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Hazara Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan: the increasing dangers they would face if they return

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Note: The following updates have been released since the original release of this paper.

- **Collection of new material: 8th November 2012**
- **Supplementary update: 12th February 2013**
- **Supplementary update: 19th May 2013**
- **Supplementary update: 28th February 2014**

All of these papers are available on our website:

bmrsg.org.au/research-material/afganistan/

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Introduction

After the September 2010 lifting of the 6 month freeze on processing Hazara asylum seekers by Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the percentage of this group being granted protection dropped from more than 99% (up to March 2010) to less than 50%.²

Analysis of the assessment reports and review decisions indicates that a major factor in the large number of rejections was the use of country information that was alleged to indicate safety for any Hazaras removed to Afghanistan, if not to Pakistan. The only possible reason for acceptance of some and rejection of others would seem to be supposed variations in levels of safety for Hazaras in some cities or areas compared with others. Credibility factors bear no relationship to safety.

Most of the Hazaras of Afghani citizenship whose asylum claims were rejected up until March 2012 sought judicial review of the decisions in the hope of being allowed another opportunity for their claims to be assessed against more up-to-date country information. However very few appeals on the basis of legal errors have been upheld. This leaves these people in an invidious situation. Whatever the validity of the original assessments of relative safety, it is abundantly clear that the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly in the past few months with no signs of reversal. Indeed the trend goes back at least 3 years. It is clear that while certain areas of Afghanistan may have been relatively safe for Hazaras a few years ago (and even that is open to serious dispute), that analysis can no longer be sustained. The Taliban and other extremist groups such as the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) are uncontrolled and mobile. They can and do act all over the nation, targeting Shiites, specifically Hazaras, who are regarded as infidels.

Even if it were operationally possible to implement the claimed agreement between Australia and Afghanistan to allow "failed" asylum seekers to be repatriated, such implementation would be unconscionable in light of the clear evidence available. It would be an obvious breach of the Refugee Convention and Protocol and of human rights considerations. The asylum seekers in question were deemed not to have well founded fear of persecution. That may or may not have been accurate at the time. But that assessment must be reviewed and every rejection reconsidered. It would be safe to say that the fear that the Hazara asylum seekers have had all along is now even more "well-founded", indeed thoroughly established.

I cite four main sources of information:

1. Research analyses by expert observers of Afghanistan.
2. The testimony of people who have visited or lived in Afghanistan in recent months
3. The reports of Hazaras who are well connected with friends and relatives in Afghanistan
4. Newspaper and other media reports of events in Afghanistan.

² e.g.: www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/reckless-plan-for-afghans-will-cost-lives-20110119-19wle.html

1. Research analyses by expert observers of Afghanistan.

A. Dr Denise Phillips, whose PhD research focused on the Hazaras of Afghanistan, noted the deteriorating situation in the country as early as 2010³, and has reinforced this finding in a recent update⁴. In 2010 she summarized:

- Afghanistan's security arguably has worsened since 2009 and a reinvigorated Taliban insurgency is spreading well beyond its southern stronghold.
- 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.
- In Maidan Wardak province, Hazaras have been killed, homes burnt and thousands currently displaced in violent land disputes with armed Kuchis, Pashtun nomads. Reflecting continued persecution through dispossession, Kuchis claim annual land rights based on decrees issued by Rahid Rahman. The Taliban may be exploiting this dispute to incite attacks against Hazaras.
- Legal and constitutional reforms are powerless to provide protection in remote villages as the Karzai government struggles for legitimacy and is plagued by allegations of mass corruption.

Phillips' update of July 2012 contains the following new emphasis:

As Afghanistan moves towards a possible Taliban alliance or faces growing lawlessness, and as Hazaras continue to be slain or attacked in Hazara-populated regions and in neighbouring Quetta, Hazaras are likely to continue to flee and have grounds under the 1951 Refugee Convention to fear persecution.

