Report
Hazaras and Afghan insurgent groups

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SUMMARY

Hazaras have traditionally been a politically and economically marginalized group, at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Afghanistan. Migration, both internally and out of the country, has been an important strategy for Hazaras. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the political influence and socio-economic position of the Hazaras has significantly improved.

The main insurgent group in Afghanistan, Taliban, does not have a sectarian agenda, and there is no evidence to suggest that Hazaras are targeted based on religion or ethnicity by insurgent groups like Taliban. IS-loyal groups, however, have gained foothold in the country during the two last years, and are allegedly responsible for the targeted attack on the Shia Muslim Hazaras in July 2016, in which almost a hundred civilians were killed.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report concerns the situation of the Shia Muslim Hazara people in Afghanistan. By way of introduction, a historical review of the position of the Hazaras in Afghan society will be presented as a backdrop to understanding the current situation. We will go on to focus in particular on possible security challenges that this population group is currently facing. Because sectarianism among insurgent groups in Afghanistan can affect the Hazaras' security situation negatively, descriptions of the various groups and their agendas are included in the report.

The topics addressed are comprehensive, and the report does not intend to provide an exhaustive account of them. The focus is on issues that are considered to be of particular relevance to the immigration authorities.

The report is partly based on written sources and partly on information obtained during Landinfo's annual fact finding missions to Kabul during the period 2010–2016. Other oral sources have also been used, such as diplomatic sources, researchers and other experts. The oral sources in Afghanistan have been anonymised out of regard for their security and work situation.

Obtaining source material and gaining an overview of the conditions in Afghanistan are demanding tasks, and it can be difficult to obtain reliable information about different issues. The source situation is complicated by the difficult security situation in parts of the country, and poor road security is among the factors that create obstacles to the mobility of both local and international sources. Access to primary sources can therefore be limited. Information from secondary sources is not necessarily based on facts and can also be difficult to verify.

The present conflict between various insurgent groups and the Afghan authorities, which are supported by the international community, has been ongoing since 2002. It can be difficult to obtain objective and verifiable information about both conflict-related matters and other topics. A critical review of sources is therefore important – both of the sources themselves and of the credibility of the information they provide. Available sources may have their own agenda because of their primary loyalty to one of the parties in the conflict, or to their extended family, tribe or clan. This report seeks to shed light on the situation for one ethnic group in the country, and is possibly influenced by the subjective observations and experience of various sources.

The security situation in Afghanistan is volatile, unclear and subject to rapid change. It is difficult to gain an overview of the different groups and alliances, and of who is behind reported security incidents. It is not uncommon for groups to take responsibility for acts they have not committed. The relatively recent presence of IS-loyal groups in the country complicates the situation further. The information presented here about the pattern of conflict can therefore quickly become outdated.

2. THE HAZARA PEOPLE

Because of the topography of the country, ethnic groups in Afghanistan have traditionally lived isolated from each other, except in the biggest cities. This has led to the development of different ethnic groups with their own stories, language and culture. What characterises an ethnic group is that its members share fundamental values, cultural background, social organisation and often ancestral relations. These are markers that distinguish them from other groups. Common to all the ethnic groups in Afghanistan is that they are Muslims, with a Sunni majority and a Shia minority.[1]

Hazaras have Mongolian features that distinguish them from the rest of the Afghan population. Mongolian tribe leader Genghis Khan and his men are said to be the ancestors of the Hazaras (Rashid 2000, p. 100).

The Hazaras' heartland is the central highlands, the Hazarajat, a mountainous, inaccessible area with no defined borders (Minority Rights Group International and Mousavi, as cited in Lifos 2015, p. 6). Today, Hazarajat encompasses the Bamyan, Dai Kundi and Ghor provinces, and parts of the Sar-i Pul, Baghlan, Wardak and Ghazni provinces. The area is largely ethnically homogenous and the population are Hazaras. There are still villages with no road access, the road standard in the area is generally poor, and many of the villages are isolated by snowfall in the winter (Barfield 2010, p. 45).

There is no reliable information about the number of inhabitants or the distribution of ethnic groups in Afghanistan.[2] According to different estimates, Hazaras represent between 9 and 20 per cent of the Afghan population, or between 2.7 and 6 million people (Lifos 2015, p. 5). The great majority are Shias. Their native language is Hazaragi, an oral language resembling Dari. Because the languages are related and because the Hazaras are Shias, they have a close connection to Iran.

