahman's central government officials in the Hazarajat substantially altered the traditional social structure of the Hazara. This new form of government displaced the traditional tribal leaders of the Hazara. Rahman's government also allowed Afghan Pashtun nomads (also called *keuchis*) access to the cultivated land of Hazaras for use as animal pastureland. This had negative economic results for the Hazara and caused a sharp decline in their standard of living. The failed uprisings and subsequent subjugation of the Hazara triggered large-scale emigration abroad. Hazaras fled to the present day territories of Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the former Soviet Central Asian republics. The events of the late 1890s created a social and political relationship in which the Afghan Pashtuns were the victors and the Hazara were the victims. The Hazara have faced varying degrees of government sponsored discrimination ever since. The harsh treatment of the Hazara by the Taliban is the most recent example of the Hazaras' negative experiences at the hands of the central Afghan government. The Hazara directly compared their experience at the hands of the Taliban to the treatment they received from Abdur Rahman in the 1890s.

At Amir Abdur Rahman's death in 1901, his son Habibullah succeeded him. During Habibullah's reign (1901-1919), Hazara who had fled to escape the fighting against Abdur Rahman in the 1890's were allowed to return to their land in the Hazarajat. Habibullah granted the Hazara amnesty for crimes committed in resistance to central government rule, and pledged that the land and possession of the Hazara would not be confiscated and given to the Pashtuns who were moved to the Hazarajat to change the balance of the population.

In the early years of Habibullah's reign, the Hazara nevertheless continued to emigrate to Quetta, Pakistan.

The Hazara initially welcomed Mohammad Nadir Shah as king in 1929, but came to resent his policy of sending more government officials to the various regions of the Hazarajat to impose greater government control. Mohammed Nadir Shah was assassinated on 8 November 1933 by a Hazara youth taking revenge for the execution of his adopted father.

During the reign of Afghanistan's last king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, the political suppression, and socio-economic and cultural isolation that the Hazara had experienced since 1929 continued as before, but with some improvement from 1963 to 1973. During this period, the king took a more active role in ruling and initiated significant changes that allowed for greater political freedom. It was in this period that a new constitution was signed and enacted that recognized all citizens of the country of Afghanistan as "Afghans," a term which had previously applied only to Pashtuns. This change was significant for the Hazara because it recognized their participation and membership in the state on an equal level with the Pashtuns and other ethnic groups, ending, at least formally, a long period of ethnic discrimination.

During the 1960s, the population of Hazara living in cities increased as Hazara sought to escape the poor conditions in the Hazarajat. Urbanite Hazaras benefited from the liberalization and modernization policies that the king instituted in 1963. Some Kabuli Hazaras were able to improve their socio-economic positions during this period and form a commercially successful middle class. Until this time, the Hazara of Kabul were relegated to the lowest rung of the social ladder, working in menial jobs as laborers and servants.

The seizure of power by the Soviet-supported People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in April 1978 marks the beginning of a period of political unification among the Hazara. Prior to the communist coup, the Hazara had been politically disjointed. Localized tribal identities prevented wider political cooperation. The new government's method of implementing reforms triggered revolt and resistance throughout Afghanistan. The PDPA challenged the power and position of the traditional leader of rural Hazara society, the *mir*. The *mirs* could no longer fulfill their role of middlemen managing interaction between the state and the Hazara community they served. This upset the balance of relations between the government and the population of the Hazarajat, which had consistently sought the greatest possible autonomy from the central government. The new government posed a threat to Hazarajat self-governance, and the Hazara population began to unify to defend their autonomy.

The Hazara organized under the Council for the Islamic Revolutionary Alliance (*Shura-ye Enqelab-e Etttefaq-e Eslami*), an organization established in September 1979 to prepare against future efforts by the communist government to impose its control over the Hazarajat. The Shura was led by *sayyed* Shia leaders. The Shura had both a political/governmental wing and a military wing. Sayyed Ali Behishti was the political head of the Shura. The Shura military operations were commanded by Sayed Hassan with the command established in Waras (Bamiyan Province).

The Shura established administrative structures to govern and organize the Hazarajat territory after the Soviet invasion in 1979. The Shura recruited conscripts, collected taxes, issued identification cards and passports, and established offices in Quetta, Pakistan and Tehran, Iran.

The Shura worked with other Afghani groups resisting the PDPA until the mid 1980s. In 1984, seven Pakistan-based Sunni parties formed the Alliance of Seven with the assistance of the Pakistani government. The majority of international assistance, both humanitarian and military, was provided to these Sunni resistance parties. The Hazara were excluded from this aid because of their association with Iran. This created a Sunni-Shia split within the Islamic resistance against the Soviets.

The unified Hazara support for the Shura also began to fall apart as the central Afghan government turned its attention to fighting the Pakistan-based *Mujahideen* Sunni resistance movements and became less of a threat to the Hazarajat.