B. Professor Willian Maley⁵ has recently documented the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, especially for Hazaras.⁶ He concludes:

³ 'Hazaras' persecution worsens: Will the new government show leadership by lifting the suspension on Afghani asylum claims?', *Australian Policy and History*, August 2010,

⁴ <http://expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/public-submissions/PhillipsD.pdf>

⁵ Professor William Maley is director of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the Australian National University. He is one of the world's leading authorities on Afghanistan history and politics, and has published extensively on these subjects for over two decades. He is the author of *Rescuing Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006) and *The Afghanistan Wars* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 2009), and has also written a study of *The Foreign Policy of the Taliban* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2000); coauthored *Regime Change in Afghanistan: Foreign Intervention and the Politics of Legitimacy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991) and *Political Order in Post-Communist Afghanistan* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992); edited *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (New York: New York University Press, 1998, 2001); and co-edited *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). He authored the entry on Hazaras in John L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) Vol.II, pp.385-386. He also wrote the annual overview of events in Afghanistan in 2010 for the journal *Asian Survey*: see William Maley, 'Afghanistan in 2010: Continuing Governance Challenges and Faltering Security', *Asian Survey*, vol.51,no.1, January-February 2011, pp.85-96.

⁶ expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au/...submissions/MaleyW.pdf

*“Unlike in late 2001, when the overthrow of the Taliban regime led to a period of optimism about Afghanistan’s future, now there is a pervasive apprehension in the country that the withdrawal of foreign forces by 2014 will trigger a collapse of the Afghan state and a return of the Taliban to power, followed by civil war A range of factors have frustrated the hopes that initially prevailed, notably the failure to build a state with appropriate capacity and legitimacy. This is now widely recognised by scholars and policymakers alike . . . **There is little reason to be confident that the general situation in Afghanistan will take a turn for the better in the foreseeable future.**”*

Maley also makes specific reference to the prospects of safety for Hazaras. He predicts that far from being a safe haven for Hazaras, “Afghanistan will see the flight of thousands of Hazara refugees in the next few years. Nowhere in the country will be safe for them as the Taliban grow in strength and build on their capacity to move anywhere in the country without restriction.”

Maley emphasises that it is . . . a mistake to conclude that Kabul is safe for Hazaras.

“This was tragically demonstrated on 6 December 2011, when a suicide bomber attacked Shiite Afghans, most of them Hazaras, at a place of commemoration in downtown Kabul during the Ashura festival that marks the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. Almost simultaneously, a bomb in Mazar-e Sharif also killed Afghan Shia. The Kabul bomb killed at least 55 people, and the Mazar bomb four more . . . Responsibility for the attack was claimed by the Pakistani Sunni extremist group Lashkar-e Jhangvi, a group that has a long history of sectarian violence against Shia.”

Commenting on the Kabul bombing, Professor Maley says *“The key point to note . . . is that no one with **any** knowledge of Afghanistan could seriously doubt that Hazara Shia were specifically targeted.”*

As far back as December 2011 Professor Maley stated that the general situation in Afghanistan remained profoundly threatening:⁷

- “As of 1 December 2011, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office warns that ‘Afghanistan has a high threat of terrorism and specific methods of attack are evolving and increasing in sophistication. No part of Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence and the potential exists throughout the country for hostile acts’.”
- The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, no less, had recently indicated that the **“security situation throughout Afghanistan, particularly in the south and east of the country, remains extremely dangerous”** and the US State Department, likewise, states that **“no part of Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence” and that the “security environment remains volatile and unpredictable”**.
- “The official US travel advice for Afghanistan, valid for 1 December 2011, states that **‘No part of Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence . . . Afghan authorities have a limited ability to maintain order and ensure the security of Afghan citizens and foreign visitors . . . The security environment remains volatile and unpredictable’**.”

⁷ On the Position of the Hazara Minority in Afghanistan, 7 December 2011
bmrsg.org.au/wp.../2011/10/Maley-Hazaras-Opinion-Updated2.pdf