2.1 THE HAZARAS' HISTORY IN BRIEF

Hazarajat was independent until 1893, when the area was conquered by King Abdur Rahman. The conquest was part of Rahman's consolidation of the 'modern' Afghan state, with its current geographical borders. Rahman's campaign was particularly brutal towards non-Sunni ethnic groups, primarily in Hazarajat and Nuristan. Under Rahman, many Hazaras were forced to leave their land. Some were forcefully moved to Kabul, where they were sold as slaves (Monsutti 2005, p. 63).

Pashtun tribes were also relocated to the north and west to ensure territorial control and loyalty to the new leader. Pashtun nomads (Kuchis), who were allied with Rahman, were given rights to grazing land in Hazara areas. The nomadic Kuchis stay in the lowlands during winter and in the highlands during summer. Since the reign of Rahman, the relationship between Hazaras and Kuchis has been difficult, and violent

[1] Estimates show that more than 99 percent of the Afghan population is Muslim. Religious minorities, including Sikhs and Hindus, account for about 0.3 percent of the population (U.S. Department of state 2015, p. 2).

[2] No cencus has been conducted in the country since 1979. The population is estimated to be about 30 million people.

conflicts have been reported between Hazaras and Kuchis, also in recent years (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2011).

The Hazaras resistance was brutally crushed. As a consequence of the difficult situation, many of them fled to Balochistan in British India and to Persia, where they established their own local communities (Barfield 2010, p. 150). It is estimated that more than half the Hazara population were killed or left the country (Mousavi 1998, p. 136).

The British most likely did object to the Hazaras settling in Quetta. In addition to providing manual labour, they were recruited to the British army (Mousavi 1998, p. 142).[3] The Hazaras organised themselves and today appear to be a 'successful' group who enjoy citizenship and rights on a par with other Pakistani citizens (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2013).

There is relatively little information about the Hazaras who travelled to Iran, but it seems that most of them settled in the area around Mashhad, making a living from agriculture. They are said to have Iranian citizenship, and some of them have served in the Iranian army. Figures from a 1956 census indicate that there were around 300,000 Hazaras in the country at that time. Since 1936, Hazaras in Iran have been referred to as *Khawaris*. They have not achieved the same position and status as Hazaras in Quetta (Mousavi 1998, p. 151).

The Hazaras who remained in Afghanistan were a politically and economically marginalised and discriminated group, at the bottom of the social hierarchy. After slavery was officially abolished in 1923, there has been a steady flow of Hazaras moving to the cities to look for work. In the 1980s, there were allegedly more Hazaras in Kabul than in Hazarajat (Mousavi 1998, p. 177). Only a small minority were allowed to go to school, and the Hazaras have traditionally held unskilled, manual and poorly paid jobs (Mousavi 1998, p. 97). For a long time, they were excluded from positions in politics and public administration, as well as from educational institutions.

2.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

For all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, including Hazaras, the extended family is the key social institutions:

> *The basic unit in Hazara society is the patrilineal patrilocal joint family. It normally consists of a man and his wife, unmarried children, and sons with their wives and children. The family occupies a common dwelling* (Mousavi 1998, p. 45).

The culture is collectivist, meaning that considerations for the group have priority over individual wishes and needs. The family group, represented by the head of the family, makes decisions on behalf of the extended family.

[3] A significant number of those who left Afghanistan and settled in Quetta came from the Jaghori district in Ghazni province. Immigration authorities in Norway and other European countries report that they receive many protection claims from people originating from Jaghori. In reality, some of the claimants originate from Quetta, and not Jaghori. This may include families who originally lived in Jaghori, but whose permanent residency has been in Quetta for several generations. UNHCR produced an interview guide in January 2004; "Identity issues for Hazaras claiming to be from Ghazni, suspicion they may be Pakistani" (UNHCR 2004, p. 6).

For all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, including for Hazaras, honour is important. What characterises an honour culture is that honour is the very axis around which life centres. A family without honour is a family with no status (Wikan 2008). Control over the family's women is essential to uphold the extended family's honour. Women's behaviour affect the reputation of the whole family group, and women must therefore be protected.

