

Query response a-7367 of 6 September 2010

Afghanistan: Afghan Hazaras from Ghazni Province (1) Nexus between general security situation and Hazara minority in Ghazni province, particularly in Jaghuri district; 2) Clashes between Hazaras and Kuchi nomads in Ghazni; 3) General information on the situation of the Hazaras)

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Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

1) Nexus between general security situation and Hazara minority in Ghazni province, particularly in Jaghuri district

In an article published on the information platform Australian History and Analysis, Denise Phillips, PhD Candidate of the University of New England (UNE), states that Hazaras were directly affected by a deterioration of the general security situation in Ghazni province. According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, Taliban were distributing night letters that announced a closure of the road to Jaghori, thereby raising fears of a replication of a Taliban road blockage of essential supplies in the late 1990s. When 11 decapitated corpses were found in Oruzgan province in June 2010, a police official reported they were killed by the Taliban because of their Hazara and Shiite origin:

"Hazaras are facing dire threats in Afghanistan's central provinces. Jaghori residents in Ghazni province have been warned of an imminent Taliban takeover, and Oruzgan province recently has seen the Taliban killing of 11 Hazaras, decapitated because of their ethnicity and religion. [...] The United Nations Security Council on Afghanistan recently reported that more civilian deaths occurred in 2009 than any other year since 2001. January 2010 brought a further decline, with 40 percent more security breaches than in the previous January. Suicide attack methods have become more sophisticated and the

use of improvised explosive devices is rising. Increasingly savvy, the Taliban are now pursuing a new strategy to win the 'hearts and minds' of ordinary Afghans.

These failures of security are directly affecting Hazara-populated regions within Ghazni, Oruzgan and Maidan Wardak provinces. Ghazni's general security has been worsening, with the assassination of a former governor in 2006 and 23 South Koreans being held hostage by the Taliban in 2007. Analysts deemed Ghazni to be 'among the most volatile provinces in southern Afghanistan'. In June 2010, the Afghanistan Analysts Network in Kabul reported that the Taliban have distributed 'night letters', a method of intimidation, to districts within Ghazni province. The night letters warn that the main road out of Jaghori which links to Kabul is now closed and 'not to prevent the [Taliban's] entry into this area'. Many now fear that insurgents will penetrate central Afghanistan and fear a repeat of the Taliban's road blockade of essential supplies in the late 1990s. Located in Ghazni province, Jaghori is the former home of many Hazara refugees in Australia. Disturbingly, just 11 weeks after the government's suspension, the decapitated corpses of 11 Hazara males were discovered in the Khas Oruzgan district of Oruzgan province on 25 June 2010. Police official Mohammed Gulab Wardak reported they were killed by the Taliban 'because they were ethnic Hazaras and Shiite Muslims.'" (Phillips, Denise/UNE, August 2010)

Thomas Ruttig, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network, reports in June 2010 of a possibly imminent attack of the Taliban of Jaghori district, founding his assessment of the situation on Taliban nightletters being distributed at the border of Qarabagh and Jaghori districts. Aside from declaring the road to Jaghori closed, the letters appeal to the local population 'not to prevent the [Taliban's] entry into this area', which according to Ruttig could be a sign of an imminent or planned attack on Jaghori. Although most Hazaras had been hostile to the Taliban's advance into their region in the 1990s, recent Taliban activity in peripheral areas of the Hazarajat has increased markedly, he states:

"The Taliban might plan an advance into the central region of the Hazarajat, one of the last areas of the country that hitherto have only been marginally affected by insurgent activities. This has been reported by Kabul-based Hasht-e Sobh daily last Thursday ('Taleban dar pay-e nufuz ba munateq-e markazi / Taliban begin to influence central areas') on the basis of Taliban nightletters distributed at the border of Qarabagh and Jaghori districts, in southeastern Hazarajat. Both districts belong to Ghazni province but the border between them marks the limit between Pashtun (Qarabagh) and Hazara-settled (Jaghori) areas.

The nightletters shown in the newspaper are handwritten (as they are often), carry the official letterhead of the Taliban Islamic Emirate's Qarabagh district administration but are not dated. They declare the road linking Jaghori, through Qarabagh, with the Kabul-Kandahar section of the great Afghan ringroad closed. The traffic on this road, the quickest connection between Kabul where many Jaghori Hazaras live, and their area of origin has been difficult since at least two years but was made almost impossible in the last few months. According to Hasht-e Sobh, commodity prices in Jaghori have already

soared. The local population is afraid of a repetition of the Taliban blockade of Hazarajat in the late 1990s.