Between 1982 and 1989, struggles for power broke out in the Hazarajat. From the founding of the Shura in 1979 until 1988, five parties competed with the Shura for the support of the Shia Hazara and control over the Hazarajat area. Four of the parties were based in Iran: Harakat-e-Islami (Islamic Movement), Sazman-e-Nasr (Victory), Sepah-e-Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard Corps) and Hizbullah (Party of God). Nasr, Pasdaran and Hizbullah were founded on Islamic fundamentalist ideology; Harakat-e-Islami was based on traditional Islam. In addition to the Iran-based parties, the Sazman-e-Mujaheddin-Mustazafin (Organization of Warriors of the Dispossessed) was established in Afghanistan. This organization had a militant and political ideology, not religious. The infighting in the Hazarajat quickly became more devastating to the area than the struggle against the central government. In 1982, the Islamicists in the Shura allied themselves with the members of the Nasr party and fighting between the two groups broke out.

In 1987, Iranian authorities helped to form eight parties into an alliance. The four Shia Islamicist parties that were based in Iran – Harakat- e- Islami, Nasr, Pasdaran and Hizbullah – plus four smaller parties created the Alliance of Eight (also called the Shura-e Ettelaf).

The Sunni resistance parties based in Pakistan established an interim government in February 1989 when the Soviet withdrawal was near completion. Although a preliminary agreement provided for the participation of the Shia parties in the interim government, the Shia parties were excluded from the government that was formed in February. The Shia parties responded by forming a Party of Unity in July 1989. The Hezb-e Wahdat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan (the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan) was created from the union of the Shura, Harakat–e-Islami, Sazman-e-Mujahidin-e-Mustazafin, Sazman-e-Nasr, Sepah-e-Pasdaran and Hizbullah, and the four smaller parties of the Alliance of Eight. Abdul Ali Mazari was chosen to lead the party. Hezb-e Wahdat retained the dominant positions of the *shaykhs*, but also allowed for the re-integration of the *mirs* and radical secular groups into a single representative party organization. Although Hezb-e Wahdat received political, and minimal material support from Iran, the party was primarily an indigenous response in preparation for a new government dominated by Sunnis that was hostile to the Shia Hazara population.

When the Afghan communist government fell, armed conflict erupted between the Hezb-e Wahdat and the Ittehad-e Islami, a Saudi Arabian-backed Pashtun force, as the Hezb-e Wahdat sought to protect the Hazara population of West Kabul. On 11 February 1993 the forces of the Ittehad-e Islami and the government massacred seven hundred and fifty Hazara in the Afshar district of West Kabul. The incident brought about a short-lived alliance between the Hazara Hezb-e Wahdat and the Pashtun Hezb-e Islami against the Tajiks, who dominated the Rabbani government.

When the Taliban arrived in Kabul in 1995 after taking control of large portions of Afghanistan, Hezb-e Wahdat agreed to not fight against them, hoping to benefit if the Taliban could oust the Rabbani government forces that had attacked the Hazara. Government forces launched an attack on West Kabul in March 1995 to push the Taliban forces out of the Hazara districts. As West Kabul fell, the Taliban retreated and took the President of Hezb-e Wahdat, Abdul Ali Mazari, with them. He was later found murdered along with seven of his assistants. This incident previewed the extremely poor relations between the Taliban and the Hazara that would follow for the next 6 years, and ended the brief Hazara-Pashtun alliance created in 1993.

The Taliban, as a radical Sunni militia, abused the Hazara population because of their Shia Muslim faith. The Taliban blockaded Bamiyan province in 1997 in an attempt to force the Hazara to surrender. During an offensive to recapture Bamiyan in September 1998, the Taliban killed more than 500 people in various villages. This followed a previous massacre of 4000 Hazara in Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998. In March 2001, the Taliban destroyed the ancient Buddha statues carved into the Bamiyan mountainsides. When the Taliban fled from Bamiyan in November of 2001, before its complete collapse, the Taliban destroyed the city.



The Hezb-e Wahdat party remains the primary political force among the Hazara. Like all other political groups in Afghanistan, Hezb-e Wahdat has both a political and a military branch that are interconnected. On the political side, Abdul Karim Khalili serves as the party's general secretary. The party

has voiced its support for the interim government and the convening of a *loya jirga* to determine the future governmental organization of the state. On the military side, Mohammed Mohaqiq leads the Hezb-e Wahdat militia.



There are four Hazara representatives in the interim government of Chairman Hamid Karzai. Mohammed Mohaqiq, of the Hezb-e Wahdat militia, is a vice chair and responsible for planning. Sima Samar, a woman and a physician, is also a vice chair and is responsible for Women's Affairs.