It is nonetheless a widespread opinion that Hazaras are, relatively speaking, one of the more liberal groups in the country. Hazara women enjoy slightly more freedom than women from other ethnic groups, especially Pashtun women. Hazaras are generally more concerned with women's schooling and education. At the same time, there is a clear division of labour between women and men; women in rural areas are responsible for cooking, collecting firewood and looking after livestock. Because it is a tradition for men to migrate and for many to participate in acts of war, it is common for women to work in agriculture and to have responsibility for the household finances. The men, on their part, are responsible for providing for the extended family and for representing the family in the public sphere (Monsutti 2005, p. 78).

It is not tradition for Hazara women to wear burkas – women who work in the fields cannot wear burkas for practical reasons. When travelling or in public, Hazara women can use an Iranian-inspired chador.[4] According to social anthropologist Alessandro Monsutti, a Hazara woman does not leave her village unless accompanied by a male relative. It is first and foremost the family that defines the extent of the women's freedom of action. The family and community's social control over women varies between rural and urban areas, and between different social classes and levels in the population. However, it is not uncommon for Hazara women in the cities to work outside the home (Monsutti 2005, p. 77 and 78).

Marriages are arranged, usually within the same ethnic group, and often with a close relative (cousins). Marriages with other ethnic groups are uncommon and go against the Hazara tradition (Mousavi 1998, p. 61). However, it sometimes happens that highly educated Hazaras, for example in Kabul, marry outside their own group (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

In rural areas, extended families live in what are known as *qalas*, normally a cluster of houses surrounded by walls. The *qala* is designed to protect the family, but also to ensure that the family's women are not seen by people outside their own family. Researcher Arne Strand (Landinfo seminar 2013) describes the *qala* as a micro-universe that is ruled by men, but where women have influence. Vegetables are grown, there is normally access to water, and it is possible to keep livestock, guesthouses etc. inside the *qala* (Mousavi 1998, p. 59). Urbanisation has meant that Hazaras in the cities live in smaller units, but often in the same geographical area (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

Hazara women have played a greater role on military and political arenas than women from other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Women have had prominent positions in political and non-governmental organisations, including in the Hazara party Hezb-e Wahdat's central council, and have probably played a role in carving

[4] Chador is a large piece of fabric which is wrapped around the body, covering the hair, but not the face.

out military strategy (Strand, correspondence September 2016; Landinfo seminar 2013).

2.3 MIGRATION

Migration and dislocation in and outside the country's borders are a traditional part of the social and cultural landscape of Afghanistan. In the last few decades, the security situation in the country has been difficult; millions have left, many of whom (approximately six million) have taken up residence in neighbouring countries. According to a former Afghan politician (conversation in Kabul, April 2016), another four million Afghans live outside the country in Europe, Australia, the Gulf states and other countries.

The soil in Hazarajat is barren and the winters are cold, and it is not possible to cultivate the land in the winter months. This is one of the reasons why the Hazaras have traditionally left the area in winter to work and thereby contribute to providing for the family network (Barfield 2010, p. 45). Social anthropologist Alessandro Monsutti (2005) confirms that migration is an element of the traditional way of life of the Hazaras; they have moved within the country and across borders to the neighbouring countries. Many have crossed the border to Iran, a country where Shia Islam is very strong and with which the Hazaras have a close linguistic affiliation. During the summer, the Hazaras move in order to work in agriculture in Afghanistan or in construction work in Iran. Those who travel to Iran often stay for many years and hold unskilled and poorly paid jobs. It is mainly young, unmarried men who move to help to provide for the extended family. Large sums have been transferred from Iran to Hazarajat over the years (Monsutti 2005, p. 124).

Monsutti also claims that it is difficult to distinguish between economic migrants and political refugees, and refers to the Hazaras in Iran as examples. War and poverty are mutually reinforcing and have caused hundreds of thousands of Hazaras to leave the country, many of them to Iran. The Iranian authorities have had a restrictive approach to permitting the establishment of refugee camps, and Afghans in the country have lived in ordinary settlements.

Migration is an important strategy for the Hazaras, and there are many indications that Hazaras are the ethnic group in Afghanistan that is most likely to migrate.

2.4 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HEZB-E WAHDAT

The communist regime that ruled Afghanistan in the 1980s met a great deal of resistance from what were known as the *mujahedin*. The regime tried to introduce economic and social reforms, but had little support and legitimacy in the population. Hazarajat was relatively autonomous during the period of communist rule, and was generally largely unaffected by the violent conflict in the country. According to social anthropologist Monsutti (2005, p. 68), 'the region [was] relatively spared by the Soviet occupying forces, and hardly witnessed any major military operation'. There was hard fighting between different Hazara groups in Hazarajat, however, and several thousand were killed and many left the area (Mousavi 1998, p. 180).

