STRONGMEN AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS:
AN EXAMINATION OF JUNBESH IN BALKH AND THE TALIBAN IN KANDAHAR

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By

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This thesis takes into comparison two strongmen-led organizations of Afghanistan: Junbesh in Balkh and the Taliban in Kandahar and provides an examination of their organization, structure and services provided in order to ascertain their level of effectiveness in permeating vital aspects of society, such as providing law and order, treatment of women, education, and taxation. These two case studies were chosen to both highlight the importance of two arguably successful strongmen-led organizations, and to provide a historical glance into two areas that are of the most secure (Balkh province) and most insecure (Kandahar province) today. Using secondary sources and examining the years between 1988 through 2001, the paper concludes that Junbesh provided more services and stability to the population than the Taliban, which may prompt further research into the effect these organizations have on stability today.
I would like to thank my family, friends and wonderful boyfriend for listening to me whine, rant and curse the futility of this so-called intellectual exercise in the pursuit of my master’s degree.

Almost there!

Teresa Tu
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INTRODUCTION

The United States and international community work with strongmen and warlords in Afghanistan, at times to the displeasure of the local populations, the Afghan government, and the international forces themselves. My research seeks to understand the role of these contemporary strongmen in Afghanistan by focusing on two regional strongmen-led organizations: Junbesh in Balkh and Farah provinces, and the Taliban in Kandahar. A strongman, as defined by Giustozzi, is a charismatic leader without military legitimacy, a personal following, and control of a territory—Afghanistan has an abundance of these types of men.

I choose to focus on Afghanistan because it is the top foreign policy objective of the United States and these strongmen are one of the most vital and controversial parts of the Afghan war. The U.S. Senate has produced scathing reports claiming that money allocated for security and defense have been paid to warlords and strongmen, forcing militaries, diplomatic missions and international development organizations to explain their relationship to these men. Given these accusations of their current behavior, an in-depth comparison of their pre–9/11 behavior could provide insights in how and why these organizations are the way they are today.

From this research, I hope to be able to provide a new comparative view of the Junbesh and Taliban organizations, built by strongmen in Balkh and Kandahar at a crucial time juncture: before the collapse of the Taliban rule in 2001. Currently, literature fails to adequately compare...

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these two important organizations. My research will employ secondary sources, making use of the available and relevant literature regarding Afghanistan, strongmen, tribal customs, and the Taliban to provide insights about the specifics of the operations of both the Junbesh and Taliban organizations in Afghanistan. The project will contribute to our understanding of Junbesh and the Taliban, strongmen-led organization and functions, while deepening our understanding of regional strongmen in Afghanistan writ large.

Specifically, this thesis seeks to explain the influence of strongmen and their role in local institution-building in Balkh and Kandahar, because they seem to have done what all functional governments have tried and failed to do, which is provide security and services for the population, at the provincial level, often at the price of freedom and democracy. These strongmen and their organizations are controversial figures. They often lead repressive, authoritarian regimes that abused local populations. The involvement of strongmen in the post–9/11 involvement, sometimes supported by the international community, does provide unique tradeoff costs to the Afghan population. Much of the population has strong feelings against the strongmen, as evident from the various human rights accusations that follow General Dostum or the atrocities reportedly carried out by the Taliban. This thesis will examine how and why the organizations differed and their effectiveness in a series of government-like activities (i.e. monopoly of the use of force, taxation, treatment of citizens, commerce and external relations, and diplomacy). The analysis will look into the pre–9/11 organization, structure, and functions of the two organizations, starting from the end of the Afghan civil war in 1992 to the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001.
All aspects of governance, defined as “the conscious management of regime structures, with a view to enhancing the public realm”\(^2\) are lagging to various degrees in Afghanistan, but areas like Balkh, with the thriving Mazar-e-Sharif area, are leaps and bounds ahead of provinces like Kandahar, which has one of the highest rates of instability, kinetic action, and coalition/local deaths.\(^3\) These two provinces, however, are historically home to two of the most salient strongmen-led organizations in all of Afghanistan: Junbesh and the Taliban. While the World Bank defines good governance as “epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs,”\(^4\) an achievement that has not yet been reached by the central government in either province. In fact, the closest these provinces have ever gotten to “governance” is via these strongmen-led organizations.

My paper will first look into the background and importance of strongmen and their organizations in Afghanistan and the processes/methods proposed for my study before delving into a literature review on strongmen in Afghanistan but focusing specifically on Junbesh and the Taliban. From the concepts and histories explored in my literature review, I aim to further explore the organizations of Junbesh and the Taliban and the services it provided the population from 1991–2001 and provide a summary of their activities in specific areas of service and their


\(^{4}\) World Bank, “Reforming Public Institutions and Strengthening Governance,” November 2000
overall success at it. Once this is completed, I will discuss the policy implications and conclusions of my research, and possibilities for future research into these organizations.

**BACKGROUND**

U.S. and international funds have been going to strongmen since the start of the war, from the CIA backed Northern Alliance toppling of the Taliban in Kabul in 2001 to the various contracts and sub-contracts doled out by Departments of Defense and State.\(^5\) While these governments try to avoid paying strongmen, it is inevitable. Even though a strongman may not be nominally in charge of a private security company, it is either run by an ally of his or he is somehow indirectly connected. In Afghanistan it is almost impossible to have a private security contractor that is not somehow indirectly related or controlled by a strongman, save for the international companies that outsource the jobs to third-country nationals (TCNs) instead of local security forces.\(^6\) Such extensive outsourcing has led to other governments asking for more clarity on the dispersion of funds.

The Canadian Parliament demanded an explanation as to why strongman Haji Toorjan received $2.5 million to provide an additional layer of defense around the Kandahar provincial reconstruction base that delivered aid and development.\(^7\) Some examples of strongmen include Ruhullah, who has close ties to the Karzai family and who leads a group of 600 armed men who have a reputation of dealing ruthlessly with the villages along the highways they control; Abdul Razziq, the commander of the border police in Spin Boldak, which is one of the principal

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\(^6\) Senate Armed Services Committee, “*Inquiry into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan*” 7 October, 2010 from [http://levin.senate.gov/newsroom/release.cfm?id=328188](http://levin.senate.gov/newsroom/release.cfm?id=328188)

trucking routes into the country;\(^8\) General Said Abdul Wahab who gave the EOD technology to the 350 guards it needed, and demanded huge kickbacks from it; Timor Shah and Nadir Khan, who provided ArmorGroup with guards to protect U.S. airbases in Afghanistan and ended up almost killing each other in the process;\(^9\) and Matiullah Khan, who heads a private army that that earns millions of dollars by protecting NATO supply conveyes and fighting Taliban insurgents alongside U.S. special forces. According to the New York Times, he “is one of several semiofficial warlords who have emerged across Afghanistan in recent months, as American and NATO officers try to bolster—and sometimes even supplant—ineffective regular Afghan forces in their battle against the Taliban insurgency.”\(^10\) According to the Pakistan Daily Times, he gets over $340,000 a month for his services from the U.S. government,\(^11\) bringing his total to $2.5 million a month, as his “company charges each NATO cargo truck $1,200 for safe passage or $800 for smaller ones.”\(^12\)

This is simply one—albeit important—reason why these strongmen matter. Many own or have influence over legitimate businesses, especially private security, and with the Afghan-first policy adopted by the Afghan government, many of the men hired for private security work for their local strongman first. Numerous strongmen benefited from either U.S. or Soviet patronage during the Cold War and have continued to build and expand their strength from that era, leading them to become rooted in many aspects of Afghan society. In spite of this, there are serious

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\(^12\) Dexter Filkins, “With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire”
concerns with respect to dealing with strongmen. In October 2010, the U.S. Senate released its most accusative report: that U.S. money indirectly funds “warlords and strongmen linked to murder, kidnapping, bribery,” among other things.\(^\text{13}\) This report further inflamed the anger of U.S. and Afghani citizens who cannot fathom why the international community would work with such strongmen. Often times, they control more of the province than the central or provincial government and more often than not, they come equipped with their own personal militia. Historically, they have been the ones who provided law and order in one of the world’s most decentralized states. Without the support of these strongmen, the Afghan government and international community would not be able to expand their reach beyond Kabul.