## Centers of Authority

Centers of authority among the rural Hazara population are divided between the secular and religious spheres. A clear hierarchy of social organization exists in which the leader at each level possesses strictly secular power. This structure existed previous to the founding of the modern Afghan state and has continued to function to the present. The leaders from the religious sphere complement the secular leaders, and have acquired increasing influence since the 1960s.

Prior to Abdur Rahman's campaign to bring the Hazarajat under central government control at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hazara society was organized by tribe with each tribe led by a *mir*. The *mir* derived his power from economic resources and social connections. The *mir*s were feudal lords who served as the leader of local government and organized tribal defense. *Mirs* ruled over *qalas*, fortified settlements made up of families from a particular Hazara tribe. *Mirs* represented the highest level in the Hazara social structure, the *quam*. The *quam* is a complex network of relations governing political, social, economic, military and cultural relations.

Directly below the *mir* is the *tayefa*, which is led by an *arbab* or *khan*. *Tayefas* are composed of several *tols* (also *tolwar* or *tolwara*). *Tols* are made up of several families and each *tol* has a chief known as a *malik*. A Hazara family is the basic unit of social organization. Families are often joint households composed of several families that are not related, or of extended families with kinship relations. Nuclear families exist, but are less common than multiple family households. Communications up and down the social hierarchy are managed by the *malik* to the *mir*, and vice-versa.

After the Hazarajat was incorporated into the Afghan state at the beginning of the 1900s, the tribal organization was weakened. Afghan officials displaced the tribal leaders as the Afghan state administered the Hazarajat area.

In the 1960s the traditional centers of authority in the rural Hazara community began to shift from secular leaders, the *mir*s, to religious figures, including the *sayyeds* and the *shaykhs*. The *sayyed* was a traditional religious figure in rural Hazara communities whose authority is based on their status as descendants from the Prophet Mohammed. *Sayyeds* are considered to be Arabs and are separate from the Hazara kinship system. Most *sayyeds* do not have a formal religious education. The *shaykh* is a trained cleric. A *sayyed* may also simultaneously be a *shaykh* if he has acquired formal religious education. This structure of authority remains current in the post-Taliban period: *mir*s retain traditional cultural influence, while *sayyeds* and *shaykhs* hold the political power.

### *Rule of Law*

The official law of Afghanistan is the Islamic Shariah law. The Sunni and Shia sects have different interpretations of the Shariah, and the adherents of one sect do not recognize certain legal tenets of the other, and vice versa. The conflict between the versions of Shariah

complicates the application of a single legal code throughout the country. The Hazara are resentful that repeated requests to allow for the application of the Ja'fari Shia rite to Hazara legal matters have been denied, and they are forced to adhere to the legal tenets of an Islamic sect they do not follow.

*Role of State versus Role of Ethnic Group*

The Hazara population in general feels a stronger affiliation to their ethnic group, and the tribe, sub-tribe and family unit they belong to, than to the state. The central government plays a minimal role in the area of the Hazarajat. Hazara leaders have consistently been more influential than government officials within the Hazara community. The central government has always faced challenges from the Hazara in its attempts to control the Hazarajat territory. This is primarily due to the historic conflict between the Hazara who are Shia followers, and the government, which has traditionally been dominated by Sunni Pashtuns. The Hezb-e Wahdat political party plays the leading role in managing relations between the Hazara and the central government.

The Hazara are similar to the other ethnic groups of Afghanistan in that the greatest loyalty is felt for the social and familial unit in the local area where the individual lives. Although the people of Afghanistan recognize ethnic identity, it is not as strong an identifier as kinship or area of residence. However, the Hazara have a stronger ethnic identity than other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, with the exception of the Pashtuns. The Hazara, particularly those who live or once lived in the Hazarajat, have a stronger awareness of their ethnic identity because they follow the Shia sect in a Sunni-dominated state, and because of the history of repression by the Pashtun-controlled Afghan government. The result is a greater ethnic consciousness among the Hazara. Nevertheless, ethnic consciousness is not sufficiently strong to fully overcome tribal and local loyalties.

## Cultural Attitudes

### *Group/Tribe/Clan*

The Hazara are divided among eleven tribal groups, each with varying number of sub-groups. The eleven tribal groups are the following: Dai Kundi, Dai Zangi, Behsud, Dai Mirdad, Ghazni Hazara, Jaghui, Polada, Uruzgani, Shaikh Ali, Walang and Kala Nau Hazara.

Although the Hazara have a stronger ethnic identity than other ethnicities in Afghanistan, the primary levels of identification are at the local and tribal levels. The Hazara have developed a strong self-perception that they are a subjugated minority that has been repressed and marginalized by the state.