Hazaras were represented on both sides, both in the armed opposition and among those loyal to the regime. The resistance movement was strong in Hazarajat, while it was largely urban Hazaras who supported the communist regime. The idea of social

mobility and a society where clan affiliation, language and religion were not of decisive importance appealed to parts of the Hazara population (Mousavi 1998, p. 176–179). Among other things, the Hazara Sultan Ali Keshtmand held a position equivalent to prime minister for large parts of the 1980s (Rubin 2002, p. 126).

The Iranian theocracy trained and armed the Hazaras affiliated to the armed opposition (Rubin 2002, p. 222). Iran also played a key role in the establishment of the Hazara party Hezb-e Wahdat in 1989, an alliance of eight Shia parties (Council of European Union, 2001). These were eight very different groups with different ideologies ranging from Islamists to Marxists and Maoists, who had previously fought each other with violent means. The purpose of the alliance was to unite and reinforce the military and political position of the Shia Hazaras. Attempts were made to replace the focus on ideological differences with a focus on ethnicity (Ibrahimi, 2012), and the result was that those who did not support this line of thinking were killed (NGO in Peshawar, 1989, as cited by Strand, correspondence September 2016). Iran was of the view that the establishment of the party was an important counterweight to the Sunni dominance of the mujahedin movement.

The communist regime stayed in power until April 1992. After the fall of the regime, a very bloody and violent civil war broke out between the parties that had defeated the communists. Hezb-e Wahdat played an active role in the war. According to a report prepared by the Dutch immigration authorities, Hezb-e Wahdat, like other militant groups, committed extensive violence during the civil war and contributed to the very serious human rights situation for the civilian population. The attacks continued after the civil war, and Hezb-e Wahdat is accused of widespread attacks on Pashtun people and Taliban soldiers in particular (Council of European Union 2001).

2.5 ETHNIC TENSION AND CONFLICTS

According to Pakistani writer and journalist Ahmad Rashid, ethnicity was an underlying factor that characterised the situation in the country in the 1990s. In reality, all parties were involved in ethnic cleansing during this period:

> *All parties committed ethnic cleansing and religious persecution. The Taliban had killed Hazaras living in cities and forced Tajik farmers off the Shomali Plain. The Uzbek and the Hazaras had massacred hundreds of Taliban prisoners and killed Pashtuns in the cities north of and around Kabul. The Shia Muslim Hazaras had also forced Pashtun people to flee because of their Sunni faith* (Rashid 2000, p. 95).

Massacres and fighting in the north escalated the ethnic conflict, especially between the Pashtun and the other ethnic groups. The Hazaras were subjected to serious abuse by Pashtuns and Tajiks, among others. The organisation Afghanistan Justice Project (AJP 2005, p. 77) have named the Tajik-dominated parties Jamiat-e Islami and Ittihad-e Islami as the main culprits responsible for the extensive massacre of civilian Hazaras in 1993 in Afshar, in the western part of the city of Kabul. These were targeted killings of Hazaras. The revered journalist and author Anand Gopal describes the massacre as follows:

> *On February 7, 1993, Massoud and Sayyaf's forces attacked Afshar, a Hazara enclave in western Kabul. They began to lobbing mortars blindly into*

> *the densely populated neighborhood, killing scores. Then soldiers went door to door, seizing able-bodied men, lining them up against the walls, and executing them in full view of their wives and children* (Gopal 2014, p. 66).

After a two-day bloodbath, the population of Afshar were either dead or had fled to Hazarajat or Pakistan. Around five thousand houses had either been pillaged or destroyed. There are no concrete figures for the number of people who were killed or how many were abducted and never released. The number is probably just below 1,000 people (HRW 2005, p. 96). A large number of women were subjected to sexual abuse. The main purpose of the attack was to strike the headquarters of the Shia party Hezb-e Wahdat, because the Hazaras received significant support from Iran (Mousavi 1998, p. 199). The reasoning was that if the Hazaras were not in Kabul, the support would go to other groups, such as the Tajik. Hazara groups took revenge after the massacre, systematically killing Tajiks and Pashtuns in certain areas of Kabul (see, inter alia, Rashid 2000).