These provincial strongmen and their organizations and militias are the chosen U.S. and international community allies in Afghanistan with regards to combating the Taliban and in building local institutions because of their monopoly on power and militias in majority of the area. In addition to being necessary allies, they would also make dangerous opponents given their reach into every aspect of provincial and district life. Besides these factors, many of the strongmen in the north and west are staunchly anti-Taliban or anti-certain Taliban commanders and were part of the Northern Alliance\(^\text{14}\) of strongmen who helped the United States oust the


\(^{14}\) The Northern Alliance was formed of 1996 by Defense Minister Massoud. The organization was composed of the ousted ethnic Tajik president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud and their Jamiat-i-Islami forces, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum and the ethnic Uzbek Junbish-i-Milli party and various other strongmen and groups against the Taliban. The Northern Alliance had its problems internally and many of its leaders were either ousted or defeated, but the alliance was reinvigorated after 2001 with U.S. and CIA support to oust the Taliban. After the Taliban fell, the Northern Front members accepted the new interim government led by Karzai, despite fears that they would refuse to give up power. from Federation of American Scientists “Northern Alliance” [http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/northern_alliance.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/northern_alliance.htm) and Institute for Afghan Studies “Northern Alliance” from [http://www.institute-for-afghan-](http://www.institute-for-afghan-).
Taliban in 2001, so there is a history of cooperation and shared goals between the international community and many of these strongmen. While these strongmen in Balkh may have their own agenda, for the most part they have cooperated with the international community in combating the Taliban.

In the south, however, the Taliban are the main organization in Kandahar province. Most of the Taliban are Pashtuns and this highly Pashtun-dominated province is not only less ethnically diverse than the rest of the country but is, not surprisingly, the heart of the Taliban movement. In Kandahar—one of the most unstable provinces in the country—life is very different than in the north. Historically, there have not been any regional strongmen, except for the Taliban that untied various Pashtun tribes, making it harder for the Afghan Government and its international partners to find allies in Kandahar. While the United States has worked with Gul Agha Sherzai and his networks in Kandahar to disrupt the Taliban, they are questionable allies. Almost all of these strongmen have been accused of various violations of human rights and have treated their populations brutally.

While the U.S. policy has been to side with these strongmen over the Taliban, this policy is not without its criticisms. Senator Dick Lugar (R–IN) has even said he “thinks a looming

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15 The Taliban played on the Pashtun sentiments to gain a power base but as they increased their rule and sought wider legitimacy, they argued that they represented more than Pashtuns, even though few non-Pashtuns were in their ranks; from Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge (2008), 85


17 Dostum has been accused of involvement in various incidents of human rights abuses by many organizations that work in the field of human rights. One such anti-Dostum group is the physicians for human rights, which states that “not only is General Dostum alleged to have committed the original war crime; he is also reportedly responsible for serious tampering with evidence,” but according to witnesses, General Dostum and his commanders “have taken all the bones and thrown them into the river [and killed witnesses].” From http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/news-2009-08-17.html
question is whether the United States is willing to accept powerful regional warlords if the central government cannot fill the void.”

He argues that, “in some cases, these strongmen have restored order, though at the price of undermining the very institutions Americans are seeking to build: government structures like police forces and provincial administrations that one day are supposed to be strong enough to allow the Americans and other troops to leave.”

Given these facts and the current importance of security and institution-building at provincial and district levels in Regional Command–South (Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan, and Daykundi) and Regional Command–South West (Helmand and Nimroz), it is pertinent to explore the dominant organization in Kandahar, which is the Taliban, and compare it with one of the many successful organizations in the north, which is Junbesh, in an effort to understand why the Taliban have such a strong hold in Kandahar.

Afghanistan, by province

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19 Dexter Filkins, “With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire”


DATA, METHODS, AND CAVEATS

The paper will be a descriptive value-added study of strongmen, particularly General Abdul Rashid Dostum and his allies (aka Junbesh), and the various strongmen of the Taliban, and their efforts at establishing control by creating pseudo-governmental institutions and services, centered on a series of patronage-based networks. My research seeks to understand how these organizations were structured, how they provided services, what services were provided, and why these organizations were successful (or not) in providing goods, services, and stability to the province in which they ruled. I have chosen Balkh and Kandahar as my case studies because they represent two areas in which strongmen-led organizations have been dominant.

In the relatively stable province of Balkh, strongmen have flourished historically, often operating successfully (albeit forcefully) in ethnically mixed areas, investing in infrastructure and maintaining power for long periods of time. In Kandahar, however, strongmen have often floundered and the only organization that was truly able to co-opt the various tribes was the Taliban, strengthened by the resources, training, and patronage they received from the United States and Pakistani intelligence services. The Taliban is a complicated organization, comprised of various networks and cells that coordinate with each other, that took hold of an even more complicated tribal and cultural system in Kandahar. That said, the Taliban were successful, to an extent, as an organization.

In order to execute my analytical comparison of two organizations, I will use a case study approach to examine the differences between Balkh and Kandahar’s organizations to draw
comparisons on how exactly they functioned. Within this case, I will use process-tracing to look into the history, actions, and impacts of the specific strongmen to ascertain their leadership styles and effectiveness in governance, and examine the social environment in which they operate and how ultimately they differed in their efforts at institution-building, or lack thereof. I will then compare the two organizations and their effectiveness in each one of these areas during the period of 1988–2001.

Some of the questions I will be asking across my cases include:

- What is the hierarchy of these two organizations?
- Who are its leading members and how do its leaders maintain control of an area and organization?
- What are its militia groups and/or armed fighters?
- What types of services do they provide the population? How do they treat said population?

To organize the queries and findings, the analysis will be summarized in a chart that describes both Junbesh and the Taliban’s actions and effectiveness in the following areas of governance: monopoly of the use of force and violence; taxation; law and order; shelter/food and other essential services; commerce, mail and livestock; roads and transportation; education; bureaucracy and civil servants’ treatment of citizens; and external relations and diplomacy.

Strongmen are vital in these case studies because they were the ones to build up the institutions and provide the goods and services in areas outside of the central government’s reach. While their motives for setting up these goods and services seem to be centered on expanding their power and solidifying their control over a population, they have truly done something unique. It is equally important to stress here that these strongmen are local figures, even if they sometimes transcend into the national scene—such as by joining the central
government like Dostum did or attracting international attention similar to that of the Taliban regime. My study will focus on the local and provincial efforts of these strongmen from 1988–2001.

In addition to the sources used for my bibliography, my data will be limited to solely English written documents. These data are derived exclusively from secondary sources.

**Literature Review**

The literature review first examines Afghanistan and its internal organization before delving into the specifics of Balkh, its ethnicities, and Junbesh. It then examines Kandahar, its tribal structures and the rise of the Taliban, and the Taliban’s role in institution building.

This research paper employs secondary research that describes Afghanistan’s diverse culture and political history, paying particular attention to accounts of the institutions built by local strongmen in Balkh and Kandahar. Here, I use Antonio Giustozzi’s definition of a strongman: *a strongman is a charismatic leader without military legitimacy, a personal following and control of a territory.* Giustozzi argues that military legitimacy is the vital difference between a warlord and a strongman, as a warlord exercises leadership over a military class and his legitimacy lies within his military experience. Strongmen often lead a group of armed men, but they do not have the military experience necessary to qualify them as warlords. An important aspect that distinguishes the strongman from others is their “degree of political legitimacy, since they might come from notable families or might claim a ‘traditional role’ (i.e.

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22 In Empires of Mud, Giustozzi uses this definition of a warlord:
- A legitimate charismatic and patrimonial military leader with autonomous control over a military force capable of achieving and maintaining a monopoly of large scale violence over a sizeable territory;
He notes that the warlord has little or no political legitimacy but nevertheless he exercises patrimonial political power over such territory where central authority has either collapsed or has weakened, or was never there in the first place.
tribal leader) and accept at least some of the social constraints that come with it.” While a warlord can be a strongman, a strongman cannot be a warlord due to his lack of military legitimacy. In Afghanistan, these two terms are often conflated, but for the purposes of this paper, strongmen will be the preferred term.

