

The Dynamics of Elite Networks and Patron-Client Relations in Post-Bonn Statebuilding Afghanistan¹

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Abstract. Afghanistan's last thirty years of political violence have been marked by factionalism and elite fragmentation. This article argues that post-Bonn statebuilding in Afghanistan can best be understood by examining the continuities and changes in the interrelations of elite networks since 2001. These include: 1) the failure of past political settlements to accommodate elites from different regions and ethnic groups; 2) the heightened role of identity politics, in particular, ethno-politics; and 3) the continuance of a pattern of statebuilding via the accommodation of patron-client networks. Findings from fieldwork in Afghanistan in 2009 highlight Karzai regime's attempt to consolidate its authority through the policy of accommodating the bargains made between different elite networks whereby most elites have been co-opted into the regime. However, this has been propagated in the form of a patron-client system, linking the leaders and sub-leaders of various ethnic, tribal and factional groups.

Introduction

Much academic and policy work on post-Bonn statebuilding/peacebuilding in Afghanistan has addressed the role and impact of formal institutions of statebuilding, to the detriment of the informal ethno-regional elite groupings intensified after the collapse of the Soviet-sponsored regime. This paper employs a different framework of analysis to understand post-Bonn Afghanistan by examining the role of national and ethno-regional elite networks in constituting the governing regime and thus shaping the nature of statebuilding in Afghanistan. I argue that rather than formal institutions providing incentives and shaping preferences of elite networks the reverse has occurred: the dynamics of informal networks have shaped the process of formal institution-building.

Afghanistan's last thirty years of political violence have been characterised as one of factionalism. The competition between different elite factions over the state has shaped the very nature of politics in Afghanistan since the 1980s, first between Soviet-sponsored political factions, Khalq and Parcham, and after the collapse of the Soviet-sponsored regime in 1991 between different Mujahedeen factions. The post-Bonn period has not been an exception from this pattern. Therefore, Afghanistan's current international statebuilding can best be understood by examining the continuities and changes in the interrelations of elite networks which emerged during and after the Soviet invasion and following the Bonn Agreement of 2001. In this sense, the current statebuilding is not divorced from the continued failure of political settlements since 1989 to overcome the logics of ethno-regional solidarity and patronage relations in Afghanistan, with the 2001 Bonn Agreement being only the most recent example of an internationally mediated and highly flawed elite pact. Yet these logics are not primordial but socially and politically constructed in large part due to the role of external powers in Afghanistan's recent history. The post-Bonn period has further provided a

platform for elite pact-making and re-negotiation. It became a forum for conflict and compromise between two broadly opposing *elite networks* – namely the oppositional former Northern Alliance (NA) Jihadis, in particular *Jamiat Tanzim*², which was represented by Dr Abdullah Abdullah in the 2009 presidential election, and the government represented by incumbent President Karzai. The former elite network emerged during the Jihad years of 1980s against the Soviet Union occupation, in particular 1992-2001, while the latter emerged with the outcome of the political settlement at the Bonn Conference in 2001. Both networks are politically constructed ethno-regional formations which have been resourced by years of intervention and interference by Western, Soviet and regional powers.

The paper argues that the failure of the Bonn Conference following the US conquest of Afghanistan at the end of 2001 set in motion an internal war (2002-2009) between the two opposing mentioned elite networks: the Jihadis, who controlled most of the security ministries in government and whose power emanated from their region bases, and the newly-formed Western technocrats around President Karzai whose power was limited to Kabul. Gradually, through a combination of repression and accommodation policies (Rothchild 1970)³, Karzai's representatives skilfully used their positions in the internationally-sponsored state and their access to state resources to coercively remove Jihadi elites and effectively consolidate their power across the country. However, this has been propagated in the form of a patron-client system, linking the leaders and sub-leaders of various ethnic, tribal and factional groups. Karzai regime has relied on two main clientalistic linkages: 1) the old *Tanzim* leaders; and 2) the provincial and district government officials. His government continues to depend on patron-client networks to gain a semblance of legitimacy and seek the consolidation of the Afghan state.

This paper begins by addressing the role of elites in statebuilding, drawing on the *elite paradigm* framework proposed by Field, Higley and Burton (1973, 1987, 1989) and supplementing it with recent work on *factionalism* in Central Asian Studies (Collins 2002, Schatz 2004). The second section analyses the Bonn Settlement of 2001, its exacerbation of the problem of elite fragmentation and the re-negotiation of complex ethno-regional elite networks. The third section examines inter-elite conflict based on divisions of ethno-regional factions and patronage in the post-Bonn period up to the 2009 presidential election. It highlights the nature and practice of patron-client relations in Afghan politics. This paper concludes by suggesting that the post-Bonn statebuilding has further exacerbated inter-elite conflict and the ethnic divisions and clientelistic features of Afghanistan's state and society.⁴

Elites, Factionalism and Patronage Politics

Elites and Political Settlement

In conflict transformation, elite settlements and transformation are of significant importance in shaping political development. The behavior and role of powerful actors and elites can determine the success and failure of post-conflict statebuilding process.

As such, I propose that Afghanistan's two decades of political development can conceptually be framed within the elite paradigm framework, proposed by Field, Higley and Burton. Their theorising suggests that examination of national elite structure and transformations are fundamental to explain for patterns of stability and regime outcome. The elite paradigm framework is an extension and modification of classical elite theory as developed by Michels, Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935) which argued that elite variability, that is, that elite arrangement and behavior, has significant effects on the form and function of political

regimes. However, Burton and Higley (1987) critiqued that neither Mosca nor Pareto went far in developing the contention of elite variability. They did not focus on elite settlement as a mechanism of variability. There has been extensive research showing the importance of elite unity in determining regime form (Pareto 1935; Mosca 1939; Putnam 1976; Huntington 1984 and others). However, in Burton and Higley's evaluation their ideas have not been "developed systematically; elites are not defined well; their origins and persistence are largely unexamined, and the consequences of their internal organization for regime forms are poorly understood" (1989, p.18).