Most significantly, the Taliban nightletters also appeal to the local population, as Hasht-e Sobh writes, 'not to prevent the [Taliban's] entry into this area.' This could be a sign for an imminent -- or at least a planned -- attack on Jaghori, a district that is characterized by relatively high standards of boys' and girls' education. The newspaper further quotes analysts who say that this might indicate 'a new plan of the [Taliban] to expand their influence on the country's central [mainly Hazara-populated] areas.' This would follow successful inroads into the north and northeast of the country where insurgent activity has abruptly increased of late.

Most Hazaras had been hostile to the Taliban's advance into their region in the 1990s after the movement that considered Shia non-Muslim had committed some mass murders against the minority group, for example in Mazar-e Sharif, Yakaolang (Bamian province) and at the Robatak Pass (Samangan). [...] Apart from Qarabagh and Jaghori, Taliban activity in peripheral areas of the Hazarajat has increased markedly. Over the past months, sporadic Taliban attacks or fighting was reported from the Shibar Pass in Bamian province, from Sarepul in the north and Ghor in the West. In most of those areas, as in the Afghan north, the activity seems to origin in neighboring Pashtun areas." (Ruttig, Thomas/Afghanistan Analysts Network, 21 June 2010)

Mr. Ruttig has been contacted and asked for further information on a nexus between incidents of generalized violence and the ethnicity of the Hazaras in Ghazni/Jaghori. We will forward any information obtained as soon as we receive a response.

According to Professor William Maley, Director of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the Australian National University, of June 2010, the Taliban showed heightened insurgent activity in parts of Ghazni. Referring to Thomas Ruttig, Maley furthermore argues that the situation in Ghazni might deteriorate, leaving all Ghazni unsafe for Hazaras, even in districts where they might seem numerically predominant:

"Many asylum seekers in Australia have come from the province of Ghazni . The Taliban are now active in parts of Ghazni. As early as 20 May 2003, it was described by Todd Pitman in an Associated Press despatch as 'a hotbed of suspected Taliban activity southwest of Kabul '. The former governor was assassinated in 2006, and an analysis in April 2006 concluded that 'A fierce Taleban-led insurgency in recent months has placed Ghazni, which lies just 135 km south of Kabul, among the most volatile provinces in southern Afghanistan': Borhan Younus, Taleban Call the Shots in Ghazni (Kabul: Afghan Recovery Report no.213, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 25 April 2006). The situation since then has arguably become even worse (see Christoph Reuter and Borhan Younus, 'The Return of the Taliban in Andar District: Ghazni', in Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field (London : Hurst & Co., 2009) pp.101-118). No part of Ghazni can realistically be considered safe for Hazaras, even in districts where they might seem numerically predominant. Most disturbingly, the June 2010 study by the Afghanistan Analysts Network warns of a risk to these areas: 'The Taleban

successfully have infiltrated Northern and Northeastern Afghanistan and destabilised certain areas, mainly in Kunduz province. Now, there are signs that they might attempt to push forward into mainly Hazara-settled areas [in] the central region. The main road into Jaghori, an important Hazara area, has been blocked raising fears of a new economic blockade or event an attack' (Thomas Ruttig, A New Taliban Front? (Kabul : Afghanistan Analysts Network, 18 June 2010))." (Maley, William/ANU, June 2010)

In April 2009, the Institute for the Study of War reported that the security situation in Ghazni Province had deteriorated from 2007 to 2009 with an increase in violent incidents such as bombings, assassinations and kidnappings:

„The security situation in Ghazni Province deteriorated from 2007 to 2009. Taliban forces loyal to the Mullah Omar-led Quetta Shura and fighters led by Jalaluddin Haqqani are operating in the province. They have expanded their control in remote areas and villages, particularly in the Pashtun-dominated district of Ajristan. Violent incidents such as bombings, assassinations and kidnappings are increasing. Armed groups have closed schools in several districts of the province, including Qarabagh, Andar, Ajristan, Zana Khan, Dih Yak, Ab Band, Giro and Gelan. The worsening of security in Ghazni has negatively impacted travel via the Kabul-Kandahar road. In October 2008, roughly 1,600 Polish troops assumed responsibility for security in Ghazni. The Pashtun inhabited districts are more lawless. However, concern persists that ISAF lacks the troops required to secure the province.“ (The Institute for the Study of War, 15 April 2009)