In September 1996, the Taliban seized power in the country. The Taliban philosophy was based on Sunni fundamentalism and Pashtun tradition. In the same way as during the civil war, ethnic polarisation continued under the Taliban rule. There had long been considerable tensions between the Sunni Pashtun and the Shia Hazaras. The Taliban regime declared Shias as infidels. In a respect, Hazaras were a double minority; both by being associated with Hezb-e Wahdat and because they were Shias. The first Taliban governor in Mazar-e Sharif is said to have stated that Shias had three alternatives: they could flee to Iran, convert or be killed (see, inter alia, the Danish Immigration Service, the Danish Refugee Council and the Directorate of Immigration 2001, p. 27). The leader of Hezb-e Wahdat, Abdul Ali Mazari, was tortured and killed by the Taliban in 1995, after attempting to strike a deal with the Taliban. The abuse of Shias and killing of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e Sharif were a contributory factor to the Taliban regime's poor relations with Iran (Rashid 2000, p. 58).

Hazaras and other ethnic groups suffered serious abuse under the reign of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001. Human Rights Watch has documented two massacres targeting Hazaras for which the Taliban is held accountable. One of the massacres took place in the Yakaolang district in January 2001. In the course of four days, 170 men were killed in what is described as a collective punishment because some Hazaras were affiliated to the Northern Alliance. At the Robatak Pass between the provinces of Baghlan and Samangan, 31 bodies were found in May 2000 (HRW 2001).

Taliban also used starvation and blocking food supplies as weapons against the Hazaras. In August 1997, in an attempt to get the Hazaras to surrender, the Taliban closed all roads into Bamian from the south, west and east. All food deliveries stopped. The corn and wheat crop failure in 1998 made the situation even worse. A total of one million people were on the verge of starvation in Hazarajat; they lived off roots, berries and a very limited supply of potatoes (Rashid 2000, p. 99).

In other places, the situation was different, and in some areas the Hazaras formed an alliance with the Taliban, although without sharing their ideological or political platform. Examples of this were seen in the Jaghori district in the Ghazni province. The population of the district consists almost exclusively of ethnic Hazaras and Shias. Hezb-e Wahdat was often involved in armed clashes with the Taliban. The local council of elders in Jaghori made a deal with the Taliban in 1998 to surrender.

According to the deal, the Taliban would leave the population alone in return for disarming Hezb-e Wahdat's commanders (Suleman & Williams 2003, p. 5–8). As a result of the deal, girls were allowed to go to school up to and including the 12th grade, and some upper secondary schools were also in operation. When inspectors came from Kandahar, the schools were notified in advance and the school for girls was closed for 48 hours. The agreement worked well: The Taliban exercised limited control of the district and the population did not oppose the Taliban with military means. The Hazaras ruled, but some Pashtuns were placed in the area to give a pretence of control. That way, the district was largely spared of war acts and attacks on civilians (Strand, Landinfo seminar November 2013).

Several sources point to how Hazaras in other places also formed local alliances with the Taliban. The Hazara commanders were responsible for attending to social order, and the Taliban left a relatively small footprint in these areas (Ibrahimi 2009a).

In 1997, the Northern Alliance was formed, a coalition of several groups that joined forces to remove the Taliban regime. The dividing line in the conflict was between Pashtuns and the Taliban on one hand and the other ethnic groups on the other.[5]

3. THE HAZARAS' POSITION AFTER 2001

After the Taliban regime fell and the transitional government was put into place, the Hazaras had expectations that their time had come and that their rights would be established.

According to the Afghan Constitution of 2004, the country consists of 14 ethnic groups, and discrimination or privilege based on ethnic affiliation is prohibited (Constitution of Afghanistan 2004).

3.1 IMPROVED SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION

There is widespread agreement that, in general, the Hazaras' socio-economic position has clearly improved since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. They support nation building projects, use their right to vote, and many Hazaras hold high-ranking positions in public administration and politics, at both central and local levels. Hezb-e Wahdat's long-standing leader, Karim Khalili, has for example held several high-ranking positions in the government administration after 2001, including as Vice President under former President Hamid Karzai.