Of the three historical routes to elite transformation proposed by the elite paradigm framework, elite settlements, where elites negotiate a deliberate compromise, best represent the Afghan case since the 1980s. Burton and Higley's elite paradigm and political settlement framework is a more relevant analysis to many conflict-driven countries such as Afghanistan, where elite disunity, weak civil society and limited democratic norms are a reality.

Within this frame of reference, Field and Higley (1973, p.8) understand elites as,

People [who are] able, through their positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes individually, regularly, and seriously. National elite can be said to encompass all those persons capable, if they wish, of making substantial political trouble for high officials (i.e., other elite persons who happen to be incumbents of authoritative positions) without being promptly repressed.

In the context of Afghanistan, this includes top executive (or government) officials, rule-making elites, ethno-regional factional leaders, tribal leaders, and even community elders.

These elites as discussed by Burton and Higley can be structured into three groups: ideologically unified, consensually unified and disunified. Elite unity, which is historically much rarer, produces stable regimes, whereas a divided national elite, which is the most common type, produces a series of challenges to the political process. Afghanistan is a case of elite disunity where it's national elites, "deeply distrust each other; interpersonal relations do not extend across factional lines, and factions do not cooperate to contain societal divisions or to avoid political crises" (Burton and Higley 1987, p. 296). However, I propose that elites in conflict-driven countries such as Afghanistan must be analysed first and foremost with respect to their own networks and hierarchical authority structure.

In Afghanistan, inter-elite competition over the control of state and the continuous failure of political elite settlements from the Soviet-withdrawal in 1989 to 2001 (Riwalpindi Accord 1989; Peshawar Accord 1992; Macca Accord 1993) brought Afghanistan ten years of civil war and led to the emergence of the Taliban as the hegemonic faction from 1996-2001.⁵ The failure of elite settlements and the civil war years had their own destructive consequences which affected the Bonn settlement. The war resulted in the emergence of a complex set of power relation based on patronage networks both within and between *Tanzim* elites and power-brokers in Pakistan, Iran and beyond (Maley, 2002).⁶ Most of these leaders were clients of rival international and regional patrons of resistance. This intensified the "regional conflict complex" (Buzan & Waeber 1990) around Afghanistan.⁷ Moreover, the diversity, fragility and loose nature of elite networks made any chance of political settlement unlikely. None of the Mujahedeen leaders had a national profile or attempted to appeal to the entire Afghan population. They were divided along ethno-linguistic, sectarian, religious and tribal lines. Their distrust and personal rivalries, which had intensified during the civil war years,

meant that each saw all politics as war. It was in this context that the 2001 Bonn Conference, aimed at achieving a compromise among different elites, took place.

Elites and identity politics in Central Asia

The Central Asian Studies literature suggests that this “disunity” or factionalism is common place across the region.⁸ In the post-Soviet years it has provided a set of resources to conceptualise factionalism – the relationship between elites and their ethno-regional or sub-ethnic solidarity groups – in terms of either “regional” (Jones Luong 2002) or “clan” politics (Collins 2002; Schatz 2004) or other forms of kinship-based association. Factionalism is understood as involving a political and economic competition between ‘clans’, ‘tribes’, or “regional” (both ethnic and non-ethnic) groupings. Collins has denoted some Central Asian states as “clan hegemonial regimes” where a given clan-based elite network wholly captures the state (2002, p.142). For Schatz, this approach opens up space between primordialist and constructivist approaches “to account equally for stasis and persistence as for fluidity and change” through “identifiable *mechanisms of identity reproduction*” (Schatz, 2004, p. xx). He sees two aspects of “modern clan politics” which seem to be salient for questions of elite networks and identity politics. Clan politics is, he argues, composed of: (1) “networks that occupy illicit social niches vying for control over scarce resources”; and, (2) “a broad discursive battle that plays on the ongoing public stigma attached to clan divisions” (p. xxiii). The result of the incorporation of modern clans into the political fabric is hybrid orders where states and factional solidarities become mutually inclusive.

Whilst it is foolhardy to make uncritical comparisons between the post-Soviet states and Afghanistan, it is also important to note that contemporary international statebuilding is not

so far removed from the “authoritarian high-modernism” (Scott 1998) exercised by the Soviet authorities in Central Asia. Moreover, at times of crisis, such as the end of the Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002), the civil war in Tajikistan (Tadjbakhsh 1993), the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan (Reeves 2006) and, perhaps, at numerous moments in Afghanistan’s recent history, identity groups “can crystalize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.5). The two outcomes identified by Schatz are apparent in Afghanistan’s complex elite networks (examined in part three of this article). However, Gullette in his summary of the political science literature on factionalism in Central Asia notes that factions (be they clans or ethno-regional groups), as ideal-types, “do not represent actual groups” (2007, p.385). Moreover, there is a great deal of fuzziness with respect to the composition of these groups which seem to be constituted of multiple social forces and in multiple social spaces, including that of the state itself. In Afghanistan, opposing elite networks’ action has had serious implications for the formation of the post-Taliban state. Elite disunity has become the main driving force for politicisation of identities, particularly ethnicity and its application of patronage networks. Elite fragmentation, ethnicity and patronage have become mutually reinforcing (Kitchelt and Wilkinson 2007). In acutely divided societies, fractured by armed conflict, ethno-regional and kinship based solidarity provides a particularly powerful bond of network construction and political organization for elites thus promoting patron-clientelist linkage building. However, it is important to recognize that these modern divisions are borne of the politics of elite and popular responses to crisis.