### *Modern Nation State*

The Hazara, despite the history of discrimination against them, regard Afghanistan as their homeland and do not seek to emigrate to Iran, nor secede from the state. At the same time, the Hazara also do not identify themselves as Afghans. The Afghan state's claim on the loyalty of the Hazara is not as strong as the claim by the kinship group and tribe. The Hazara recognize the Afghan state, and their existence in that state, but do not feel wholly integrated into it. This is primarily due to the Hazara view that Afghanistan is a Pashtun-dominated state, which history and experience has shown to be hostile to the Shia Hazara minority. The degree of Hazara identification with the Afghan state may increase in the future if the Hazara are provided more opportunities to participate in the government, and if more tolerant policies are adopted and carried out towards Afghanistan's Shia minorities.

### *Conflict Resolution*

Conflicts are resolved at the local level, usually without resorting to appeals to government officials. As a rule, local populations try to prevent government intrusion in the affairs of the area because the population will then be subject to taxation and administrative regulations. If a government official does become involved, a fee or bribe is usually charged. As a result, there are significant incentives for solving disputes internally.

Conflicts are resolved by local community leaders. The primary arbiters of conflict in the community are the *sayyeds*.

### *Other Ethnic Groups: Pashtuns*

The Hazara have had a mixed relationship with the Pashtuns of Afghanistan. Throughout the history of the modern Afghan state, the Hazara have been the object of Pashtun discrimination. This can be explained by two factors. First, the close identification of the Pashtun ethnic group with the Afghan state, to the point that the two are considered

analogous, and the state building activities of the Pashtun-dominated governments, has relegated the autonomous Hazara to an inferior position. Second, the Hazara are predominantly Shia followers, which further distinguishes them from the majority Pashtuns and other Sunni followers. As a result, the Hazara are alienated simultaneously from both the state and the Pashtuns.

The Hazara have felt marginalized by various Afghan governments since the late 1890s. The position of the Hazara varied between improvement and decline from 1900 to 1994. In 1994, the Hazara were once again the target of violence and repression by the Pashtun-dominated Taliban. Although the Hazara realize that not all Pashtuns were Taliban and not all Taliban were Pashtun, the abuses committed by the Taliban against the Hazara population throughout Afghanistan rekindled Hazara animosities and resentment towards the Pashtuns.

#### *Neighboring States: Iran*

The Afghan Hazara have had a mixed relationship with neighboring Iran. Iran is the only Shia state, but this fact alone has not established positive relations between Iran and the Shia Hazara of Afghanistan. Iran provided political and material support to the Hazara during the resistance against the Soviets, and again during the siege of Bamiyan under the Taliban in 1997. Iranian involvement has been perceived by Hazaras alternately as assistance and interference.

The Islamic revolution in Iran had an impact on developments within Afghan Hazara society. The success of Iranian religious leaders in expanding their influence into the secular political realm provided inspiration for the religious leaders in Hazara society. The Hazara *sayyeds* and *shaykhs* attempted to translate their religious power into political influence. The two religious elites formed an alliance to challenge the *mirs*, the traditional secular power holders, for political control. This effort received political, and some material support from Iran, but greater Iranian backing was not forthcoming because Iran was preoccupied by the war with Iraq. The mid-1981 effort to oust the *mirs* was inconclusive and the control of the *sayyeds* and *shaykhs* over the Shura declined rapidly when popular support for the Shura collapsed in 1982, when Islamicist parties began to fight for dominance in the Hazarajat.

With the strengthening of the radical religious leaders in Iran in 1983, the Iranian government increased its involvement in Hazara politics. The Iranian goal in 1983 was not to fight the Soviet forces, but to alter the balance of power within the Hazarajat. Two Islamicist parties were instrumental in this effort: the Sazman-e Nasr (Organization of Victory) and the Pasdaren-e Jihad-e Eslami (Guardians of the Islamic Holy War). The remaining supporters of the Shura fought against members of five other parties, four based in and supported by Iran, and one operating from Afghanistan. The internal Hazarajat conflict that began in 1982, and lasted until 1989, was as devastating to the Hazara as the Afghan war with the Soviets.

Iran assisted in the 1989 formation of the Hezb-e Wahdat Eslami-ye Afghanistan, the Hazara Party of Unity. The Nasr and Pasdaran Iranian-backed Islamicist parties dominated Hezb-e Wahdat, but the material support Hezb-e Wahdat received from Iran was minimal.

The Hezb-e Wahdat was primarily an indigenous response that anticipated a new and hostile Pashtun-dominated government to follow the Soviet withdrawal.

Iran provided support to the Hazara during the Taliban siege of Bamiyan in 1997. Iran provided weapons to the Hazaras for their use as members of the Northern Alliance. As a Shia state, Iran was staunchly opposed to the Taliban, which was a radical Sunni militia that considered Shia followers to be *munafaqueen*, or heretics, and outside of the true religion of Islam.