**Afghanistan: Political, Military and Social Histories**

Because Afghanistan was never formally colonized, the Anglo-Afghan wars ended without leaving an organizational or bureaucratic legacy in Afghanistan. Afghanistan entered the international system under British suzerainty even though it was not a colony. The British and Russians thought of Afghanistan as a buffer state, largely separating two great regional empires. The British backed-Amir Abdul Rahman Khan of Afghanistan chose to spend his funds on arming the military and police instead of building roads and infrastructure, as his Indian counterpart did. Khan feared foreign influences would undermine his power and instead focused on isolation as a national security objective. Khan was not unique in his goals of isolation and power consolidation, as Afghan political elite continued to act as an “ethnically stratified hierarchy of intermediaries between the foreign powers, providing the resources and the groups receiving the largess of patronage” once the Anglo-Afghan War was over, isolating themselves from the population. These elites did not invest in state building or spread of governance.

With the Soviet-funded communist government, the Afghan state did not penetrate the provinces and establish governance but instead “encapsulated local traditions.” With no organization or bureaucracy, local populations relied on kinship for patronage and remained

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23 Giustozzi, “Tribes and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan”, 2
25 Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, 20
isolated, linked to the nation-state “only through personal ties to individuals in the
government.” This political fragmentation meant that the government of Afghanistan had no
institutions in which the population could rely upon for goods and services outside of traditional
kinship ties.

The various rulers of Afghanistan in general have “consistently preferred to depend on
foreign patrons [resources] to rule, instead of gaining the loyalty and trust of their own people
and relying on the internal resources of the nation, both human and material,” leading to the
severe underdevelopment of institutions and capacity in Afghanistan, especially in the south.27
The lack of centralized government and dependency on foreign and local rule explains the lack
of governance in all of Afghanistan. But, from that starting point, two different paths have
emerged: that of Balkh and Dostum’s ruling party; and that of Kandahar, and the tribal and
Taliban rule that have dominated since 1992.

Afghanistan skipped the colonization stage and in effect, missed “the opportunity to
develop a coherent sense of nationhood.” While colonization brought a host of issues to
colonized countries, it did provide a semblance of centralization and state structure in some
cases, but not all. Afghanistan instead was held together not by consensus of civic nationalism
but merely by ethnic and tribal dominance of one group over the rest of the constituent
partners.29 Afghanistan did not have a strong infrastructure given the absence of natural
resources, industry, commerce, and limited agricultural sector, and because they were so
dependent on foreign aid, there was never a reason to develop a functional taxation system

26 Ibid
29 Ibid, 7
nationwide – they received foreign funds and the population did not have much to offer.\textsuperscript{30} These were all choices made by successive Afghan governments, such as the one formed by Amir Khan and Amanullah, in which both chose to carry out domestic policy from a top-down movement, often ignoring grassroots and local populations.\textsuperscript{31} It was these rulers who decided that their governance was limited to Kabul, giving the Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north and west to remain isolated from national mainstream identity and the Pashtuns in the south to self-govern as well.

The lack of internal coherence has large implications for stability. Rubin finds that the quick spread of chaos and revolts in 1978–1979 occurred because the state had no internal coherence. The weak internal control mechanism of bureaucracies, especially the military, made it easy for the revolt to occur and brought the Soviets on the ground. The Soviet-backed People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) attempted to build state institutions in an attempt to maintain power. They understood the importance of having a secure state apparatus to solidify their influence and reach. They correctly realized that “as the [state] apparatus became stronger and more consolidated, it would gradually absorb and outweigh the fragmented rural society without having to ever fully conquer it.”\textsuperscript{32} While they may have had the right intention, the execution of state building was rather poor—the PDPA leadership increasingly focused on maintaining their own job security, not building state institutions. There was no stable or reliable mechanism for collecting tax and most of the resources were put into the development of the security forces and secret police.\textsuperscript{33} After the fall of the communist government in the 1992, Afghanistan once again plunged into chaos. There was no national government, not even a

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 7
\textsuperscript{31} Fair, C. Christine Fair “Insurgency, Instability and the Security of Afghanistan”, 186-188
\textsuperscript{32} Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, 136
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 129-130
semblance of an inherited organization that a new government could use to rebuild, and hence, a huge political vacuum in Kabul began to take root. In order to combat the communists, the mujahedeen, supported by the Pakistanis, Americans, and Saudis among others, were born.

These groups started to gain traction and popularity with the people, especially in the south and thus started a new era in Afghan state and society. Once the communist government was eliminated in 1992, a new struggle for power emerged between the mujahedeen leaders—a struggle that still continues today. Some leaders, like Dostum and Khan, have moved toward the central government whereas others have joined the Taliban and insurgency against Kabul. The situation in Afghanistan is complex, as the current struggles have roots within governance in Afghanistan over the last century. The trends of foreign patrons and no domestic constituency has contributed to a lack of centralized bureaucracies and institutions that have given way for regional leaders to create areas of control outside of the central government.

**Strongmen in Afghanistan**

The fragmentation of the political and military systems is what prevented local victories from becoming national ones because none of the groups were able to resuscitate the barely-there bureaucracy and turn it into a state-building tool for their cause. Local and regional organization, however, was much more effective, given tribal and ethnic kinship networks and proximity. Local commanders were able to unite with like-minded individuals, and create regional networks, but:

> “only a few commanders had developed the autonomous bureaucratic and political organizations to provide support for their military actions. The extent to which such organizations developed was what really marked the differences among regions of the country during this period. Only in the non-Pashtun areas did leaders manage to establish such organizations inside the country. The

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34 Ibid, 247
combination of ISI manipulation, tribal segmentation, and a high level of emigration kept the Pashtun areas fragmented. The only large conventional military units of resistance among Pashtuns were Hikmatyar’s battalions organized by the ISI among the refugees in Pakistan.”

Whitney Azoy explains that Afghans interact and find common ground on the basis of four social principles: kinship, residence, class, and religion. Though these four principles do not always work together, they “bind” Afghans and are necessary to understand social behavior in Afghanistan. Kin is the most significant institution in the lives of most Afghans; residence is important as it determines their work and interactions; social class is weakly developed and supplies no institutions of political authority; and Islam is central to cultural life and can be called the strongest unifying force in Afghan society. Kinship-based political institutions have different structures or regime types than that of the nation-state. For tribes, such as the Pashtun, nesting is involved: “[These] groups contain subgroups, which in turn contain other subgroups, whose relationship to each other is once again similar. There is no preeminent or crucial level for social organization.” In other words, there is not central authority. This lack of central authority makes it hard for any nation-state to exist, as a central government needs an apparatus to carry out activities of the state from revenue collecting to monopolizing the use of force. Some local or regional structures that resembled state institutions were formed in parts of Afghanistan, but not in concert with others. These were individual and isolated areas of control by strongmen, warlords, and local rulers, and acted independently of other regions and from Kabul. These apparatuses had different reaches and effectiveness, but arguably one of the most successful

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Ibid, 258
Ibid, 24-27
areas of control was the Dostum-led Junbesh party centered in Balkh and spreading to the surrounding provinces/areas.