In Afghanistan, although clientelism has a long history its present nature and the level of its operation is closely combined and interlinked with ethno-regional factionalism. Throughout Afghan modern history, patron-client networks, one way or another, have persistently shaped

the emergence of the state. The Afghan state has repeatedly succumbed to the “micro-societies” of tribal power, local leaders and ethnic regional strongmen (Saikal, p. 2002, p.193).⁹ Consequently, state elites had to enter into a complex relationship of co-option, compromise and incorporation with periphery forces, which then determined the authority, power and legitimacy of the central government (Saikal, 2005, p.196, Shahrani, 1998, p. 226). Afghan anthropologists (Shahrani 1998, Glatzer 1998) sees this relationship emerging from Afghanistan’s societal conception of politics of difference - whether familial, local, regional, tribal, ethnic or national - which has structured mainly on the principles of complementary (segmentary) opposition, and ties of patronage between leaders and followers. The ties of loyalty and responsibility - whether economic, political or moral - between leaders and followers are conceived in interpersonal dyadic terms and are in constant negotiation. The full range of alliances and appositions are often contingent upon the shifting boundaries of the community within the changing context of various factional struggles within or between contending groups. This is what Shahrani calls the “political ecology of particular times, places and spaces” (1998, p.220). As such, informal institutions of paternalism, nepotism, tribalism and ethno-regional favouritism suffused all aspects of state-society relations.

The post-Bonn period has not been exempt from this. In the elite settlement model, repression as a policy of domination over the periphery often fails in environments where societal forces are powerful and resilient (Rothchild, 1970). Therefore, Karzai has complemented the repression policy with the policy of accommodation, in which he has developed a complex network of relationships with former *Tanzim* leaders, tribal leaders, commanders and other power brokers extending as far as village level. However, the accommodation policy has been propagated in the form of a patron-client system, linking the leaders and sub-leaders of

various ethnic, tribal and factional groups with the governing elites. In this sense, the state has become a venue for contestation over the control of power by opposing elite networks.

Patron-client relations characterise the daily politics of contemporary Afghanistan. They take the form of patterns of interactions, in which selective benefits are distributed to individuals or groups in exchange for loyalty or political support, not limited to electoral process. As noted by Scott (1972, p.92) this relationship is dyadic and characterised by unequal status, reciprocity, and personal contact arranged hierarchically. Such relations link factional elites and their regional-ethnic or tribal clients to the state. Therefore, the state in Afghanistan is an expanding regime: a factionalised network of elites linked to President Karzai which uses state resources and positions in government to further consolidate power.

To recap, the above analysis provides a conceptual framework to consider the role of elite networks in co-opting the interventions of international statebuilding in Afghanistan. Elites should be understood as autonomous and factionalised actors who can be found on horizontal networks and at the top, middle or bottom of vertical patronage relations where they play the role of patrons, clients or both. Factional divisions are constituted of multiple bases of identity – ethnic, regional and clan/tribal – but made politically salient by elite manipulation. We can expect that these divisions have been exacerbated by the worsening violence and uncertainty as the Bonn settlement has faced a growing insurgency and continued inter-elite conflict. Both network ties and patron-client relations are likely to be more and more based on factions in these circumstances. Thus, I propose that as post-Taliban international statebuilding builds the modern Afghan state it is concomitantly building factionalised elite

networks and patronage relations. To explore how this came about we need to consider the Bonn settlement and its mechanisms.

Elite networks and the Bonn conference

Political settlements are aimed to provide frameworks for ending hostilities among opposing elites and a guide to post-conflict containment of failed states and its disorderly elites. With this logic, on the 5th of December 2001 the international community as well as the four main Afghan political elite groups concluded the agreement on provincial arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions (the *Bonn Agreement*).¹⁰ The Agreement began an internationally-supported four-year political process that included the holding of an Emergency Loya Jirga (grand council) in June 2002 to elect an Interim President to lead a transitional government which in turn would ratify a new Constitution in 2003. This was then followed by a Presidential election in October 2004 and the legislative elections a year after. Despite the meetings of these formal benchmarks of the Bonn Conference, I argue that Bonn was not a successful political settlement in resolving the Afghan elite fragmentation. This is because it set into motion the seeds of elite disunity, the consolidation of power by the internationally-supported Karzai faction and ultimately a conflict over the state which brought Afghanistan closer to inter-factional political violence in 2009. The formal survival of the Bonn Agreement is not an indication of its success and fundamental departure from other, more short-lived elite settlements since the Soviet withdrawal, but is due to the deterrent effect provided by external assistance and the presence of an unprecedented number of foreign troops.

Bonn political settlement and its consequences

The Bonn Conference was driven by the opposing forces of massive external pressure to produce a stable, pro-Western and preferably liberal-democratic regime in the aftermath of September 11 attacks and an internal political environment which was particularly ill-disposed to compromise. There was a shift in the compositions and positions of the ruling elite factions as the Taliban were driven out and some former Jihadi leaders (e.g Ahmad Shah Masud and Ali Mazari) were killed to be replaced by new jihadis and pro-Western technocrats. This change however was not significant in terms of the composition of the Jihadi elite and the nature of their power. Maley (2002, p.197) characterizes the Bonn Conference as an exercise in “elite restructuring” that came about when the carrots and sticks of international donors produced a reshuffling of national elites rather than the elimination of parties or a fundamental change in the nature of their power. This shuffling of the pack characterised the Bonn Settlement returned to power the same *Tanzim* elites who were responsible for the civil war and some of its worst brutalities, instead of auguring the transitional justice which many Afghans had hoped. Bonn had three main principal consequences for post-Taliban statebuilding in Afghanistan.