#### *Neighboring States: Pakistan*

The Hazara have mixed attitudes towards Pakistan. Many Hazara fled to Pakistan to escape persecution and poverty in Afghanistan, and have been very successful in business and government there. However, Pakistan has historically been a supporter of Hazara opponents. Throughout the 1980s, Pakistan supported the Sunni resistance parties, which received the bulk of international support in their war against the Soviets. The Hazara and the Sunni resistance clashed in the late 1980 and early 1990s when the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan collapsed. Pakistan was also a supporter of the Taliban, which was particularly brutal to the Hazara in Afghanistan. Hazara may see Pakistan as a place of opportunity where they can be more prosperous and practice their Shia Islam, but resent the support this country provided to the Taliban.

## Language

### *Dialects*

The Hazarajat Hazara speaks *Hazaragi*, a dialect of Dari that incorporates Turkish and Mongolian words. The Hazara who live outside of the Hazarajat speak Dari with localized dialects, which are more similar to the Dari language spoken throughout Afghanistan.

### *Influence on Culture*

*Hazaragi* distinguishes the speakers of the language from others who speak different dialects of Dari. The Turkish and Mongolian words designate *Hazaragi* speakers as members of the Hazara ethnic group.

### *Geographical Differences*

The *Hazaragi* dialect is spoken by Hazaras in the Hazarajat area. Hazaras outside of the Hazarajat, whether Sunni or Shia, speak the dialect the area where they live.

## Religion

The vast majority of Hazara are Shia followers. Shias accept the revelation of Mohammed and the five pillars of Islam; in addition they believe in the divine nature of Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law Ali, and believe that Ali was Mohammed's rightful successor. The Shia sect of Islam is further subdivided into three major sub-sects, two of which (Imami and Ismaili) are practiced by the Hazara in Afghanistan. The majority of the Hazarajat Hazara are Imami (Twelver) Shia. In Afghanistan, this Shia sect is often identified by the Arabic term Athna-Asharia (or Isna-Asharia or Ithna-Asharia). Some Hazara are Ismaili Shia or Seveners. Imami or Twelvers do not recognize the three caliphs (imams) who were companions of Mohammed. Instead, Imami recognize the line of twelve successive imams that began with Mohammed's son-in-law Ali. Ismailis reject the seventh imam in the line of twelve Shia recognized imams and accept instead the son of the sixth imam, Ismail. Ismailis further believe that the imams who succeeded Ismail's son Mohammed were concealed or substitute imams, with the real imams being invisible.

A small number of Hazara who do not live in the Hazarajat are Sunni Muslims. Some of these Sunni Hazara had been forced to convert to Sunnism from Shi'ism, while others converted willingly to avoid persecution. The generally lower profile of the Sunni Hazara in Afghanistan's history and politics is due to their greater similarity to other Afghan ethnic groups relative to the Hazarajat Hazara. As adherents to the Sunni sect and speakers of more common Dari dialects, and their physical separation from the larger Hazarajat population, they are more assimilated into non-Hazara culture.

### *Major Tenets*

All Muslims, both Shia and Sunni, follow the five pillars of Islam: the recitation of the creed "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his messenger," daily prayer, almsgiving, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage (*haj*) to Mecca.

### *Influence on Culture/Role in Society*

There is a close relationship between ethnicity and religious sect among the Afghan population as a whole, and the Hazara in particular. Certain ethnic groups are identified exclusively with the Sunni sect, including the Tajiks and Pashtuns (Afghans). With the exception of the small minority of the Sunni Hazara, the Hazara are uniformly associated with the Shia sect. This correlation is illustrated by the tendency to speak of Hazaras who convert to Sunnism as having "become Tajik."

Islam serves as a unifying force among the many ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The centrality of Islam to Afghan society is illustrated by the depiction of a mosque on the national flag (both before and after the Taliban). The primary effect of Shia Islam for the Hazara has been to distinguish them from the other peoples of Afghanistan who are members of the Sunni sect. Frequently the effect of this distinction has been negative and has made the Hazara the object of persecution.

### *Political Influence*

The Shia sect of Islam has not itself been an engine of Hazara political activity, but reinforces the Hazara's status as a minority. It is the Hazara's distinct identity, which is a result of religious distinctions, which motivates Hazara political activity and social organization. Shia Islam has contributed to group cohesion among the Hazara because it is the primary difference between the Hazara and the other peoples of Afghanistan. The tenets of Shi'ism and the accompanying version of Islamic law place the Hazara in opposition to, or at least at a distance from, the Afghan state that is dominated by the Pashtuns and governed by Sunni Islamic law.

The Hezb-e Wahdat Party of Unity is the clearest manifestation of the political influence of Shi'ism among the Hazara. Hezb-e Wahdat was created to unify the Shia Hazara after they were excluded from participation in the interim government formed in 1989. The Hazara were excluded on the grounds that they were followers of the Shia sect. The formation of the Hezb-e Wahdat political party, which remains the primary party in Hazarajat in 2002, demonstrates the influence of religion on politics in Afghanistan.