**Balkh, Dostum and Junbesh**

Englehart argues that the “south has a long history of minimal formal governance, creating opportunities for increased Taliban insurgency,” and the better governance in the north facilitated the disarmament of warlords and comparative stability. 39 In the north, the Northern Alliance strongmen, who are often called warlords, developed large secure bases during the civil war but lost power during the Taliban rule. After 9/11, the United States largely supported the Northern Alliance leaders in order to maintain minimal manpower on the ground and these strongmen quickly assumed authority over their former areas of control. While their reigns were at first problematic—withholding tax revenue from the central government, engaging in internecine fighting and committing human rights abuses—the successful leadership of strongmen, such as Dostum, quickly brought stability and eventually international actors into their areas of control. 40 Englehart notes that:

“the monarchy and the communist government did much less institution-building [in the south, and that] numerous militias battled among themselves, but none was able to exploit any significant concentration of resources in order to build quasi-states with regularized revenue sources, bureaucratic administration and public services [as seen in the north].” 41

The forces of the strongmen in the south tended to revolve around tribal affiliation while the forces of the strongmen in the north descended from government forces. The difficulty of strongmen to produce an effective regime is due to the historical and cultural mores of the

39 Englehart, “A Tale of Two Afghanistans: Comparative Governance and Insurgency in the North and South” *Asian Survey* 50:4 (2010), 735
40 Englehart, “A Tale of Two Afghanistans: Comparative Governance and Insurgency in the North and South”, 737
41 Ibid, 749
Pashtun belt, which has been governed by “patronage of local leaders and tribal politics.”\textsuperscript{42} Even the Taliban, which Englehart argues is the “only force that proved capable of overcoming these [tribal] rivalries,” did not attempt to build a more capable administration in the south.\textsuperscript{43} The Karzai administration had more difficulty absorbing the south into the centralized system: “Rather than assume control of a relatively intact local civil service as it did up in the north, the government had to build one from the ground up in the south.”\textsuperscript{44} It was here, in the building of an intact local civil service, that strongmen like Dostum became essential. Tribal rivalries characterized the south. In Kandahar especially, no infrastructure remained after the Soviet withdrawal and no one group was able to concentrate power and provide a de-facto government for needed services and security.

Dostum “used these revenues [from international donors] to build a stable zone of governance with relatively good services and infrastructure, preserving much of the administration he inherited from the previous government,” making Mazar-e-Sharif a flourishing city with good roads, reliable electricity, and an institutionalized education system.\textsuperscript{45} Then, a British-led PRT arrived and forced Dostum to take accountability for his behavior. While Englehart argues that the presence of PRTs forced the warlords to be more accountable to the public and central government, he does not further explore the stable, centralized de-facto governments and institutions put into place by these warlords.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid
\item Ibid, 751
\item Ibid
\item Ibid
\item Englehart, “A Tale of Two Afghanistans: Comparative Governance and Insurgency in the North and South”, 741
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Kandahar: Pashtuns and the Taliban

In the unstable south, strongmen have had to face considerable tribal resistance, given the rigidness of some Pashtun tribal structures in the so-called Pashtun Belt area. There are many variations within the Pashtun community of tribal structure and culture, but this paper will focus mostly on the rutbavi Durrani Pashtun tribes. These tribal structures were and are based on unity and a system of elders and shuras, and are not at all conducive for a charismatic individual to take over.

Giustozzi uses I.E. Katkov’s research to differentiate between the three types of Pashtun tribes: quami; rutbavi, and kuchi, arguing that rutbavi, or hierarchical, Durrani tribes are more prone to warlordism than the quami, or egalitarian, ones. Their system was made to sustain group decisions, not individual ones, forcing strongmen to overcome more obstacles. It is also important here to note that this assumption is not applicable to the entire south, but to some of Pashtuns in Kandahar (see Figures 1 and 2 regarding the Pashtun tribes of Kandahar and their organization.)

While Giustozzi classifies the Pashtuns as hierarchical, Barfield argues that they are of the egalitarian sort: “organized through segmentary descent groups that were egalitarian in social structure and prone to reject the legitimacy of any hereditary leadership” with an open and fluid political structure that reject leadership. These groups operate on consensus and are especially resistant to leaders from outside groups—a claim that Giustozzi agrees with.

Giustozzi argues that quami tribes are not conducive for warlords/leaders: these egalitarian tribes did not require as many resources and were typically found outside of the

47 Barfield, Afghanistan: a Cultural and Political History, 78
capital/urban areas, basically places where the revenue base was too marginal to support a “more hierarchical political structure.” With these structures, they did not have to overcome the population but replace the dynasty that ruled over them and then went through four phases as articulated by Ibn Khaldun: a strong leader; the son of the first leader, who was more luxurious and less thrifty; a weaker leader who inherits the economic decline; and finally, the weakest leader, ripe for displacement all over again. The ruler’s failure would lead to the decline of the government (via a hierarchical system where no rival outside the imperial line could be considered for the position). It is important to understand the two types of tribes before understanding why the people of Kandahar behaved the way they did. It seems that much of the hierarchical tribes favored a more warlord-type existence but the majority of Pashtuns, egalitarian in nature, preferred a more intimate type of rule.

*Tribal Culture and Politics*

Giustozzi uses three case studies to illustrate the different issues of strongmen in a Pashtun environment: Esmatullah Muslim, in Kandahar; Akhundzadas in Helmand; and the militia commanders of Lashkar Gah in Helmand. He concludes that Muslim, the tribal warlord in Kandahar, was the most successful in creating an effective warlord-led rule. Muslim, in contrast to his northern peers, never rose above a strictly military role as he was primarily concerned with tribal politics. “Once he had firmly established himself as a leader of the Achakzais, he had little incentive nor potential to try and expand beyond those limits.”

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48 Ibid, 82  
49 Ibid, 82-84  
50 Ibid, 88  
were a bit more successful than Muslim in terms of expanding their power base over their own tribe but they failed to permanently absorb other tribes under their leadership.

Giustozzi catalogs various different characters in the Akhundzadas that played an important military role, but no individual actor played a role such as Muslim. In a way, the Akhundzadas did produce warlords but not a warlord: a central figure that commanded an area. His last case study revealed that the commanders of Lashkar Gah (also known as Khalqi militias) were not very successful in creating an area of control due to a variety of factors, including the lack of military experience and resistance from other tribes. Clearly, the tribal mentality of the south plays a role in the development, or lack thereof, of warlords.

Giustozzi’s three case studies show that there are clear difficulties in amassing power in the Pashtun-dominated areas of southern Afghanistan. “Within the context of Pashtun tribal society, [strongmen] could find little space… they faced competition from tribalism, which ended up imposing a logic different from militarism, even when warlords did emerge to play an important if temporary role.”52 Guistozzi concludes that warlords can only prosper in social environments that allow them to easily acquire political control over a territory, which was not possible in the south.

On the other hand, Carl Forsberg concludes that in reality there are only a few influential actors in Kandahar that derive influence from this position. His analysis of the power and politics in Kandahar shows that there are strongmen, such as Ahmed Wali Karzai, Arif Noorzai, Abdul Razak, and Matiullah Khan who have formed alliances that control transit routes and run commercials and military networks. There are also other strongmen, such as Gul Agha Sherzai,

52 Ibid, 17
who run rival networks. There are a handful of strongmen in Kandahar, not all of who are allies, but these men dominate the political and economic life of Kandahar.\textsuperscript{53} The central government, however, has an extremely limited role.

Forsberg further advances the decentralized nature of tribal politics to dispel the myth that tribal politics is predictable and uniformed in Kandahar. He argues that “the tribe’s role in politics and security can be overestimated because they are not unified political entities… The tribe is not the central driver of politics in Kandahar; however, it is the terrain on which Kandahar’s political battles are fought. Influential actors in Kandahar, though not brought to power through the tribes, nevertheless attempt to maintain influence over the tribal system.”\textsuperscript{54} These strongmen purposely maintain the importance of the traditional tribal system and their place within it for their own ends.

Forsberg argues that broader tribal classifications are mostly for heuristics sake, and not all that accurate of the actual situation on the ground. He examines the differences in tribal organization in the Durrani monarchy and the mujahedeen/Taliban era that led to the transformation of tribal politics in Kandahar, such as the super-tribal elite.\textsuperscript{55} In the Durrani monarchy, Kandahar became more hierarchical than the rest of Afghanistan due to connections with the monarchy because the Durrani kings had their roots in the tribes of Kandahar.

\textit{The Taliban in Kandahar}

The Taliban was an organization that consisted of various strongmen and who took advantage of the tribal system and hierarchy in Kandahar. Even though the Taliban had been the

\textsuperscript{53} Forsberg, “Politics and Power in Kandahar” Understanding War
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 11
\textsuperscript{55} Forsberg, 12
only organization to unite the various Pashtun tribes, they were by no means effective rulers. Crews and Tarzi argue that the Taliban largely failed in their efforts to reconstruct the governing institutions and provide services to the population due not only to their ideology but to the difficulties of ruling Afghanistan. They note that before the Soviet invasion, the structure of Afghan societies were small, heterogeneous villages in the countryside but by the late 1980s, 25–33 percent of all Afghans moved to the largest cities due to displacement and civil war. Many also ended up in refugee camps all over the world, though the majority where displaced to Pakistan.