Firstly, the Bonn Conference was not inclusive enough of Afghanistan’s micro-societies as it excluded the Taliban and the Pashtun groups who were reluctant to line up behind Karzai. The factions disagreed on the rules of the game and the worth of the proposed political institutions. President Rabbani saw the conference as an attempt to replace him whilst he continued to preside over the legitimate government which occupied the UN seat. Furthermore there was tension between himself and other NA leaders, especially the military

wing of the *Jamiat Tanzim*. Karim Khalili, the *Wahdat* faction leader, Haji Abdul Qadir, an influential leader of Pashtuns in South East, and Abdul Sattar Sirat, Rome delegate leader, left in protest of the lack of representation of their particular interests (Maley, 2002, p. 269). Dostum, the leader of *Junbish* faction (predominantly Uzbek ethnic group) officially questioning the inclusiveness of the conference as only three Uzbek delegates were in attendance out of thirty two. According to Ghulam Muhammad Aylaqi, the Former vice-chairman to Karzai's Interim Administration and Current Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, "several participants did not sign the agreement. Sirat, Khalili and Haji Qadir had walked out. Enayatullah Wasefi, Sayyaf's representative, Abdullah Wardak and I did not sign it".¹¹

Secondly, the power-sharing process was hasty and shaped by urgent Western security concerns. Negotiations on the structure of the new government were strongly influenced by the changing military situation on the ground (Jalali 2003, p.175). It has been argued that Bonn was a "home-grown" settlement which benefited from a clear transitional framework and granted substantial ownership of the transitional process to Afghans (Papagianni, 2005). However, international donors mediated the process to achieve a deal which satisfied their counter-terrorism agenda and allowed them to fill the military vacuum that was created in Afghanistan with a new, friendly and weak regime. The decision on who could attend, which factional elites should be excluded and how they should be accommodated was made in the first place by the donors. The senior advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moradian noted that "The Bonn Agreement did not reflect the Afghan people, but reflected the American policy and interests....both Khalilzad [the US envoy] and the NA hijacked the conference as both parties decided on the outcome."¹² Both Abdul Sattar Sirat and Mr Aylaqi, confirm this point.¹³ Much like previous Afghan elite settlements, international

coercion shaped the process and led to a formal agreement which was all set to be undermined by the fully and partially excluded factions and interest groups.

Thirdly and most importantly, the conference created real winners and losers. These did not necessarily reflect the general estimate of the Afghan demographic balance, or even the political power of the factions, but the internationally-sponsored military successes of the NA. Bonn thus set the stage for further distrust, exclusion and alienation of certain ethnic-factional elites. De jure, the four main Afghan political groups agreed to a “broad-based, multi-ethnic, politically balanced, freely chosen Afghan administration representatives of their aspirations” (United Nations, 2001). De facto, power was largely dominated by the NA, which was a loose coalition of four anti-Taliban factions who had long fought one another during the civil war. And within the NA, the military wing of *Jamiat Tanzim*, predominantly Tajiks of the Panjshir valley controlled most power.¹⁴ The NA took 17 of the 30 government positions, which included most of the important ministries including Defence, Interior, Foreign, Intelligence, Planning and Commerce. Only the Presidency and the Ministry of Finance were beyond their reach. Qaseem Fahim also became a vice-chairman to Karzai (see table 1).

This was proximate to a “winner-takes-all” scenario in which the NA who had liberated Kabul and were in possession of two thirds of the country, were awarded the lion’s share of posts. Ethnically, Tajiks were over-represented, whereas Pashtuns, Uzbeks and Hazaras suffered underrepresentation. According to Goodson (2005, p.90, 94) its main failure was the failure to include more Pashtuns in the government, bringing Pashtun dissatisfaction to the surface once more. Karzai was surrounded in his own cabinet by powerful NA political elites, who made sure that his authority remained weak and circumscribed. In the country, Karzai’s

authority was limited to Kabul city as regional leaders and warlords took control of the provinces where they had their own militias, sources of income and autonomous administrations. Ismail Khan was the governor of four Western provinces, Gul Aga Shirzai controlled Kandahar and General Dostum and General Atta controlled different parts of the North. This exacerbated the fragmentation of central authority in Afghanistan rather than its consolidation.