### *Geographic Differences*

The distinction between the Hazarajat and non-Hazarajat Hazara population is followed by a geographic difference in religious affiliation. Sunnis are the main population of the strategically important lowland areas. Shias inhabit the less accessible mountainous areas. Although there are significant Shia Hazara populations in cities outside the Hazarajat, the majority of Hazara living outside the Hazarajat are Sunni.

### *International Connections*

The Hazara have ties to Iran because Iran is the only majority Shia country. However, relations between the Hazara and Iran are mixed and have been tense during certain periods. Iran is the only state from which the Hazara have received substantial political and military assistance. Because of the Hazara adherence to the Shia sect, and the resulting ties with Iran, the Hazara have been cut off from other sources of assistance due in large part to the rift in relations between the United States and Iran.

## Customs

### *Greetings*

A handshake is the common greeting among men; close male friends or relatives may embrace when meeting. The right hand is always offered for a handshake, never the left hand. Men do not touch a woman in public, but women may shake hands or exchange three kisses on alternate cheeks with another woman. Men may greet women indirectly with a verbal greeting. Women may turn their faces or their eyes away when greeted by a man. Introductions can be lengthy, with many questions about one's health, family and general well-being.

In Dari, "Khubus ti?" asks "How are you?"

People are frequently referred to by their status titles, even if they no longer hold the position described by the title. A common example is the title of 'Haji,' given to a person who has completed the *haj* to Mecca.

Afghans have a different sense of personal space than most Westerners, particularly Americans. Especially in greetings, but also in other conversation, Afghans may stand or sit very close to each other as they talk. Afghans may also be very animated and expressive when they speak.

### *Gestures*

Afghans typically sit on the floor with legs crossed, but it is considered impolite to point the sole of the shoes at someone. Using the left hand to pass items is seen as impolite and unclean. To ask for divine assistance, both hands are held at chest level with the palms up and open. When gesturing to ask for or select an item, the whole hand and not a single finger, should be used to point.

### *Visiting*

Afghans, in general, are very hospitable. It is a point of pride and a sign of status if a family can receive visitors, because being a host requires that one offer food and drink to guests. If the hosts are financially able, tea or other drinks are served. Significant effort will be put into obtaining and preparing food if a visitor comes to share a meal. Guests should not refuse gestures of hospitality, unless the security situation prohibits it.

Most Afghans remove their shoes when entering a home, however, it is acceptable if a non-Afghan (Western) guest cannot take off his shoes.

### *Negotiations*

Negotiation is most frequently used when buying items at local markets. The prices of items can and should be negotiated with the seller.

### *Gifts*

An Afghan visitor is not expected to bring gifts when going to visit a friend or relative. Foreigners may bring small useful gifts as signs of goodwill.

## Lifestyle

### *Role of Family*

The family is the center of Hazara social organization. A family may be an extended family composed of several nuclear families, a joint household in which several families that are not blood relations live, or a nuclear family. Nuclear families are less common because sharing household expenses and responsibilities is a more efficient use of scarce resources.

### *Role of Women*



**Sima Samar, a Hazara, is Minister of Women's Affairs in the Interim government under Hamid Karzai.**

A rural Hazara woman's role is to complete a variety of daily chores that keep the household functioning. A woman is not considered to be equal to her husband, although she is to be respected by him. Recently in Hazara society, women have had significant political social and military roles in the defense of the Hazarajat. The Central Council of the Hezb-e Wahdat has 12 female members, all of whom were educated professionals. The role of women in Hazarajat society, by virtue of its isolation from the total control of the central government, tends to be substantially greater than that allowed for other women in Afghanistan.



**Women armed to defend the Hazarajat**

### *Role of Men*

The role of a man is to provide for his family. He is responsible for training his sons in farming or a trade, and making them aware of their religious and social duties. The father has full authority over the household. Men participate in the local political bodies.

### *Dating and Marriage*

Dating does not happen in Afghanistan because boys and girls are separated in adolescence when girls enter *pardah*, seclusion from non-relative males. Matchmakers arrange marriages and negotiate the bride-price and the dowry. Most marriages are the union of first cousins.

### *Role of Children*

Afghan parents are protective of their children, but also appreciate if one takes an interest in their well-being. Most children are very curious and friendly. Making friends with children and showing genuine interest in them can be an effective way of gaining the trust of their parents.

### *Role of Elders*

Elders are the community leaders. In Hazara society, they are the *mirs*, *sayyeds* and *shaykhs*. The elders represent the village or town to the government and visitors, making decisions that affect the community. Social custom holds that visitors should meet with the elders.

### *Passage into Adulthood Rituals*

The separation of girls from boys marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Girls must cover their heads with scarves and are no longer allowed to interact freely with non-relative males.

## Clothing

The typical man's dress consists of a long shirt, loose pants, a vest, and a woolen coat with long sleeves. Men wear a skullcap that fits close to the head. Some men also wear a turban over the cap that is tied with one end longer than the other which hangs over the shoulder. Men shave their heads regularly, usually with the assistance of other men in a cooperative effort.