The Taliban were responsible for some of the Afghan boom in the 1990s, when the economy saw an increase in growth and activity, but the “main obstacle to a continued boom within the [oil] industry was the absence of law and order.” The Taliban did not support the development of an institutionalized system to supplement the economic boom. The boom of the 1990s was due to the increase in opium prices, when Afghanistan opium dominated the world market, which had previously been dominated by Southeast Asian countries. This trade especially benefitted the organization and not the population. The lack of popular measures aimed at attracting local support (combined with the strict ideological push) hurt the Taliban in the end. Their focus on ideology and expansion at the expense of delivering goods and services decreased their support from local populations; even though they provided a semblance of security.

56 Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 18
57 Ibid, 19
58 Ibid, 103
ANALYSIS

Afghanistan is currently comprised of a variety of different ethnic and linguistic groups, the largest being the Pashtuns, estimated to be a total of 42 percent of the population. These Pashtuns are scattered around the country, though a majority of Pashtuns live in the south. Even more Pashtuns live in Pakistan—in either the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—making the ethnic bonds between parts of these two countries very strong. According to the CIA Factbook, in addition to the Pashtuns, there is an estimated 27 percent Tajik population, 9 percent Hazara, 9 percent Uzbek, 4 percent Aimak, 3 percent Turkmen, and 2 percent Baloch, with about 4 percent either other or undetermined. While these are the numbers that the U.S. government stands behind, these numbers may not be the most accurate, as there has not been a complete census of Afghanistan since the 1970s.

Balkh and Junbesh

History, Structure and Organization of Junbesh

Dostum’s party, the Junbesh-i-Milli-ye Islami, was formed in 1992 in reaction to the recentralization efforts by the government starting in 1991, but even before then, Dostum’s horizontal networks with his fellow military leaders emerged in the 1980s. Dostum relied on a feudal type of relationship with the provincial military leaders to maintain his influence over the larger area. This extensive patronage gave Dostum the leverage he needed to impose his recognition as regional leader and co-opt the military class into his party.

Dostum was not content with his current powerbase and sought to increase power. He knew the importance of foreign relations, diplomacy and constituency—seeking donations and

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61 Giustozzi, Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan, 109
support from Pakistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan—relations he maintained closely during his rule. Dostum’s charisma was also vital in his rule because he maintained and continued to have good relations with his military leaders, “an ability which is in a sense the essence of ‘feudal’ leadership and is enhanced by the group solidarity that derives from military comradeship.”

**Services Provided and Foreign Relations of Junbesh**

Altogether, Dostum and Junbesh controlled a de-facto mini-state, comprised of 5–6 provinces in northern Afghanistan and centered on Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh province for a large part of the 1990s. Part of the Junbesh’s strategy was to not only solicit international support but to build domestic support through institution-building and local development. Dostum’s delivery-based legitimization was fairly successful in the north: educational investments, such as the foundation for Baghlan University, the upgrading of Balkh university dormitories, and funding of Afghan students to study abroad in Turkey; extensive public works, such as bringing natural gas to Mazar-e-Sharif, the renewal of gas pipelines in Shiberghan, and the improvement of roads in Faryab and Mazar-e-Sharif; and the building of a power line to Samangan were crucial factors in his rule.\(^\text{63}\)

Junbesh invested heavily in roads, education, and electricity/natural gas. This not only fostered relations with its population but provided essential resources to tighten their grip and control of the area. In addition to providing public works, Junbesh also built up an extensive bureaucratic and military machine. Dostum, a skilled strategic thinker and planner with decades

\(^{62}\) Ibid, 114
\(^{63}\) Ibid, 193-194
of military experience, was able to provide salaries and career prospects for his men, even Pashtuns, after Herat and Jalalabad fell.

Junbesh had in place a bureaucratic system that spanned their area of control and maintained “control of airfields, roads, and fuel depots [to] keep his force mobile.” Junbesh, led by Dostum, relied heavily on foreign support and pressure from regional neighbors, and hence retreated from a separatist agenda to support a united but decentralized Afghan state. While they relied on support from international actors, they also maintained a fairly bureaucracy that could pay and promote Dostum’s soldiers and raise taxes within the areas of the north under his control><i>(see Figure 3 on Junbesh networking)</i>. This type of institution building was a stark contrast to what happened in Kandahar. In the south, more so than the north, successive empires chose to bypass or impose only symbolic elements of sovereignty and this gave the Pashtuns much freedom to rule how they pleased.

During the late 1980s, Dostum and Junbesh controlled many resources, including Soviet Union weapon depots, important oil and gas fields, a functioning international airline, and duties and fees from border crossings with Central Asia. Instead of simply exploiting these resources, Junbesh was collecting taxes, operating legal court systems, and even printing their own bank notes between the years of 1994–1996. Junbesh also operated various health and educational

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64 Dostum’s military experience includes: serving in the mountains against the mujahedeen; joining the Afghan military in 1972 as a noncommissioned officer; heading a group of local defense forces; and becoming a four star General of the 53rd Division of the Afghan Army, formerly known as the Jowzjan militia.


65 Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, 275


systems, including supporting the only functioning university in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{68} The administration of Junbesh was fairly effective because it had controlled most of the north (most or all of: Balkh, Faryab, Jowzjan, Baghlan, Konduz, and Samangan) until the rise of the Taliban.\textsuperscript{69}

**Junbesh and (Relative) Successes in Governance**

Part of why the Junbesh system functioned more effectively than its counterparts in the south was due to the surviving infrastructure of the Soviet rule. The Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks had full political and administrative autonomy in the 1980s, a system that was built upon and enhanced by Dostum and Junbesh in the 1990s. The Soviet reliance on minorities and local militias eroded the Pashtun dominance of the area and gave an opportunity to the other ethnicities to take political, administrative, and social control.

While outside the realm of study, it is interesting to note that even after 2001, when Dostum came back into power, he continued his focus on service delivery. The scale of the effort was smaller due to the presence of international donors but the Junbesh reestablished a fairly good level of public services in the cities it controlled (i.e. gas and electricity). Dostum also donated money to rebuild schools, roads, and mosques, gaining well-publicized initiatives and support. “On the whole, Junbesh’s [continued] policy of delivering service was one of its most successful initiatives and appears to have been instrumental to gaining a degree of support among the urban population which benefitted from them.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{69} Rieck, Andreas, “Afghanistan's Taliban: An Islamic Revolution of the Pashtuns” *Orient*, 38:1 (1997), 139
\textsuperscript{70} Forsberg, 194
Clearly, Junbesh provided plenty of the required goods and services involved in governance— from collecting taxes to providing education and health care, they functioned as a de-facto government in the provinces of control up north. Junbesh provided a fairly comprehensive set of goods and services, despite their lack of democratic mandate. Junbesh built roads, enhanced existing infrastructure, and revamped the bureaucratic system, but its leaders have also been accused of crimes against humanity against its citizens.

Despite these accusations that have followed Junbesh leaders for decades, Junbesh did in fact provide a substantial amount of governance. It was able to collect tax and provide revenue for Junbesh’s militias; maintained law and order (though at times with violence); had a functioning legal and court system; supported women’s rights to education and business; provided educational and health care to its citizens; ran an effective bureaucratic system; and maintained good standing with a number of foreign states/dignitaries. Overall, Junbesh was relatively successful in providing governance. Again, this is not to discount their various human rights violations and accusations of mistreatment of its citizens, but from a purely “goods and services provided” standpoint, they were successful in providing a viable form of government, even if it was authoritarian and/or riddled with violence.

Kandahar and the Taliban

History, Structure and Organization of the Taliban

Historically, the central government has an extremely limited role in Kandahar. Forsberg further advances the decentralized nature of tribal politics to dispel the myth that tribal politics is predictable and uniformed in Kandahar. As he argues, “the tribe is not the central driver of politics in Kandahar; however, it is the terrain on which Kandahar’s political battles are fought.
Influential actors in Kandahar, though not brought to power through the tribes, nevertheless attempt to maintain influence over the tribal system.\textsuperscript{71} These strongmen purposely maintain the importance of the traditional tribal system and their place within it for their own ends.