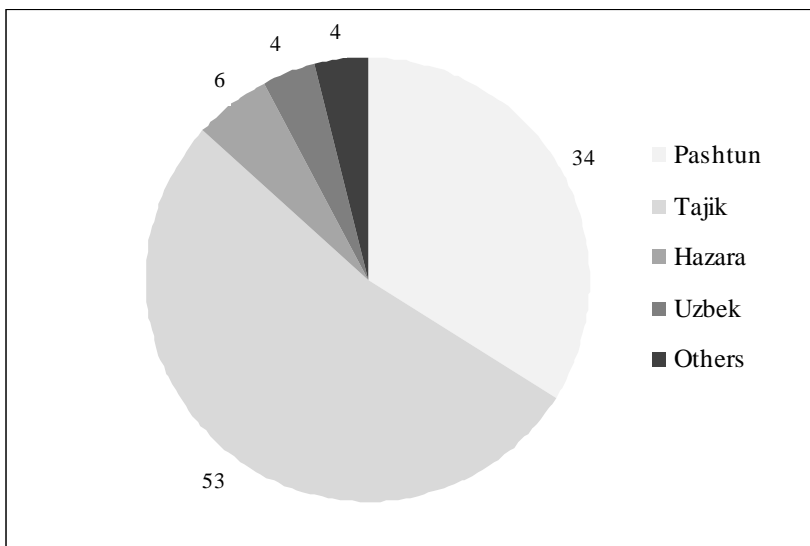
Ministers by faction¹⁵

Departments	2001 (Interim Government)	End of 2004 Cabinet
Defense	M. Qaseem Fahim	Abdul Rahim Wardak
Finance	Hedayat Amin Arsala	Anvar ul Haq Ahadi
Foreign Affairs	Dr Abdullah Abdullah	Dr Abdullah Abdullah*
Interior	Younous Qanooni	Ali Ahmad Jalali
Planning	Mohammad Mohaqeq	Ramazaan Bashardost
Commerce	Seyyed Mustafa Kazemi	Hedayat A. Arsala
Mines & Industries	Muhammad Alem Razm	Mir M. Saeq
Small Industries	Aref Noorzai	Removed---
Information & Culture	Raheen Makhdoom	Raheen Makhdoom
Communication	Abdul Rahim	Amirzai Sangeen
Labour & Social Affairs	Mir Wais Sadeq	Sayed Ekramuddin Agha
Haji & Auqaf	Mohammad Hanif Hanif Balkhi	Namatullah Shahrani
Martyrs & Disabled	Abdullah Wardak	Sediqa Balkhi
Education	Abdul Salam Azimi	Noor M. Qarqeen
Higher Education:	Sharif Faez	Amir Shah Hassanyar
Public Health	Suhaila Seddiqi	Mohammed Amin Fatemi
Public Works	Juna Mohammad Mohammadi	Suhrab Ali Safari
Rural Development	Abdul Malik Anwar	Hanif Atmar
Urban Development	Abdul Qadir	Eng. Yusuf Pashtun
Reconstruction	Amin Farhang	Amin Farhang
Transport	Ishaq Shahryar	Enayatullah Qasemi
Water and Electricity	Shaker Kargar	Ismail Khan
Refugees	Enayatullah Nazeri	Mohammad Azam Dadfar
Agriculture	Seyyed Hussein Anwari	Ubaidullah Ramin
Irrigation	Mangal Hussein	Combined---
Justice	A. Rahim Karimi	Sarwar Danish
Air Transport & Tourism	Rahim Wardak	Removed--- Combined to Tmasport
Border Affairs		Mohammed Karim Brahoye
Women's Affairs	Sima Samar	Ms. Masouda Jalal
Economy		Amin Farhang

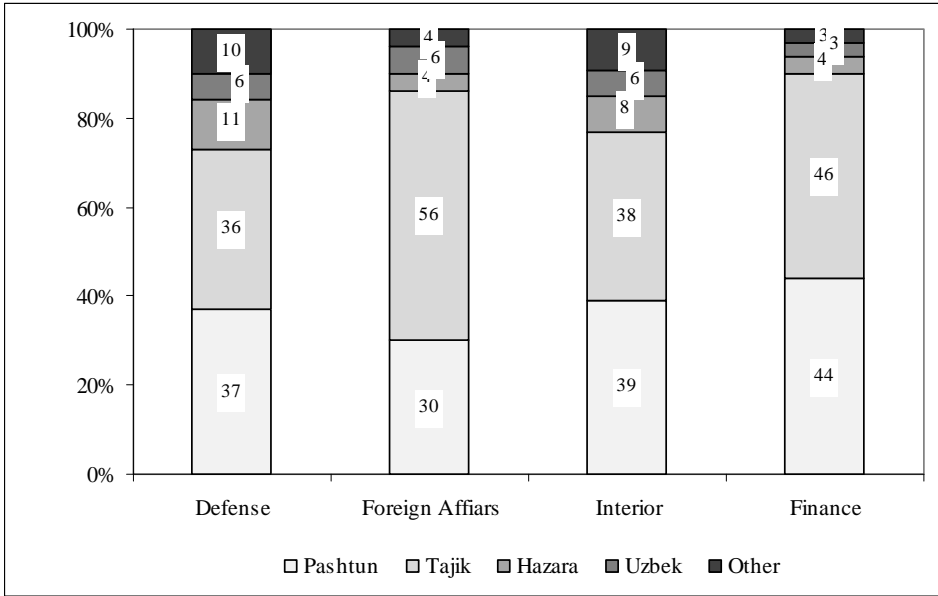
All this set the stage for further inter-elite conflict based on identity politics. Jalali, Afghan academic and former Interior minister, (2003, p.176) argued that “monopolization of power [by the NA factions] precluded the emergence of an ethnically balanced post-Taliban government.” With the sudden evacuation of Kabul city by the Taliban, the Panjshiri led Tajik faction of the NA who had seized control of the city, immediately dominated the main bureaucracy (Jalali, 2003, p.175). Data collected by Office of Administrative Affairs (2006) confirm that monopolization not just at ministerial level but at all levels of Afghan government – bureaucracy, army and police – was consolidated under Bonn.¹⁶ It also shows nepotism, at least along ethnic lines, in government bureaucracy that followed with the appointment of new government positions in 2001. Figures 1 and 2 show that even in 2006, after the formal elimination of most NA Tajik *Jamiat* Faction from the government, Tajiks comprised 53% of the government bureaucracy at grade 3 and above, compared to Pashtuns at 34% and Hazara and Uzbek respectively at 4% each.¹⁷ The ethnic composition of four main ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Interior and Finance also confirm this point about the over-representation of certain Tajik elites in the early Bonn period, where Panjshiris controlled the first three ministries from 2001-2004 (Figure 2). The “security gap” that resulted from ISAF’s initial limited mandate to operate inside Kabul meant that provision of security relied heavily on indigenous anti-Taliban forces (numbering about 100,000) under the command of various warlords (Goodson, 2003, p. 15). From 2001 to the removal of Fahim and Qanooni from the ministry of Defence and Interior in 2004, Afghanistan’s national army and police force were dominated by one ethnic sub-group, the Tajiks of the Panjshir Valley (see Figure 3). This is reflective of Afghanistan’s tradition of state operation and bureaucracy staffing, which have used ethnic, tribal and other forms of solidarity affiliations as a basis of distribution of state resources – whether economic, educational and political. Subsequently, this shaped popular perceptions that, in the new era, Afghan politics

were once again to be divided along ethnic lines and that democratic representation and a fair balance of factions was only found in the rhetoric of internationals.