Women wear long skirts and moccasin-like decorated shoes. Women may also wear turbans over skullcaps, or a bright scarf over their hair and fastened below their chin. Women's dress in cities was restricted by the Taliban, which forbade women from showing their face in public. The wearing of the *burqa* is a remnant of Taliban rule combined with the general Afghan custom of modesty in women's dress.

## Diet

The rural Hazara diet is centered around bread. Three types of bread are most common: the *tawa* bread baked on hot plates, the *tandur* bread baked in a sunken oven and *nan-butā* bread that is thick and brick sized. Rice is consumed infrequently because it is expensive. Milk products, but not fresh milk itself, are common in the Hazara diet. Tea is popular throughout Hazarajat and Afghanistan in general. It is expensive, but its purchase is given priority over other household needs. Fruits and vegetables are consumed only in season. The Hazarajat area is not fertile, and the people living there struggle to make the land produce sufficient food for the population.

## **Cultural Economy**

The rural Hazara population consists of subsistence farmers, raising wheat and barley. Only ten percent of the Hazarajat is cultivable and the soil is rocky, with the fields poised on steep valleys. The Hazara also raise sheep. The Hazara lost access to the more fertile lands after Amir Abdur Rahman and his successors granted Pashtun nomads the right to graze their herds in Hazarajat territory in the 1890s. Many Hazara migrate seasonally to the cities to find work. A substantial number of Hazara have taken up permanent residence in Kabul and other cities where they work as day laborers. Hazara typically fill the lowest level jobs, and are at the lowest end of the socioeconomic scale in the cities.

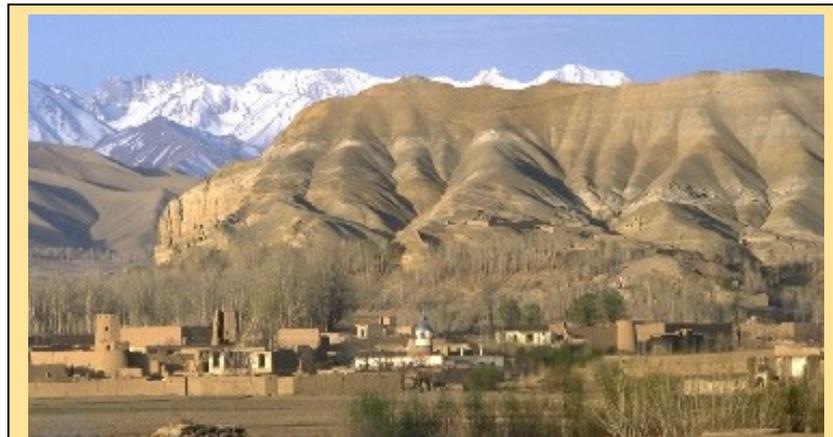
## Cultural Geography



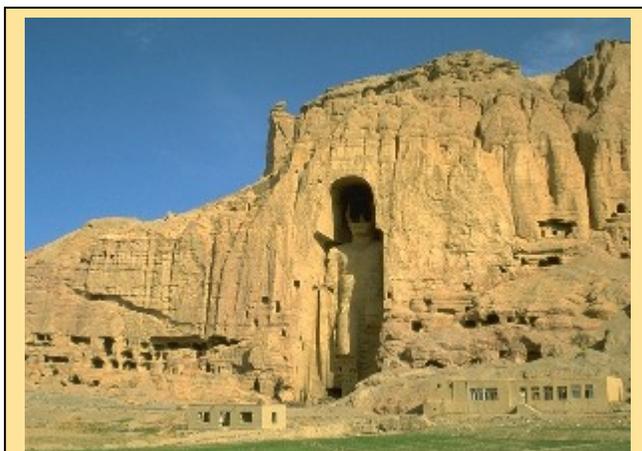
The Hazara population is concentrated in the Hazarajat region in the Hindu Kush Mountains in central Afghanistan. The Hazarajat is centered on Bamiyan province, and includes the areas of Ghowr, Wardak, Uruzgan and Ghazni provinces that border Bamiyan province. Other concentrations of Hazara population are located in Kabul, where the Hazara are 20% of the city's population, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Samangan province.

Bamiyan province was the location of the

monumental Buddha statues carved into the mountainsides. The Hazara appreciated the presence of the statues because they brought tourist revenues from Indian and Chinese pilgrims. The Hazara also respected the ancient Buddhist history of the area that the statues symbolized. The destruction of the



**Village in Bamiyan province, central Hazarajat**



**Buddha statue carved in mountainside in Bamiyan**

statues was perceived by the Hazara as an attack against the ancient culture of the Hazarajat, as much as an affront to Buddhism and internationally valued artifacts.