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- “These observations are mirrored in recent reports to the UN Security Council on Afghanistan by the Secretary-General: ‘**The deterioration of Afghanistan’s security situation has continued**, with 2009 being the most volatile year since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 . . . **The situation worsened in January 2010 . . .**’”
- “In his second 2010 report, the UN Secretary-General stated that ‘Overall, the number of security incidents increased significantly, compared to previous years *and contrary to seasonal trends* . . . ’”
- In September 2010 the UN Secretary-General stated that ‘**The security situation has continued to deteriorate in many parts of the country . . .**’.
- In March 2011, the UN Secretary-General observed that ‘**anti-Government elements are expanding operations into previously uncontested areas**’.
- The limited capacity of the Afghan state means that ‘constitutional and legal reform to protect minorities’ rights’ is meaningless for most Afghans while the Taliban remain active; there is no evidence of a ‘durable security’.
- The Taliban are now extremely active in large parts of Ghazni (the homeland of many asylum seekers in Australia). “In June 2011, the International Crisis Group reported that the province of Ghazni ‘has slipped from being one of the most stable to the third most volatile after Kandahar and Helmand’ . . . No part of Ghazni can realistically be considered safe for Hazaras, even in districts where they might seem numerically predominant. Most disturbingly, a June 2010 study by the highly regarded Afghanistan Analysts Network warns of a risk to these areas: ‘The Taliban successfully have infiltrated Northern and Northeastern Afghanistan and destabilized 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 even an attack’ .”
- “The Taliban now enjoy what the International Crisis Group calls ‘near total control’ of Moqer, Qarabagh and Gelan, the three districts that immediately adjoin Jaghori to the east.”
- “On 18 June 2011, there was an explosive outbreak of violence against Hazara villages in the Nawor district of Ghazni, with witnesses testifying to Taliban involvement.”
- “In most cases in which *kuchis* have resorted to high-level violence as a way of resolving so-called ‘land disputes’, **it has been ethnic Hazaras who have been targeted**, rather than members of other landowning groups such as the Pashtuns or Tajiks. . . *kuchi* groups are being armed by the Taliban. Furthermore, there is evidence from Maidan Wardak, adjacent to Kabul, that when attacks were mounted against Hazaras’ houses, army officers were ‘ordered not to intervene’ . . . the position of Hazaras as an overwhelmingly Shiite non-Pashtun minority makes them an easy target for overwhelmingly-Pashtun Taliban seeking to rebuild support from Sunni Pashtun groups such as the *kuchis*.”

- Travel for Hazaras remains extremely dangerous, and “claims that roads are ‘open’ need to be treated with great caution. On 3 December 2011, I received the following observation from a very highly respected Kabul-based observer: ‘Dozens of Hazaras have been killed or abducted and never heard of while travelling between Ghazni and Jaghuri and also through Wardak province to Behsud and Bamyān. Ghulam Hussain Naseri, a Hazara member of parliament from Behsud, reported on November 10 that 10 Hazaras were forced off vans and buses going to the Hazarajat in Wardak and killed in dreadful manners in front of other travelers during the preceding 10 days’.”
- “Hazara fears . . . are gravely aggravated by the widespread claims from both Western political figures and President Karzai that some kind of reconciliation with the Taliban is required. . . . With the terms of such ‘reconciliation’ still unclear, there is a risk that one outcome of current political processes (should they amount to anything) could be a ‘spheres of influence’ agreement that would concede local dominion to the Taliban in some provinces. The situation for Hazaras in such provinces could easily be dire, and certainly a fear of being persecuted would not be ill-founded . . . What the late E.F. Kunz called ‘anticipatory refugees’ are no less refugees on account of their foresight; indeed, many refugees from Nazi Germany fell into this category, and their shabby treatment in the 1930s remains to this day a stain on international refugee protection.”

Maley summarises: ***“To assume that Hazaras can expect protection from the agencies of the Afghan state is unrealistic. . . All ‘country information’ that suggests a ‘golden age’ for Hazaras after 2011, or that suggests that Hazara Shia have not suffered persecution for reasons recognised by the 1951 Convention, should be regarded as definitively outdated.”***

In July 2012 Professor Maley again warned of the disturbing resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan:

“A gruesome video seen around the world this week of an Afghan woman being shot in the Shinwari district of Parvan province in Afghanistan provides a sobering reminder that the Taliban are as brutal a force now as when they dominated significant tracts of the country before being overthrown in late 2001. .

“This latest atrocity, hauntingly reminiscent of the distressing scenes in Kabul when women were executed by the Taliban between 1996 and 2001, understandably has captured global attention. The abuse of women, however, is only the tip of the iceberg as far as the brutalities of the Taliban are concerned.

It is often overlooked that the vast majority of civilian casualties in the war in Afghanistan have been inflicted by the armed opposition, made up of the Taliban, the so-called Haqqani network, the Hezb-e Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and assorted radical hangers-on.

Moreover, these groups have engaged in the deliberate targeting of civilian non-combatants, with physical violence being used in pursuit of a political agenda in order to create a psychological effect that is disproportionate to the immediate harm caused.

These attacks are acts of terrorism, pure and simple. They have been designed to strike fear in the residents of Kabul . . . Other attacks have had an ethnic dimension. In June 2010, Reuters newsagency reported a massacre in Uruzgan: “The bodies of 11 men, their heads cut off and placed next to them, have been found in a violent southern province of Afghanistan, a senior



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police official said on Friday. 'This was the work of the Taliban. They beheaded these men because they were ethnic Hazaras and Shiite Muslims,' he said." . . .