When the communist regime and its subsequent resistance occurred in 1978, this system of tribal organization was changed. The tribal strongmen who flourished during the monarchy “had grown more attached to their state than their clans.”\textsuperscript{72} The educated tribal aristocracy was replaced in the 1980s by a new set of commanders who led the mujahedeen. “These new commanders were tribally based but drew their power less from traditional sources of moral authority than from their access to weapons and ability to organize and lead tribal militias.”\textsuperscript{73}

After the communist government collapsed, the main mujahedeen commanders seized large amounts of government land and carved out areas of control. This, Forsberg argues, was an aberration from the historic subordination of Kandahar’s tribes to state-connected elites, produced by the weakness of the state at the time and the effect communist rule had on breaking the connection between the tribe and state.\textsuperscript{74}

The tribal leaders of the monarchy were no more and were subsequently replaced by strongmen who used violence (vice soft power). The traditional tribal leadership that was not integrated into the militias became irrelevant—they virtually wielded no control or resources compared to the strongmen. Under the Taliban rule, in a reaction to the militias, the Durrani tribal structure was reinstated with support from the Pakistani intelligence, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The ISI was supportive of the Taliban for many reasons, especially due to the

\textsuperscript{71} Forsberg, 11
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 14
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 15
\textsuperscript{74} Forsberg, 16
anti-Soviet sentiment and the shared Pashtun ethnicity (see Figure 4 for map of Pashtunistan). This reinvigorated system under the Taliban “incorporated a broader base of Kandahar’s tribes than did previous or successive governments,” but that too did not last.75 The Taliban insisted on a revolutionary social program that went too far from the “traditional political, social and cultural order of Kandahar, and lost local support.”76

Under the Soviet regime, the Pashtuns had been neglected in favor of the Tajik, Uzbek, Pashai, Turkemen, and Nuristani tribes and languages because the communists focused on “ethnic labels as a means to categorize minority groups whom they targeted for liberation,” a direct challenge to the Pashtuns, the ethnicity of the late monarchy.77 In spite of their alienation under the communist government, Pashtun elites, however, see themselves as the “natural masters of the country, a claim endorsed by key foreign sponsors.”78 They make up anywhere from 38–46 percent of the population in Afghanistan and there have only been two periods in Afghanistan where Pashtuns did not rule (briefly in 1929 and again from 19921–1996, both by ethnic Tajiks).

The Taliban’s Organization

The Taliban’s organizational structure consists of hierarchical tiers. Before 9/11, the groups operated in a conventional and centralized manner at the top and middle levels. During insurgent levels, the organizations become flatter, “giving local commanders more independence so they can adapt to the demands of a complex environment and benefit from dispersing their

75 Ibid, 16
76 Ibid
77 Ibid, 20
78 Crews and Tarzi, 19

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forces into small units.” Their organization is successful because it is a network of franchises, fitting the decentralized tribal structure (see Figures 5 and 6 for Taliban centralized and regional organization).

Shahid Afsar, Christopher Samples, and Thomas Woods describe the formation of the Taliban from bottom up. It starts with an organizational small militant group called the local Taliban, which eventually gains some form of recognition from the central Taliban hierarchy in return for its support and cooperation. The new cell both supports the central strategy and maintains freedom of action, preserving tribal boundaries and territorial boundaries. The typical village cell has 10–50 part-time fighters who are mostly motivated by ideology and run their own intelligence-collection through logistics and population control mechanisms, and sometimes even coordinate with other cells. These cells have a reciprocal relationship with the Taliban for physical and intelligence-support and cooperate on a matter of issues from finances to IED-making. (See Figure 7 for Kandahar cell structures and how they relate to the central and regional Taliban)

**Institutional Problems with Providing Governance**

The Taliban was aware that simply uniting the Pashtun tribes was not enough. If they were to spread their message across to Kabul and beyond, they needed to increase their power base and reach. Much of what they did was political and not beneficial to the people of Kandahar.

The Taliban used ethnicity almost haphazardly. They first played on the Pashtun sentiments to gain a power base, but as they increased their rule and sought wider legitimacy,

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79 Afsar, Samples and Woods, 64
80 Ibid, 64-66
they started to argue that they represented more than Pashtuns, even though few non-Pashtuns were in their ranks. They deemphasized the role of Pashtuns publicly, despite the fact that it was a mostly Pashtun organization. The Taliban chose ideology over ethnicity, and that choice was clear with regards to their efforts at governance.

Above all, the Taliban focused on pushing their religious ideology to the rest of Afghanistan instead of building institutions and capacities to strengthen the bureaucracy and system of governance in Kandahar. The Taliban were smart regarding their spread, as they would approach a weak commander, who would be more willing to join the Taliban for his own security, and spread that way. They would swallow weak local commanders and focus on expansion, instead of maintaining control and order over the swaths of area already under Taliban control. The Taliban understood local dynamics and self-interest and started to slowly spread across southern Afghanistan toward Kabul. Beyond the Pashtun belt, the Taliban had to “tweak their message and adopt different strategies… military attacks, assassination, buying loyalty and co-opting minorities” were all included.\(^81\) Their effort of dismantling rival power structures proved successful, but their sustainability was limited given the lack of institution-building.

In 1992, when the mujahedeen entered Kabul, there was still a government infrastructure of ministries and municipalities functioning at the lower levels, but by the time the Taliban took over Kabul in 1996, the infrastructure collapsed shortly thereafter. The Taliban considered the state institutions corrupt and replaced the “senior Hazara, Tajik and Uzbek bureaucrats with

\(^81\) Ibid, 87
inexperienced Pashtuns so that the ministries ceased to operate.”

The Taliban officials in areas like Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif were also Pashtuns not qualified for the jobs of governor and police chiefs to which they were assigned. The military also had no hierarchical structure of officers and commanders, and the commanders were often left to fend for themselves in terms of recruiting and paying troops. The Taliban rule effectively dismantled the bureaucratic institutions built in the 1900s. Even though those had not been the most effective institutions, they were far more effective than the Taliban-replaced bureaucracy of nepotism and unqualified assignments.

**Foreign Relations of the Taliban**

With regards to the Taliban, its most important foreign relations came in its dealings with Pakistan. Oliver Roy explains the Pakistani support for the Taliban as twofold: to assert the regional influence of Pakistan by establishing a type of control in Afghanistan; and an ideological and religious connection that challenge the Islamic credentials of the Pakistan government. In addition to close relations with Pakistan, specifically their intelligence and military aspects, the Taliban maintained fairly friendly communication with other extremist groups in the Middle East and South Asia.

**Additional Considerations Specific to Kandahar**

Basically, Kandahar politics has always been personal, not institutional, and I am interested in examining why political life was never institutionalized in Kandahar. Currently, the people of Kandahar feel alienated from what they call the “oligarchy” of Kandahar elites and

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83 Ibid, 194
their corruption.\textsuperscript{85} Forsberg concludes “as Kandahar’s tribal system has evolved away from traditional models, tribal leadership in Kandahar is increasingly based on a leader’s ability to provide resource for his constituents,” succinctly summarizing the complex, flexible, and at times, fluid tribal system in Kandahar.\textsuperscript{86}

In addition to these tribal strongmen, Kandahar is especially unique due to both the strong presence of the Taliban and drug-trafficking networks. These two factors, along with Karzai and the other strongmen, show the complexity of Kandahar as a province. Within this province alone are problems of security, governance, corruption, terrorism, and drugs. Stability is lacking, incidents of attacks, IEDs and explosions are high, and the drug trade flourishes—all within the borders of this province. While Kandahar City mostly operates under the Karzai network, there are parts of Kandahar that are outside of their influence and controlled by the Taliban or the traffickers. Karzai has an ambiguous relationship with the Taliban, in which political considerations can outweigh the impetuous to defeat the insurgency. Forsberg is not the first to argue that the Karzai views the Taliban more as a means to their end rather than a threat to his power. \textsuperscript{87}