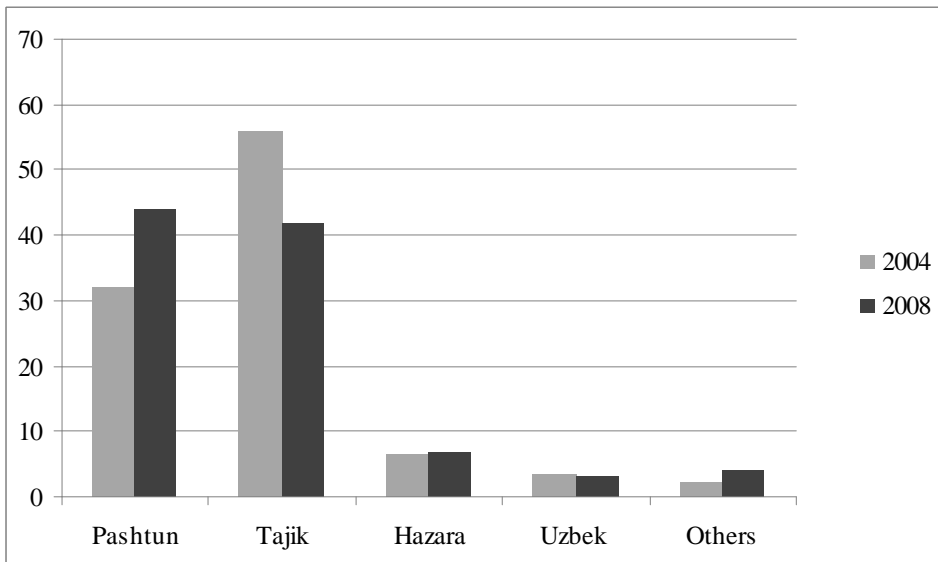
[FIGURE 1 SOMEWHERE HERE] Ethnic Composition of Government Bureaucracy at Grade 3 and above (%)



[FIGURE 2 SOMEWHERE HERE] Ethnic Composition of Four Top Ministries at Grade 3 and above (%)



[FIGURE 3 SOMEWHERE HERE] Afghanistan National Army by Ethnic Group



The Consolidation of Power by the Karzai Network

The failure of the Bonn Agreement to “codify de facto power-sharing” (Rubin, 2002, p.155) that could resolve elite conflict, set into motion fierce internal competition between different elites within the government. This conflict has shaped the character of the post-Bonn settlement era. When there is no broad consensus on the boundaries of political community the political authority typically relies on some combination of *repression* and *accommodation* to maintain order. With the ostensible legitimacy accrued by Karzai in his indirect election as the head of Transitional Administration in the *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly) of 2002, he adopted a *repression policy* to extend his political authority beyond Kabul and his home region. Therefore, from the end of 2002 Karzai began to work towards the exclusion of the main NA elites from the cabinet by utilizing state resources and his position as the head of the state. International perception of the state as a unified and consolidated body has largely given both material resources and legitimacy to the Karzai regime as the state, and therefore to Karzai’s actions as the figurehead of that state. It is fair to characterise the period between 2002 to 2005 as an elite contestation over the control of the state between a largely Western Pashtun technocrats led by Karzai and his close allies Jalali and Ahadi who stood one side and the overwhelmingly Northern Alliance former Jihadi networks. The difference here was clearly international support, which shifted decisively to Karzai and his predominant Pashtun allies and thus fomented the factional conflict which was to come.

A careful analysis of changes in the cabinet between the Post-Bonn and the 2004 post-presidential election cabinet confirm this point. By the end of 2004 there was only one main NA political figure, Dr Abdullah, left in the cabinet who was eventually replaced by Dadfar Spanta, a Hirati, in 2006. The NA Jihadi elites were effectively replaced with predominantly Southern Pashtun and Western-educated technocrats in Defense (Rahim Wardak), Finance (Abdul Haq Ahadi), Interior (Ahmad Jalali), Reconstruction (Hedayat Arsala), Economy

(Amin Farhang) and Rehabilitation and Rural Development (Hanif Atmar). But Karzai's repression policy was supplemented by accommodation in the form of the cooptation of rival warlords. By 2004 he managed to co-opt Ismail Khan (Minister Energy and Water), Rashid Dostum (Symbolic Chief of Staff) and Gul Aga Shirzai (First Urban Development minister and then governor of Nangarhar province), three of the country's most powerful warlords, through the offer of positions in the central government. This was a high-risk strategy which led directly to significant outbreaks of political violence in these regions. Both in Hirat and Mazar, the president's consolidation of power involved playing one commander or warlord against another.¹⁸ Evidence from these provinces show how Karzai's allies have gradually used their position in the state and state's resources in war-making so to strengthen their position, particularly vis-a-vis the Jihadi Panjshiris. As the elite network which acted as gatekeeper to the external resources supporting "statebuilding", the Karzai regime was able to deploy these resources against other elite networks in their conflict over the state.

These inter-twined strategies of repression and accommodation brought two results. Firstly, they allowed Karzai to consolidate his power and to extend his network's penetration of society. Secondly, it brought a shift of power from NA Jihadis, particularly Panjshiris to predominantly South and South Eastern Pashtun and technocratic elites. Whilst the promotion of technocrats pleased Karzai's international backers, they were unable to prevent the ethno-regional divisions that also characterized this process of reversing the political balance which favoured Panjshiri Tajiks in the immediate post-Bonn period. Karzai's attempts reflected the general mood of Pashtuns who felt that they had lost the dominant position in Afghan politics, what they saw as a "decline of Pashtun's hegemony". However, Karzai regime's consolidation of power has been propagated in the form of a patron-client system, linking leaders and sub-leaders of various ethnic, tribal and factional groups with the state. This

section explores two main types of clients which the president has relied on. These are: 1) ethno-regional factional (*Tanzim*) leaders; and 2) the provincial and district government officials.

1) Ethno-Regional Factions (Tanzim)

Clientelism has ebbed and flowed as a feature of Afghan politics. Its present form is closely interlinked with ethno-regional factions. Karzai and his elite network have gradually sought the support of the powerful factional patrons. Evidently this was best utilised at the 2009 presidential election. During the election he was successful to co-opt some of the key factional elites: Mohaqeq and Khalili for Hazara vote, Dostum and Sayyed Nurullah for Uzbek vote, Fahim and Ismail Khan for Tajik vote and Akhundzada and Gul Aga Shirzai for Pashtun vote in the South. Individuals such as Rasul Sayyaf, one of the most important Jihadi leaders and influential MP in parliament, and Sebqatullah Mojaddadi, the leader of Upper House and former president, are other national elites whose networking abilities are often used by Karzai both in parliament and beyond (Bijlert, 2009, p.10).