"One can only begin to imagine what risks ordinary Afghans face over the coming years, as Western forces are withdrawn. . . .

"Pakistan continues to provide sanctuaries from which the Afghan Taliban operate, and the notion of a stable Afghanistan in which power is shared between the Taliban and other political groups remains a fantasy: any attempt to strike such a deal is much more likely to lead to civil war than to "peace".

Professor Maley concludes:

"It is likely that in the foreseeable future there will be an outflow from Afghanistan's region of thousands of desperate people, the vast majority of them indisputably genuine refugees, who will seek protection in stable countries that are parties to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Abandoned by the West, they will feel under no obligation to wait obediently for Western bureaucracies to rescue them"

Finally, in a recent ABC discussion on the Hazaras of Afghanistan⁸, Professor Maley stated:

"The capacity of the state to offer realistic protection of the Hazaras from predatory attacks of such groups as the Taliban is negligible in most of the country . . . You have an acute sense of vulnerability which many, in fact probably the majority, of Hazaras rationally feel in their day to day lives. . . There is an overwhelming sense of apprehension. . . . The Taliban have proved themselves to be a resurgent force. . . (for fearful Hazaras) Pakistan is no longer a choice . . . the only options are Australia and Europe – both dangerous (to reach)."

He emphasised that asylum seekers will be in danger if they return to Afghanistan. "The push factors from Afghanistan are likely to be going up significantly in the next couple of years"

C. In April 2011, former Kabul based correspondent for the Global Post, Jean MacKenzie⁹ reported on a story that the Afghan government was holding talks with the Taliban, concluding that such talks remained purely speculative. In the course of her discussion she summarised: "***Security is deteriorating steadily throughout the country, despite loud claims that Taliban momentum has been reversed.***"

2. Testimony of people who have visited or lived in Afghanistan in recent months

A. Dr Phil Sparrow, a recently returned, long term fieldworker in Afghanistan with TEAR Australia, fluent in Hazaragi language and a published author on the Hazara situation, recently wrote¹⁰:

⁸ **Rear Vision**, 9th August 2012,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=9nBUYH8k5X8&NR=1>

⁹ Jean MacKenzie spent five years as program director for the Institute for War & Peace Reporting in Kabul. Her work took her to the farthest corners of Afghanistan, where she met hundreds of Afghans from all walks of life. She created a network of Afghan reporters who could gather news and information from all over the country, lending an all-important local perspective to coverage of the conflict.

MacKenzie has become a renowned analyst and commentator, contributing to the ABC, among others.

¹⁰ Personal communication to G Swincer

“Annual raids by Kuchis (Pashtun nomads) on traditional Hazara lands in the central Hazarajat continue, with hundreds of families fleeing in the early summer of 2012, some thousands in 2010. About 20,000 people (mainly women and children) arrived in Kabul in 2010, as a direct result of these attacks, where many men were killed. Government forces did nothing to stop these and were complicit in some cases. 2011 was a slight improvement, but in 2012 attacks resumed. Once the people are driven off the land, the Kuchis occupy it for their summer pastures, sometimes leaving in the winter, but often leaving behind remnant forces to keep the original owners out.”

B. The recently televised SBS program “Go Back to Where You Came From” featured not only the host and refugee expert Dr David Corlett¹¹ but also high profile figures musician Angry Anderson, writer and social commentator Catherine Deveny, and former senior cabinet minister Peter Reith, who all visited Afghanistan. During the program and in the *Insight* debriefing that followed, both Anderson and Reith told of how shocked they were about conditions in Afghanistan, especially for Hazaras, and how disturbed they were about the fate (often death) of Hazaras who had previously returned from Australia or Nauru, either forcibly or under some kind of duress and with misleading promises.