\textit{Overall Failure of the Taliban to Provide Lasting Governance}

Critically, the Taliban’s lack of bureaucratic and managerial skill made them rely on “puritanical morality” when formulating public policy, which created a government that failed to provide any public services or reconstruction projects in either Kabul or Kandahar.\textsuperscript{88} Their efforts at state-building were limited: they “attempted to resurrect a ruined state apparatus and

\textsuperscript{85} Forsberg, “Politics and Power in Kandahar”, 51
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 55
\textsuperscript{87} Forsberg, “Politics and Power in Kandahar”, 56
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 111-112
project its sovereignty in the international community while simultaneously implementing their vision of an Islamic order built on resort to exemplary violence against their mujahedeen rivals and in urban centers, against the ostensible enemies of the new order." They did, however, use propaganda extensively to reach out to the public, even in their neglect of actual capacity-building of the state and its institutions. In 1996, when the Taliban assumed control of Kabul, they began state-building efforts. They could not find the trained professionals necessary to run the government ministries (many had left during the civil war) and staffed ministries with kinship networks from Kandahar but were still unable to pay salaries and transmit central authority into the provinces. This weak state led to the loss of power for Taliban subordinates. They could not effectively gain the loyalty of local populations. Even when the Taliban attempted a more nationalist rhetoric that ultimately failed as well. The regime was too dependent on external sources of income and too corrupt to build adequate representation. The estimated fighting strength of the Taliban for late 2009 was estimated to be somewhere in the 20,000–30,000 men range. In addition to the fighting force, there are probably a few thousand political cadres who carry their message to remote corners of the country, recruiting, providing political structure, working as judges, tax collectors, and so on.

The Taliban, as an organization, were aware of the importance of maintaining a popular mandate, even though they were also not democratically elected. The Taliban was able to unite a disparate Pashtun community, but they did so in ideology and fell short in following that up with governance. They were preoccupied with spreading ideology and maintaining their power base.

\[89\] Ibid, 244
\[90\] Ibid, 258
and not with building effective governance tools for their population. The Taliban, like Junbesh, was less concerned with human rights than spreading its power base; but unlike Junbesh, the Taliban implemented a variety of laws to limit the role of women in society. The Taliban also falls short with regard to other areas of governance: their taxation of opium is often hand-in-hand with a campaign of fear to collect revenue, working with traffickers and criminal organizations, but without a formal system of taxation; limited rule of law and court system; and very limited health, welfare, and education programs. Clearly, the Taliban did not prioritize governance.

They were, however, fairly adequate at providing law and order, given their emphasis on morality and righteousness, even though it came at the expense of its citizens with a system of informers. And while the contemporary Taliban were working on providing a semblance of a bureaucracy, during the years 1992–2001, the bureaucracy was informal, with cells that reported to commanders and commanders that reported to other leaders. This confusing and de-facto system of bureaucracy ensured that very few public works and/or systematic policies were carried out by the Taliban commanders uniformly. Their methods of communication were limited and the focus was expansion, not providing a way of life.

**Summary of Comparisons**

It is clear that these two organizations provided a variety of essential services to their population, but the Taliban was more interested in furthering its political agenda than taking care of their citizenry. This is not to say that Junbesh was the more altruistic organization, but perhaps they had a better understanding of the benefits of providing services to a population, namely dependence, despite the unpopularity and harsh tactics of Dostum and his fellow Junbesh leaders.
While neither group was democratically elected, unpopular with many locals, and have been accused of human rights violations and extreme violence under a campaign of expansion and more control, they are still two very different organizations. Junbesh was concerned with expansion, but it also harnessed its population’s potential by providing educational and military support for locals, provided infrastructure and communications upgrades in an effort to build good will, and focused on securing the area it controlled before expanding elsewhere. While Junbesh had the advantage of a preexisting nascent bureaucratic system, its leaders still made a conscious decision to provide services for the population as one way of strengthening the organization. The Taliban, on the other hand, was more concerned with expansion than strengthening the territory it already maintained. Their lack of efforts in building infrastructure and failure to invest in people (i.e. via education and health initiatives) show their role as a de-facto government is limited solely to that of ideology, law and order and spreading power; a fact that makes them weaker with the population. The population did not have any popular programs or goods and services provided to them by the Taliban, making them more likely to dissociate from the organization when it acted in unpopular manners.

Listed below is a summary of the main goods and services I consider part of governance, provided by the two organizations in the years of study. Please note that in the comparison that some of the Taliban’s services include post-9.11 statistics, but they are used to mostly highlight the enormity or extremity of changes in service.
## Services Provided by Organization, 1988–2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Junbesh – Balkh &amp; the North</th>
<th>The Taliban – Kandahar</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monopoly on the Use of Force and Violence</strong></td>
<td>Formed after the Soviet Union dissolution in 1991, this non-Pashtun militia group had the reputation of being the best equipped of Afghanistan, numbering 15–16,000 men.(^{92}) Junbesh and their allies controlled almost all of the militias/use of force in the region controlled by Junbesh and their local and regional allies.</td>
<td>The Taliban, as a whole, is estimated to be at tens of thousands of people; but the actual fighting force of the Taliban is estimated to be around 15–20,000, with the rest as administrators and other political actors. In the Kandahar area, the Taliban had a monopoly of the use of force in the majority of the province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taxation</strong></td>
<td>Junbesh’s bureaucratic system was able to collect charges due to the effective control of roads, airfields and other means of commerce. Taxes and revenue provided to Dostum to support his militia and invest into the population.</td>
<td>The Taliban constantly use fear as a tool to collect revenues and they often collaborate with traffickers to maximize the revenue by taxing farmers, transporters in their areas of control and the local population to raise revenue for their organization. The pre–9/11 figures have been difficult to ascertain, given the Taliban’s restriction of opium during its rule, but NATO’s most recent figures estimates that the Taliban raise $60-$100 million a year from the trade in illegal narcotics.(^{93})</td>
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| Law and Order (i.e. security and policing) | Junbesh was fairly successful at providing law and order. In fact, led by Dostum, Junbesh was known for the severe measures taken to maintain discipline in the armed militia/troops of the region. | The Taliban was fairly good at imposing law and order in its controlled areas; it did not happen through specialized police forces but through a system of informers, commanders and local militias.⁹⁴ |
| Administration of Justice and Courts | Junbesh ensured that it had a functioning court and legal system in place. The scope and effectiveness of these courts remains murky; but their existence is confirmed. | Very limited pre–9/11: until late 2008, the Taliban-appointed judiciary only operated in two dozen districts where they were confident of their territorial control. In other areas where they operated, they were not in full control and invited the public to refer to specific religious judges and tribal conditions.⁹⁵ |
| Shelter, Food and other Essential Services | Junbesh provided better care of its citizens, but mostly left its population to handle food, shelter, and essential supplies on their own. | There were minor efforts by the Taliban in education and health sectors by attempting to provide some of both in remote areas.⁹⁶ The Taliban spread doctors around the provinces, for the primary reason of treating wounded Taliban fighters, but they also sometimes served the population.⁹⁷ |
| Women’s Rights | Women were free to go about their business as they pleased. Women and girls were allowed to go to school, be out in public without a burqa and wear high- | The Taliban prohibited women from attending school and working outside the home. The Taliban’s gender restrictions interfered with the delivery of |

⁹⁴ Giustozzi, “Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects”, 20
⁹⁵ Ibid, 19
⁹⁶ Ibid, 18
⁹⁷ Ibid., 22
| **Commerce, Mail and Livestock** | Junbesh controlled the airfields, roads and services, such as electricity/gas fields in the areas of control. | Much of the Taliban’s revenues is derived from opium and drug trafficking and they work extensively with networks of traffickers and poppy farmers to produce revenue. The economy of Kandahar is mostly based on rural poppy farming, with limited alternative livelihoods. |
| **Roads and Transportation** | Junbesh built up existing roads and infrastructure as part of its service-based delivery; this brought Junbesh some good will despite their otherwise authoritarian rule. | Roads were fairly neglected and not considered a vital part of the Taliban strategy to expand into the rest of Afghanistan and impose an ideological rule. |
| **Education** | Junbesh donated money to fund Mazar-e-Sharif University and re-built Baghram University in addition to funding Afghan students to study abroad in places like Turkey. | The Taliban is currently investing in schooling, but pre–9/11, their efforts at education were very limited. They focused their efforts mostly on building and training their forces and did not prioritize education; girls were also not able to attend school under Taliban controlled areas. |
| **Bureaucracy and Civil Servants** | Dostum ensured that his loyal men were well-paid and had careers in the bureaucratic system. The non-Pashtun ethnicities were already politically and administratively autonomous. | Very limited pre–9/11; the Taliban only started to centralize their bureaucracy in 2003. Pre-9.11, the Taliban had limited commanders and provincial administrators that |

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and so Junbesh simply built upon the pre-existing systems to create bureaucrats to carry out administrative duties (i.e. control of commerce, taxation collection, providing services to the population).

reported up a loose chain of command.\textsuperscript{100}

Again, given their priority of fighting a war, they never spend that much time building their civil service and didn’t have the benefit of a pre-existing system to build upon.