## Culture's Effects on Warfare

Throughout the modern history of the Hazara in the Afghan state, the Hazara have fought to remain autonomous from the control of the central Pashtun-dominated government. While it cannot be said that a specific style of warfare has developed among the Hazara, there is certainly extensive experience with resistance fighting and its tactics. The Hazara have the advantage among the ethnic groups of Afghanistan of living in a self-contained and defensible geographical area. The strength of local and tribal affiliations applies to warfare, as well as social relations. Military alliances are built on social affiliations, and military activity occurs in response to threats to the welfare of the social group to which an individual belongs.



As members of the Northern Alliance fighting forces, the Hazara have employed certain warfare tactics. These tactics have been developed from a history of resistance, especially against the Soviets in the 1980s. The ambush is the most common and most well known tactic used by all Afghan resistance forces. An ambush is used to rapidly inflict casualties, steal supplies, and demoralize the enemy. The middle of a convoy, where there are more supply vehicles and fewer armed vehicles, is the preferred target for an ambush attack. When launching an ambush, the primary goal is not to engage the opposing personnel, but steal as many supplies as possible and retreat.

Raids on fixed targets are used to undermine the resolve of the enemy and create a sense of vulnerability by attacking defensive positions. It is considered honorable to lead the attack but providing support or security is looked down upon. Speed is a key part of such raids, as

the fighters strike and retreat before a strong response can be launched. Raids are an example of the preference for offensive, rather than defensive action. Contact with enemy forces is avoided unless launching a raid or ambush.

Fighting has a localized character in Afghanistan. Because the local and ethnic identity is so strong, fighters do not travel to engage enemy forces or join with other forces to fight in areas of the country where their ethnic group does not live. Strategic planning is uncommon. Command and control is decentralized, which was a strength in the war against the Soviets. However, this structure prevents large-scale operations requiring coordination between ethnic groups who each follow their own leader. Military leaders tend to lead by their force of personality rather than by military leadership skills. The cohesion of fighting forces is due in large part to the ability of the commander to motivate and provide for the men under his command.

## **Urban vs. Rural Culture**

Afghanistan is a rural state where 87% of the people live in rural areas. Because the vast majority of the population lives outside the few urban centers that exist in Afghanistan, the politics of the countryside are especially important in the Afghan context. Cities are not the only locations of political activity.

There are differences between the Hazara living in the Hazarajat and those who inhabit the cities, particularly Kabul. However, a common characteristic between both rural and urban Hazara is their place on the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. The status of the Hazara as a repressed ethnic minority carries over from the rural to the urban environment. Many urban dwellers, in particular those who left the Hazarajat in the 1960s, sought to escape the poor conditions there. Over time the position of Hazaras in the capital city have improved, especially for those who have built up retail trade businesses. Nevertheless, a large portion of Hazara inhabitants of the cities occupy the least desirable jobs.

## Influence of Diaspora

Hazaras have been emigrating to Iran and Pakistan since the imposition of central government control over the Hazarajat in the 1890s. The Hazara in Pakistan are concentrated around Quetta, where a section of the city is known as Hazara Town. The Hazara population in Pakistan is estimated at 100,000. There is also a substantial Hazara population in Khorasan province, Iran, centered around the city of Mashhad. The approximate population of Hazara in Iran is 500,000.

The Hazara living in Pakistan are well integrated into Pakistani society, but have maintained a strong sense of their ethnic identity, and their traditional tribal and social structure. The Hazara in Pakistan have risen to high-ranking positions in both the government and private sectors. They enjoy a higher standard of living and a higher



**Hazara man in Quetta  
Pakistan**

level of education than their fellow Afghan Hazara. Pakistani Hazaras tend to have a more extreme sense of ethnic identity than Hazaras in Afghanistan. Pakistani Hazara emphasizes the historical connection to Genghis Khan, because they see this heritage as a means of gaining respect and social status among other groups in Pakistan.



**Hazara man in Quetta  
Pakistan**

The Hazara in Iran have integrated into Iranian society by becoming almost inconspicuous. They have not retained their tribal identities, or other aspects of Hazara culture that would distinguish them from other Iranians. Unlike their co-ethnics in Pakistan, the

Hazara in Iran have not risen to high-ranking positions in Iranian society, but have a low socio-economic status.

## Holidays

The Hazara celebrate certain holidays with the majority of the Afghan population as well as some that are specific to the Shia sect. Common holidays include the Islamic New Year and Mohammed's birthday. Although not a holiday, the beginning of Ramadan is important. Eid al-Fitr, the conclusion of Ramadan, is celebrated with feasting. Eid al Adha is celebrated to mark the end of the annual *Haj* pilgrimage to Mecca.

Hazara also celebrate Ashura, the Shia holiday celebrating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. Shia beat themselves in memory of the martyrdom of Hussein. This practice is opposed by the Sunni sect, and was prohibited by the Taliban.