Hazaras are considered to be ambitious; they send their children to school and are overrepresented in higher education. This applies both to Hazaras who have stayed in Afghanistan and those who return from abroad, including from the nearby areas of Iran and Pakistan. They are well represented in civil society. Several of the country's

[5] The Northern Alliance included leaders and commandors of the mujahedin movement which operated during the war against the Soviet Union and the warring parties who had fought each other during the civil war in the early 1990s. A number of parties representing different ethnic groups participated in the Alliance. The front figures were Tajiks: Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masood. Hezb-e Wahdat and their leader Karim Khalili also joined the Northern Alliance to fight Taliban.

most prominent and high-profile human rights activists and members of parliament are Hazaras.

Many Hazaras have been abroad themselves or have relatives in Western countries. Networks abroad can give them access to financial means and enable Hazara people to invest in business activity and succeed in trade. In western parts of the country, the Hazaras play a dominant role in trading with Iran.

In addition, the Hazaras are considered to be good at organising and promoting the interests of the group. The establishment of Hezb-e Wahdat in 1989 has probably played an important role in mobilising and raising the Hazaras' awareness of their own ethnicity, their position in society and in politics:

> *Despite its patchy background and composition, the formation of the party was an important step forward in the evolution of political process among the Hazaras, in terms of its relatively high degree of inclusiveness and of the lobbying power that it granted to the community* (Ibrahimi 2009b, p. 16).

Solidarity within the group is strong, and the Hazaras join forces to invest in and build infrastructure; institutions such as schools and businesses that benefits the community. They use a wide range of instruments to promote their interests, including social media like Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. According to researcher Arne Strand, even a small village in Ghazni can have its own Facebook page. They organise large demonstrations that mobilise thousands of people to promote the interests of the Hazaras, most recently in 2016 for the purpose of improving the electricity supply to the central areas (Qazi 2016a).

The Hazaras seek to influence political processes through the political channels established for nation building projects. The war in the 1980s and 1990s gave Hazaras, like other ethnic groups, a political-military elite with both political and economic power.

There are a number of strong Hazara women with a clear voice in Afghan society. The doctor Sima Samar, the country's first Minister of Women's Affairs and current Chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), is one of them. The trend of Hazaras prioritising schooling and education, also for girls, has continued after the fall of the Taliban. Because the Hazaras had school buildings and infrastructure in place, they got a 'head start' on other groups. This is described in an AREU study of women's political participation in the Yakowlang district in Bamian:

> *However, while many communities had to wait some years for education to become reasonably accessible, especially for girls, residents of the Yakowlang community had almost immediate access to a well-established high school. As a consequence, by 2011, the village was home to almost an entire generation of educated young people, a phenomenon with significant consequences for women's political participation* (Lough et al. 2012, p. 55).

At the same time, it may seem as though Hazaras place great emphasis on their collective experience up until 2001. The Hazaras have their own websites, for example www.hazara.net (n.d.). Information about the Hazara minority is communicated in social media and on the internet, emphasising in particular the abuse and injustice suffered by the Hazaras, both in and outside Afghanistan. Researcher Arne Strand (seminar 2013) supports the view that the Hazaras have built a uniting narrative on persisting oppression, based on the injustice they have

historically suffered, not least what happened in Kabul in the 1990s and the Afshar massacre. Despite the Hazaras' progress and development in recent years, they maintain that they have historically been underprivileged and oppressed in Afghan society. Strand believes that the Hazaras' influence and development is poorly reflected in how they present themselves as a group (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

The contrast and the gap between reality and the Hazaras' history of suffering can be provocative to other groups. This may in itself contribute to ethnic tension and conflict, often triggered during events to mark the Shia Muslim holiday Ashura[6] (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

3.1.1 Emigration and smuggling networks

For the Hazaras, migration is still an important strategy to provide for the extended family and establish a good life for themselves. There are many well-developed smuggling networks that make a great deal of money from the many Afghans who wish to leave the country (see, inter alia, EASO 2016, p. 5–6).

The difficult security situation means that many Hazaras leave both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iranian authorities put strong pressure on unregistered Afghans to return to Afghanistan, and several hundred thousand people have been deported in recent years (UNHCR 2015, p. 6). Because of the difficult situation for Afghans in Iran, many travel west to Europe.

Pakistani authorities also put strong pressure on Afghans to return to their home country. In summer 2016, the number of returns increased dramatically; by the end of August, almost 200,000 people had returned to Afghanistan (diplomatic source, email August 2016). Landinfo has no concrete information to confirm whether this also applies to unregistered Hazaras in Pakistan.

While it was previously a case of internal migration and to neighbouring countries, the goal is now to migrate out of the region to Europe, Australia and Canada and the USA.