During the second episode Catherine, Peter and Angry talked with a Hazara man, cousin of Hamid, an accepted refugee who they met before departing Australia. He said *“Here is dangerous for a long time; you know of bomb blast, suicide bombing – we are usually seeing – but this year it’s increased. . . I really worry about my children, really worry, and for Hazara people there is no chance to go in neighbour countries. Hazara people are like rats. When they cross borders nobody will accept them, even though you have passport, visa . . .”*

When asked “Your cousin got to Australia by boat; have you ever been that desperate?” he replied *“Every single man from here they want to escape as fast as they can do.”*

During the same episode Reith stated that *“A lot of the asylum seekers who come to Australia are Hazara, and there doesn’t seem any doubt that the Taliban have them targetted and that is a very difficult situation for them, one which I would assess at this point of time is not going to get any better; if anything it’s likely to get worse. . . It is very depressing. . . hard to see any way out.”*

The commentary of the second episode presented an alarming fact for just one location: *“Hundreds of men, women and Hazara children have been killed here in the last year. Families like this can’t seek refugee status in their own country. Their only option is to flee and seek asylum elsewhere.”*

During the *Insight* debriefing Anderson observed: *“There was persecution . . . Muslims persecuting to death other Muslims, so it’s not so much a religious thing . . . I became aware of that simple fact . . . that there were eight million people being persecuted in their own country. In their own country they are known as “non-people”; seemingly somehow they don’t exist.”* He clearly referred to persecution of Hazaras.

¹¹ Dr David Corlett has worked with refugees and asylum seekers for about two decades as a case worker, researcher and advisor. He currently works as a researcher with the International Detention Coalition. He has authored the book *Following Them Home: The Fate of the Returned Asylum Seekers* which was highly commended by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

C. Dr Phil Glendenning,¹² Director of the Edmund Rice Centre, revisited Afghanistan in April 2012 to interview asylum seekers who had been returned from Australia. He affirmed that many who had been sent back from Nauru were largely the victims of terrible mistakes in the assessment of their refugee status. He gives examples of men and their family members being targeted as returnees. He quotes from his conversations with Musa Mahmodi, head of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, who says that returnees are seen as sympathetic to the “west” and this counts against them.

Glendenning states that “*the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated rapidly. . . More civilians have been killed in the past year than in the previous ten*”. Musa Mahmodi told him that the road from Kabul to Ghazni is no longer safe. Just 15 minutes from the city any travelling Hazaras are certain to be killed and any westerners taken hostage.

3. Reports from Hazaras who are well connected with friends and relatives in Afghanistan

Since February 2011 I have visited Villawood Immigration Detention Centre frequently and have developed friendships with many Hazara refugees. These friendships have continued with the many who have been released into community detention or granted bridging visas. Most travelled to Australia via Pakistan and have relatives in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Every few days they give accounts of the worsening situation in both countries. Friends and relatives are being killed and reports of persecution and violence are transmitted – none of them covered in the mainstream media. This fits with other indications of under-reporting of the ongoing attacks on Hazaras in both countries.¹³ All communicate that this situation is escalating and they are terrified at the thought of being forced to return.

One friend, still in detention in VIDC escaped from Afghanistan after being captured, tortured and forcibly trained by the Taliban for 6 weeks. He has been granted refugee status but denied security clearance, presumably because of the Taliban “encounter”. He says he was one of the lucky ones; many others simply disappear without trace, many clearly as a result of being used as “gun-fodder” by the Taliban.

4. Newspaper and other media reports of events in Afghanistan.

Reports of incidents of violence against Hazara people appear in newspapers and on the internet on almost a daily basis. Indeed there are websites devoted to collecting such reports¹⁴ and attempting to draw international attention to the plight of the Hazaras¹⁵.

¹² Phil Glendenning is a Human Rights Advocate and Educator. He has served on the Boards of the Australian Council for Social Service (ACOSS), various committees of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, and the Centre for an Ethical Society. He is a current Board Member of the Refugee Council of Australia, and ANTaR. In 2007 he was recognised by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) with the Sir Ron Wilson Award for Human Rights. In recent years he has led the Edmund Rice Centre's research team for the *Deported To Danger* series which monitored the safety of rejected asylum seekers in 22 countries, and resulted in an internationally screened documentary, *A Well Founded Fear*.

¹³ e.g. op. cit. footnote 6, page 5.

¹⁴ e.g. <http://www.hazarapeople.com/hazara/hn/afghanistan/>

¹⁵ e.g. <http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/06/24/hazara-genocide-by-sunni-terrorists/>



The following is a selection of three recent articles that seem especially instructive.

A. On 26 July 2012 Masood Korosh, a writer for the Daily Outlook Afghanistan wrote about the increasing dangers faced by Hazaras as they travel the roads of Afghanistan.¹⁶

A friend had told him of driving from Kabul to Ghazni province and being stopped, along with all the other vehicles on the highway, by gun-wielding Taliban militants. The car and occupants were searched and they were forced to divert along an unpaved track. After driving for about 10 kilometers, they were forced to stop and once again two escorting militants checked their bodies and then the vehicle and then separated them for questioning. Eventually, after three hours, they were released.