The Swiss Refugee Council (SFH) states in an update on the security situation in Afghanistan of August 2010, that the security situation was among the worst in Ghazni, with assassinations, intimidations and bombings being common in the southern and eastern provinces:

„Weitverbreitete Ermordungen, Einschüchterungen und Bombenanschläge prägen die Sicherheitslage in den südlichen und östlichen Provinzen. Seit dem Beginn der Offensiven im Süden Afghanistans hat sich die Situation dort drastisch verschlechtert. In Helmand, Kunar, Ghazni, Kandhar und Khost ist die Sicherheitslage am schlechtesten.“ (SFH, 11 August 2010, p. 9)

2) Clashes between Hazaras and Kuchi nomads in Ghazni

According to the annual country report on human rights practices by the US Department of State (USDOS) published in March 2010, ethnic tensions between Hazara and the Kuchi nomads constitute a further destabilizing factor in Ghazni province:

„There were no updates regarding the June 2008 violence between Hazara and the Kuchi nomads in Wardak province; however, ethnic tensions between the groups were reported in Ghazni province, fueled by conflicts over grazing rights, especially in the high passes in Jaghato, Nawur, and Kwaja Omari.“ (USDOS, 11 March 2010, Section 6)

BBC Monitoring in August 2010 quotes the operative deputy head of the National Directorate of Security, according to whom the conflict between Hazaras and Kuchis had a political

dimension as well. He furthermore stated that Taliban were threatening a number of districts, among others in Ghazni:

„The internal security and regional affairs committee of the Senate summoned the operative deputy head of the NDS, Mohammad Nahim, to its session. Nahim said that the directorate had launched an investigation into the recent dispute between Hazaras and Kuchis in the capital, adding that they have so far arrested one person in connection with this case and efforts are under way to arrest all of the perpetrators of this incident.

He said that the Hazaras and Kuchis disputed over land, but it took a political shape when a number of political circles got involved in the dispute. [...] He also said that Taleban militants were threatening a number of districts in Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, Baghlan, Konduz, Nurestan and some other provinces and it is difficult to hold the [parliamentary] elections in these provinces.“ (BBC Monitoring South Asia, 24 August 2010)

3) General information on the situation of the Hazaras

According to the USDOS of March 2010, Shia Hazaras faced social discrimination:

„Social discrimination against Shia Hazaras continued along class, race, and religious lines. Ethnic Hazaras reported occasionally being asked to pay additional bribes at border crossings where Pashtuns were allowed to pass freely.“ (USDOS, 11 March 2010, Section 2c)

In its annual report on religious freedom published in October 2009, the USDOS underlines the socially segregated position of Hazaras, additionally referring to Hazara complaints against the government of ignoring minorities, especially Hazaras. On the other hand, the government in 2009 made significant efforts to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community:

“Most Shi'a were members of the Hazara ethnic group, which was traditionally segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious reasons, some of which resulted in conflicts. The Hazaras accused the government, led by Pashtuns, of providing preferential treatment to Pashtuns and of ignoring minorities, especially Hazaras. The government made significant efforts to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community, including affirmative hiring practices. Although there were reported incidents of unofficial discrimination, and treatment varied by locality, Shi'a generally were free to participate fully in public life.“ (USDOS, 26 October 2009, Section III)

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated in July 2009 that Hazaras were affected by social discrimination, neglect by the government (despite efforts to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community, and the rising power of warlords, which might pose a direct threat to the Hazara community:

“Social discrimination against the Hazaras continues to be reported, including being asked to pay bribes at border crossings where Pashtuns were allowed to pass freely. Despite significant efforts by the Government to address historical tensions affecting the Hazara community, including preferential employment, some Hazaras community leaders accused

President Karzai of providing preferential treatment to Pashtuns to the detriment of other minorities, particularly the Hazaras. Furthermore, the rising power of warlords is also a concern for the Hazaras as they may pose a direct threat to the Hazara community given the absence of State presence and rule of law in many areas." (UNHCR, July 2009, p. 19)

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