3.1.2 Attacks on Hazaras in Pakistan

Hazaras in the Quetta area in the Balochistan province (Pakistan) have in recent years been the subject of widespread sectarian violence, which also contributes to a sense of insecurity among Hazaras in Afghanistan. Fundamentalist Sunni groups, including Lashkar-e Jhangvi, are responsible for many attacks and killings. Several hundred Hazaras were killed between 2008 and 2012 (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2013).

There is a widespread belief among analysts and experts that the violence in the Quetta area is sectarian and not ethnically motivated. In 2012, Landinfo's partners in Pakistan believed that Hazaras in Quetta/Balochistan are targeted because, unlike other Shias, they are easy to identify because they have Mongolian features and speak Dari (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2013, p. 3).

[6] Ashura commemorates the martyr death of Imam Husayn at Karbala in 680. For Shias, it is a day of grief and mourning (SNL 2009).

Since 2013, the sectarian violence towards Hazaras has decreased. A UN source indicated in 2015 (conversation in Islamabad, April 2015) that the general threat to the Hazaras had been reduced. This was explained by the fact that the authorities had implemented measures to protect the population, but also because the main culprits behind the sectarian violence were in a weaker position. Twelve sectarian attacks took place in Balochistan in 2015, a reduction of 20 per cent from the year before. A total of 34 people were killed and 25 injured, most of them Hazaras (PIPS 2016, p. 12 and 18).

3.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHNICITY AFTER 2001

Ethnicity has to a limited extent been an express dividing line in Afghan society and culture after the fall of the Taliban regime. Many individuals and organisations with a role in society have been careful not to play the 'ethnic card', which can quickly contribute to increased ethnic tension and thereby a higher level of conflict. The backdrop is the brutal civil war in the 1990s, which was largely fought between different ethnic groups.

There is nonetheless no doubt that ethnicity plays an important role in Afghan society, both politically and socially. Power and positions are largely distributed on the basis of ethnicity. In presidential elections, ethnic alliances are important. The background is the recognition that Afghans vote for candidates who represent an ethnic group. Former president Karzai was good at building ethnic alliances in order to appeal to as many voters as possible and thereby gain support; for example, he had an Hazara and a Tajik as vice presidents. The current president, the Pashtun Ashraf Ghani, chose the infamous Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum and the Hazara Sarwar Danish as his vice president candidates.

Without an electoral reform, it would be very difficult for a non-Pashtun to be elected president. An important reason why the Tajik/Pashtun Abdullah Abdullah chose to join a coalition government with Ashraf Ghani was the prospect of introducing an electoral reform that would make it possible for ethnic minorities (i.e. non-Pashtuns) to win power and become president (email from diplomatic source, August 2016).

In a 2011 article in the newspaper *Independent* (Gutcher 2011), it was reported that ethnic tensions were dividing Kabul, and that the city was becoming increasingly segregated along ethnic lines. Property dealers who had spoken to the journalist had noticed a tendency for people to move from ethnically mixed neighbourhoods to more homogenous areas. The background was allegedly fear that civil war would break out in the country, and that, in such case, they wanted to have an easy way of getting out of the city and back to the villages and their relatives there.

This observation has subsequently been supported by researcher Arne Strand, who has looked at the settlement pattern in Kabul (Landinfo seminar, November 2013). A high proportion of the researcher's informants who had moved to Kabul after 2002 had settled in areas of the city where they made up the ethnic majority. The reason was that they believed this contributed to their family's safety in the long term. For the Hazaras, the security aspect was emphasised as particularly weighty. It is natural to interpret the tendencies outlined above to mean that the population has little faith in the nation building project. There is deep concern about how the security situation is developing, and many people do not have confidence in the Afghan state's ability

to protect them. There is also a recognition that networks, affiliations and local knowledge are important protective mechanisms in a country like Afghanistan.

Furthermore, it seems as though young people who are taking an education largely choose a university based on language and ethnicity. This has created 'ethnic private universities', 'Hazara universities', 'Pashtun universities' etc. This can be based on both ethnic networks and the geographical location of the educational institutions. This development contributes to ethnic segregation (Strand, correspondence September 2016; Landinfo seminar, November 2013).

4. RECENT SECURITY INCIDENTS

During 2015 and 2016, there have been several security incidents that have targeted Hazara people in particular, including the attack in Kabul on 23 July 2016, which was a direct attack on the Hazaras.