Another group, young Hazara men, was not so fortunate. Going towards Bamyán province, they were kidnapped by Taliban militants in the same province, Maidan Wardak, “beheaded brutally” and their corpses thrown on the highway.

On July 25, four men from Jaghori district of Ghazni province were also arrested by Taliban militants on their way to Kabul. They paid around 160 thousand US dollar to get free.

There is no doubt that Hazaras are at special risk. Those who are shaven and wearing something other than Afghani traditional clothing will not be able to avoid thorough checking by “militants”. If unacceptable documents are found, their bearers will be beheaded or detained indefinitely for ransom.

Korosh claims that such incidents are now routine on highways between Afghan cities. But he adds that there is an additional danger for travellers in western and eastern parts of the country caused by road-side bombings devised to explode the vehicles of foreign and Afghan security forces.

B. In the Wall Street Journal of 9th September 2012, Nathan Hodge and Ziaulhaq Sultani reported that a minor traffic incident in Kabul escalated into a deadly gun-battle between rival ethnic groups that threatened to rekindle civil-war tensions and marred a major government celebration.¹⁷

The fighting pitted ethnic Tajiks from the Panjshir province north of Kabul against ethnic Hazaras, who were on opposing sides of the civil war that leveled much of the capital after the Communist regime collapsed in 1992. Hazara residents put their death toll at five or six.

This confrontation occurred during a national holiday to commemorate Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Tajik commander from Panjshir who was assassinated by al Qaeda suicide bombers in 2001. While Mr. Massoud is officially revered as a national hero in Afghanistan, with his portraits bedecking government buildings and the Kabul airport, many Hazaras still harbor bitter memories of a violent offensive against western Kabul by his forces in 1993. The recent incident was triggered when a cyclist was struck by a vehicle in a decorated convoy of Massoud supporters that was driven provocatively through a largely Hazara neighborhood.

¹⁶ <http://kabulpress.org/my/spip.php?article117775>

¹⁷

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444554704577641833333191196.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

According to the journalists, this outbreak reinforced fears that such ethnic tensions might spiral out of control after most international forces withdraw in 2014, just as happened after the Soviet withdrawal. They quote Patricia Gossman, an independent analyst with long experience in Afghanistan: *“the civil war has become “the elephant in the room” as foreign forces go home. This is the undercurrent right now below everything going on in Afghanistan: The fear of a return to that kind of ethnically based divisions and rivalry”*.

C. On 7th June 2012 *The Outlook Afghanistan* ¹⁸ reported that hundreds of armed Kuchis (Nomads) – perhaps up to 2,000 – invaded the Kajab area of Behsud district of Wardak province, raiding houses and a mosque, burning property, and attacking people. As a result 600 families had to escape to other areas. The Deputy Governor of Maidan Wardak Province was reported to say that three people were killed and 12 houses and 8 shops set ablaze.

The report noted that invasion of the villages in Central Afghanistan by Kuchis has been an ongoing phenomenon over the last few years, in spite of a 2008 Presidential Decree calling for permanent settlement of the Kuchis and an end to attacks on the local people. The reporter estimates that about 4,000 families from Behsud, Dai Mirdad, Tizak and Kajab have been coercively displaced, contributing to the 40 to 50 thousand people who have come to Kabul or have left for other areas in Hazarajat in recent years. “This had not happened during (the) communist (period) . . . but is taking place at the age of democracy.”

Summary

The evidence seems clear and without credible challenge: the safety of the Hazara people in Afghanistan is under serious threat and the situation is deteriorating without any sign of relief in the foreseeable future. Not only that, their livelihoods are increasingly threatened as entrenched discrimination and persecution is exacerbated by escalating invasion of their traditional lands.

The experts and most well-informed observers predict continuing and growing waves of flight from this situation, based on a well-founded fear of persecution, even genocide. By any standard of human rights it would be unconscionable to force any Hazaras to return to such an Afghanistan, especially if they have little or no residual family or community support. It must be remembered that the close families of a majority of Hazara refugees are already in Pakistan to which they have fled over the past few years and where they face increasing threats and targeted violence from the Taliban and the Lashkar-e Jhangvi and associated groups.

¹⁸ www.wahdatnews.com/?p=825