This patronage relationship is clearly based on reciprocity. This was best manifested at the 2009 presidential election. During the election while Karzai promised ministerial positions, licenses, government contracts and development funds as political resources for these clients, factional patrons like Mohaqeq, the leader of the *Wahdat* faction, demanded five ministries for Hazaras. The demands of Mohaqeq are a good illustration of the kinds of requests which were made. He summarised his terms as follows: “We want the proper position of Hazara in Afghan politics and economic development. We want five ministries to reflect our population....construction of Central Highland’s roads from Kabul to Bamian, and the

establishment of Jaghuri and Behsud districts into provinces... This is not a promise, it is an agreement and I believe that we can get what we agreed to".¹⁹ He further demanded the power to decide whom to appoint. The decision to allow General Dostum, the leader of Uzbek *Junbish* faction, to return to country from exile in Turkey is a clear example of the extent to which Karzai regime went to use ethnic-factional clients for its gain. As Karzai's senior advisors stated: "Dostum's call did turn the tide for Mr Karzai."²⁰ In return, these factions' became a mediator or campaign agent of the leading presidential candidates as they provided their own staff and resources to mobilise electorates. These examples indicate that the ethno-regional patronage relations elicited by the election and the post-Bonn political process have extensive ramifications not just for the nature of governance in Afghanistan but the politico-administrative shape of the state itself. This raises questions of statebuilding which will be returned to in the conclusion of this article.

The majority of Afghans to follow these ethno-regional leaders suggests that they are mere automatons and easily prone to manipulation. However, this solidarity emerges both from the structure and composition of Afghan society and the legacy of decades of violent political conflict. The linkages between elites and the electorate are personalised and characterised by little institutionalisation (Roberts 2002). In such a complex security dilemma it seems expected to follow those politicians who promise to deliver or who have already delivered a particular mix of goods and services to them as individuals or small groups in return. Most Afghans have no access to public information. According to the 2005 Millennium Development Goals report for Afghanistan an estimated 90 per cent of women and 63 per cent of men in rural areas of Afghanistan, where the large majority live, are illiterate. As argued by Scott (1970), in a condition where physical security, status, and wealth are precarious, subordinates seek to substitute this by attaching themselves to ethnic elites,

warlords and powerful power brokers who are capable of providing protection and even advancement. These patron-client linkages provide a “personal security mechanism”.

The post-Bonn state has become the major source of protection, of security, of employment for most elites. Karzai network has been deliberately maintaining an expensive patronage system in parliament with payments to MPs to pass bills or when the approval of parliament is required for the appointment of a new minister. The next two quotes from two influential MPs summarised this relationship.

Most of them [MPs] supported the government. The opposition is weak and powerless. When opposition members like myself are threatened what can we do? Mawlawi Takhel [MP] rigged 50,000 votes before the election for Karzai [referring to 2004 election] and later he confessed saying I did it because I got money and lands from government and because Karzai is the only one who can provide me with security. Another MP [who] was supporting Karzai when asked why? He replied because I have been accused of killing 41 people so if I do not support him what guarantee is there that they would not kill me. He is in power.²¹

Similarly, another MP noted,

even international holidays and trips are decided on the basis of which group you belong to. If you are not part of that group you can never go. Karzai has got 70-80 MPs on his side. They have their own special meetings. Even the ministers sit with them often bribing them as they are offered trips abroad, gifts, and positions for their relatives.²²

These quotes show the nature of statehood and governance that is being propagated by this system of payments and promises.

2) *State Patron-Client Networks*

The best-resourced buyer in a client-patron network is usually a political actor close to government resources, most often the incumbent authorities (Piattoni 2001). A second type of group through which Karzai has extended its regime network is the state networks of provincial and district governors and officials. This network is not mutually exclusive of the former network but overlaps with it at certain moments. It is largely agreed that Afghanistan's political system is one of the most centralised in the world in which the president appoints not only the provincial and district governors, but also provincial and district police chiefs. Subsequently, Karzai's regime has benefited from this opportunity where they continuously award their allies and friends in state positions at all levels of governance. In the 2009 presidential election, it was this regime-state network that ensured Karzai success. Interviews with some provincial and district governors confirmed that prior to the election these officials were called to Kabul to reaffirm their allegiance and were even instructed on what measures to take. The only two governors that openly declared their support for the opposing contender, Dr Abdullah, were General Atta and Haji Bahlol, retrospectively the governor of Balkh and Panjshir provinces. In the South, it was a similar story. In addition to provincial and district government fraud and vote-rigging, officials threatened tribal leaders in order to get out the vote for Karzai. In the uncertainty generated by a regime-state where the rule of law is absent in most areas, the fear of punishment is quite high. Tribal leaders were continuously reminded that if they did not vote for the government,

they would be excluded from the local government: meaning jobs, aid money and privileges. In Helmand province, the two main tribes, the Noorzai and Achekzai, were threatened that “if you do not vote for Karzai I would appoint all the chiefs and governor from that other tribe.”²³”

These networks as a part of the international sponsored post-Bonn statebuilding are producing a state which is indistinguishable from the regime. In this sense, the state is not a homogenous entity but rather a venue for contestation among different opposing elite networks. The state provides the forum for inter-elite conflict made manifest in ethno-regional division, local opportunism or the expropriation of public resources for personal gain. Indeed the state itself exacerbates this problem as it provides the primary incentive structure – outside of the drug trade – for inter-elite conflict.

Conclusion

In sum, my multi-dimensional account of the role of elite networks and faction politics in contemporary Afghanistan sheds new light on the post-Bonn international statebuilding, regime formation and bargaining. Inter-elite conflict has become the main driving force for politicisation of identities, particularly those of ethnicity, and of the increasingly ethno-regional composition of patronage networks. Elite fragmentation, ethnicity and patronage relations have become mutually reinforcing. The internationally-sponsored state provides a framework for inter-elite competition and endows the faction(s) which controls its various parts with symbolic and material resources. These factions, and the regime they together represent, in turn constitute the state itself. This then is the nature of statebuilding in

contemporary Afghanistan: containing multiple layers of contradiction yet “progressing” to build a schismatic state divided by ethno-regional factionalism and begetting profiteering and opportunism.