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<th>Treatment of Citizens</th>
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<td>Dostum believed in a delivery-based constituency / system of patronage. He donated large amounts of funds into rebuilding of schools, mosques, and roads to improve the lives of the population under his control. Many instances of human rights abuse have been reported, especially during their 1991–2001 era in both Northern Afghanistan and Kabul. They have been accused of looting, pillaging, rape, and murder of Afghans.</td>
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<td>The Taliban banned television, music and dancing and carried out atrocities against Afghanistan’s non-Sunni population and allegedly supported militant Sunni sectarian groups in Pakistan\textsuperscript{101} In addition, “during its reign, the Taliban held public executions in Kabul’s soccer stadium. Women were forced to wear burqas because their faces were seen as a source of corruption. Beatings for adultery or because a man’s beard was not long enough were common; girls were denied schooling and could be married at age 9.”\textsuperscript{102}</td>
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<th>External Relations and Diplomacy</th>
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<td>Junbesh was close with the United States, as part of the U.S. supported-Northern Alliance resurgence in 2001. Dostum has also been very skillful in maintaining partnerships with countries from Central Asia and the</td>
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\textsuperscript{100} Giustozzi, “Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects”, 20
\textsuperscript{101} Afsar, Samples and Wood, 60
\textsuperscript{102} Jim Michaels, “The Taliban had Changed Approach in Marjah” USA Times/Army Times, 22 February 2010, retrieved from http://www.armytimes.com/news/2010/02/gns_marjah_022210w/
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is clear strongmen matter and will continue to play a large role in Afghanistan, no matter what ends up happening in Afghanistan, and my research seeks to understand just how two of the largest strongmen-led organizations functions. By furthering our understanding on Junbesh and the Taliban and their efforts and extent at providing local and provincial governance, I hope to find possible linkages between institutions and security, transition and/or other areas of national importance in addition to broadening the academic and policy world’s understanding of these two organizations. With an understanding of Junbesh and the Taliban, there could be lessons learned for the central and provincial governments, who do not have the luxury of absolute force and zero accountability to the population, on what worked for these organizations and what had to be forced onto the population.

The two organizations were chosen for their very but substantial similarities: both were authoritarian regimes, without a popular mandate, that not only maintained control of an area, but used the area as a power base in which they spread further. The main difference between these two organizations is that that Junbesh did not have the ideological or moral impetus that the Taliban did, which was a key factor in their providing of goods and services. Though Junbesh was the less political organization, it was not purely apolitical—they just did not have any guiding political principles besides the spreading of power. Junbesh leaders worked with a
variety of commanders and militia leaders, all of different ethnicities and political leanings, in an effort to spread their power base across northern Afghanistan. The Taliban, on the other hand, were guided by the religious principles that helped them unite the Pashtun tribes in Kandahar. Their insistence on these principles above all other principles partially explains their lack of capacity and institution-building efforts in their areas of control.

Policy Implications

From the research, it is clear that Junbesh invested more in the population, by providing a delivery-based approach to goods and services, in an effort not only to maintain control and good will, but to provide resources (revenue, soldiers, etc) to the organization. Junbesh figured out that providing for the people makes them dependent on an already authoritarian regime and less likely to revolt if they were living fairly comfortably, albeit under the threat of violence and human rights violations. The Taliban, on the other hand, never figured out how to strengthen the areas of control before conquering new ones. Their impatience in spreading helped them in 1992, when they quickly rushed into Kabul and took over by 1996, but it hurt them in terms of providing a viable power base. Kandahar today is still the stronghold of the Taliban, but there is no discernable system or bureaucracy, only the highly decentralized, informal system of communication and rule that existed in the 1990s.

From these conclusions, it would seem that Junbesh would be the more successful and long-lasting of the two institutions, but that is not the case. In reality, the Taliban is still the major force in Kandahar whereas Junbesh leaders were co-opted into the central government or have faded from politics. This perhaps shows the problem with governance in Afghanistan and raises the question of whether or not governance and a delivery-based system is what the people
want. This research concludes that for all intents and purposes, Junbesh was more successful, provided more services and should have lasted longer, given their efforts at rooting themselves in the local population, but it is the Taliban that still stands strong today.

Further Research Considerations

This research has provided a comparison of two of the most dominant strongmen-led organizations in Afghanistan during the 1990s: Junbesh and the Taliban. While the study shows clearly that Junbesh was the more successful organization in terms of providing services to the population it controlled, it is not clear why the Taliban remains so active today, given their failure to provide goods and services at the level of Junbesh. While this study only aimed at comparing and contrasting the services provided and implications of the two organization’s attempts at governance, there have been a few key questions unearthed for possible future study:

- What do the Afghan people want? Is it security or goods and services?
- Why is the Taliban still strong today if they have failed to provide essential goods and services to the Kandahar population?
- Is there a relationship between the “governance” provided by these organizations and the security situation today?
- How did these organizations pave the way for centralized government transition? How did they not, in the case of Kandahar?
- Is the success of Junbesh and its “governance” goods and services linked to the (relative) success of former Junbesh commanders, such as Dostum?
- Does Junbesh’s delivery-based approach play a role in its long reign, despite various human rights accusations?
- Does this type of governance by a strongman-led organization apply to other cases across the world?
With this comprehensive review of the structure, logic, and services of these two organizations, it is clear that Junbesh was the stronger of the two organizations, specifically in terms of local governance and the goods and services provided to their population. From this conclusion, it would be logical to assume that Junbesh would outlast the Taliban, but the Taliban are still a dominant force in Kandahar, whereas Junbesh has been co-opted into the central government and/or forced out of politics. The U.S. understanding that providing goods and services is the main platform of governance may not be applicable to Afghanistan, if the Afghan people are not seeking services. Further research regarding the wants and needs of the Afghan people, and their opinion on priorities (i.e. security vs. services) would serve the international community well in tailoring a policy response that adequately addresses the needs of the Afghan people. In addition, further research into the second and third order effects of these organizations into the current state of affairs in their provinces would be highly desirable and useful to the international community and their state-building efforts.
Figures 1 and 2: the Pashtun Tribes of Kandahar and their Organization

Source: Karl Forsberg, “Politics and Power in Kandahar”, Institute for the Study of War; and Jones and Munoz’s “Afghanistan’s Local Wars”, RAND
Figure 3: Junbesh Networking – 2004; most of these networks were already in place from when Junbesh was in its heyday in the mid-1990s. Dostum was the center of this network, connected to local and regional strongmen across the north.

Networking among military leaders in Faryab Province – 2004

Junbesh, from Giustozzi’s data:

Figure 4: Pashtunistan – showing the areas of Pashtuns that spans the border of southern and eastern Afghanistan and northern and western Pakistan

Source: University of Texas, Map Library
Figures 5 and 6: The Taliban Organization and Regional Leadership


*Taliban’s Regional Leadership – note the dedication of a Deputy for Pashtun Units, lending more credence that the Taliban is a Pashtun-heavy in leadership roles*

Note: this is the Taliban’s leadership, as of 2008, but for the pre-9.11 period, some of these names do not apply – but these positions existed (as some of the commanders were either killed or replaced).


Figure 7: The Taliban cells in Kandahar and how they relate to both regional and national Taliban organization and structure


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