This paper was an attempt to understand the inter-elite divisions and conflicts that have emerged under the auspices of the post-Bonn international statebuilding process in Afghanistan. Despite four political settlements since 1989, Afghanistan still suffers from a crisis of elite fragmentation where the internationally-backed state provides the sticks and carrots to both foment and settle battles amongst faction leaders. The 2009 presidential election provided yet another excellent opportunity for the Karzai network to firmly consolidate its regime. A careful analysis of Karzai’s 2010 cabinet nominees shows how skilfully he has managed to do this. It was clear in the election that the Karzai regime had offered to sell the state several times over the promise of posts, contracts and aid which it may never be able to deliver. On the one hand, he met promises to his clients by appointing their nominees in second-ranking cabinet positions; on the other hand, he made no effort in making sure they were approved by parliament. Many Northern Allies’ nominees, including once-powerful individuals such as Ismail Khan (former Hirat Governor and former Minister of Energy) were rejected. On the other hand, key allies, largely southern Pashtuns were appointed to key ministries including Defence (Rahim Wardak), Interior (Hanif Atmar), Finance (Omar Zakhilwal), Foreign (Zalmay Rasul), Economy (Hadi Arghandival), Education (Farooq Wardak). With Karzai’s main supporters in powerful government positions he has further expanded his network through an effective patron-client system.

The post-Bonn statebuilding process has further exacerbated inter-elite conflict and the ethno-regional divisions and clientalistic features of Afghanistan’s state and society.

However, like many previous power transfers in Afghanistan it might prove to be unstable and prone to resistance and interference by excluded elites as it was almost close to bring the country to the brink of violence in the aftermath of 2009 presidential election. Consequently, this might further lead to the fragmentation of elites. The aggravation of ethnic and clientelistic linkages will also have serious consequences for Western-led international intervention. Plainly put, it precludes the emergence of the kind of stable, predictable and relatively accountable state that is posited as the outcome and endpoint of the mission.

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² *Tanzim* is used to refer to the ethno-regional military-political formations that emerged during the Jihad years against the Soviet Union.

³ Elsewhere, repression and accommodation are denoted as control and cooptation. See Byman (2002) for a survey of this literature.

⁴ This study draws on my fieldwork in 2009 in Afghanistan. Participant observation in three districts of Kabul (Dashte Barchi, district 13; Chaharrahi Sarsabzi and Shamali, district 11; and Karet Naw, district 8) was carried out. In addition, 24 in-depth interviews with key political informants such as ethnic-regional clients, leaders of political parties and campaign directors were conducted. I wish to thank my research assistant, Abbas Arianzay.

⁵ For the dynamics of political elite settlements in Afghanistan from the Soviet-withdrawal in 1989 to 2001 see Maley (1997, 2002, and 2006) and Saikal (1998).

⁶ Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was supported by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), Rasul Sayyaf by Saudi Arabia, Ali Mazari by Iran and General Dostum by Uzbekistan and Turkey.

⁸ My argument here is not that factionalism is a phenomenon of Central Asia or, more broadly, the underdeveloped or post-colonial worlds, but rather that it may be considered as taking certain forms within the region and thus, in this respect, a comparison between Afghanistan and the post-Soviet republics may be constructive.

⁹ Historically, Afghan kings and leaders relied almost exclusively on the support of their own immediate family, lineage, clans, tribes and larger ethnic community (Shahrani, 1998). In return, their loyal kinsmen and supporters were amply rewarded, often at the expense of "other" tribal or ethno-regional communities, especially in Hazarajat who lost their pastoral and agricultural land and property.

¹⁰ The first group was the Northern Alliance (NA) associated with the *Jamiat Tanzim* and its allies after 1996. The Rome group was associated with King Zahir. The Peshawar group was associated with Gilani, the old seven Sunni Mujahedeen groups in Pakistan. And the final group - known as the Cyprus group - was associated with Humayoun Jareer in Iran. The Rome group was selected to balance and represent the Western interests, the NA were the winners against the Taliban while the two smaller groups were selected arguably to please Afghanistan's neighbours, in particular Iran and Pakistan

¹¹ Author Interview with Aylaqi, 17 June 2009

¹² Author Interview with Moradian, 12 June 2009

¹³ Aylaqi, Interview 17 June 2009; Abdul Sattar Sirat's Interview with Guradian.

¹⁴ This must be taken with caution as Jamiat has long been internally further divided into sub-branches and some elites of the Northern Alliance have shifted allegiance. General Fahim, the Former Defence Secretary joined Karzai as first vice-president and Qanooni, the head of House of Representatives who run for presidency in 2004 against Karzai has set up his own party *Hizbe Afghanistani Naween*.

¹⁵ There were 26 ministries and 4 vice-chairman positions, totalling 30. The Light grey is the NA ministers and the dark grey is the Rome ministers.

¹⁶ According to the office of Administrative Affairs the aim of the study was to come up with a more inclusive bureaucracy and inclusion of minorities in the government. The margin of error is estimated at 10%.

¹⁷ This shows a significant over-representation of Tajiks and a serious under-representation of Hazara and Uzbeks when compared to the estimated overall ethnic composition of Afghanistan with Tajiks constituting 24%, Pashtuns 35%, Hazara 19% and Uzbeks 9% of the population.

¹⁸ For the full account of Ismail Khan and General Dostum struggle with the central government see Human Rights Watch 2004 Rome Report and Antonio Guiztossi (2005).

¹⁹ Author interview

²⁰ Author interview

²¹ Author Interview with an independent MP from North

²² Author interview with a female MP

²³ Author interview with one of Kandahar's Independent Human Rights officers