A significant proportion of the incidents have taken place on the road network, where there have been several cases of mass kidnappings from buses and other vehicles. Many Hazaras are worried that these are signs of a sectarian wave that is about to hit the country.

According to UNAMA's registrations, 146 Hazaras were abducted in 20 different incidents in 2015. All the incidents, except one, took place in ethnically mixed areas: Ghazni, Balkh, Sari Pul, Faryab, Uruzgan, Baghlan, Wardak, Jawzjan and Ghor. Of the 146 people who were kidnapped, 118 have been confirmed to be released, 13 are dead and 2 died in captivity. UNAMA has no verified information about what happened to the remaining 13 hostages (UNAMA 2016b, p. 49).

Several cases of abduction of Hazaras were also reported in the first half-year 2016. UNAMA registered one incident in the Wardak province and two in Sari Pul. In all, 36 Hazaras have been abducted during the first six months of the year. In one case, a total of 22 Hazaras were abducted, including three women and a child. All of them were released on 17 June (UNAMA 2016a, p. 65).

Below is an overview of individual incidents in the past two years that have wholly or partly affected the Hazaras.[7] This overview is not exhaustive.

- July 2016: A large-scale suicide attack took place on 23 July 2016 at the Deh Mazang square in the western part of Kabul. The attack targeted a protest march consisting of several thousand people, most of them Hazaras (Osman 2016). Nearly 100 people were killed and several hundred were injured. The Hazaras were protesting against the decision to bypass the Hazarajat region in the development of the TUTAP power project.

[7] Please see Landinfos report «Generell sikkerhet og veisikkerhet» from November 2015. The report describes security matters up and until October 2015, including a summary and analysis of incidents which has involved Hazaras.

- June 2016: More than 40 passengers were kidnapped from three different vehicles in the Greshk district in the southern part of the Helmand province (Stanikzai 2016). The Taliban confirmed the incident on its website and stated that the operation was carried out based on intelligence information. According to the website, the people who were retained were '[…] people who according to our information belongs to Kabul regime's security organs' (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, June 2016). Ethnicity was not a topic in the Taliban's announcement, nor in the media that reported on the case. It is unknown whether there were Hazaras among the hostages. According to news media, the hostages were released after a short time (Ahram Online 2016).
- Spring 2016: Several mass kidnappings that the Taliban has claimed responsibility for. At a roadblock on the main road between Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri, two buses containing 180 passengers were stopped on 31 May 2016. The Taliban was looking for any passengers with links to the authorities, and ten of the hostages were killed (BBC 2016b). There is no information about the ethnicity of the killed hostages. On 8 June, 47 passengers were kidnapped on the main road between Kunduz and Takhar. At the same time in Sar-ePul, several civilian travellers were kidnapped, but all were released unharmed (Totakhil 2016). No information about their ethnicity is available in this case either.
- November 2015: Two women, four men and a nine-year-old girl, all Hazaras, were killed in Zabul province. The killings were very brutal, and the victims had their throats slit. It is a clear violation of Afghan culture that women and children are the victims of such violent attacks (conversation with UN source A in Kabul, April 2016), and the incident received widespread attention in national and international media. The chain of events and timeline were unclear, and also where the victims were kidnapped before they were killed. Several thousand people participated in a mass protest in Kabul on 10 November 2015, and the coffins carrying the dead were carried through the streets in the pouring rain. Most of the protesters were Hazaras, but representatives of other ethnic groups also participated (BBC 2015b).
- November 2015: Three buses were stopped by armed men on the main road between Kabul and Kandahar in the Zabul province. The armed men allegedly singled out Hazara passengers, and a dozen people were abducted. It is unclear who was behind the abduction. Some days later, information was provided via the media (Joyenda 2015) that the elders in the area were negotiating with the kidnappers, and the hostages were expected to be released.
- Februaryy 2015: More than thirty male passengers were abducted from a bus in the Zabul province, most of them Hazaras. In May 2015, 19 of the 31 hostages were released in what was reported to be an exchange of prisoners between the authorities and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (BBC 2015a).

4.1 EXPLANATION OF SECURITY INCIDENTS

Both national and international organisations have followed developments closely and continue to analyse the dynamics behind incidents like the ones referred to above. The incidents are difficult to analyse because their origin is often complex, local dynamics and conflict.

Landinfo has discussed the conflict scenario with several national and international sources, both in September 2015 and April 2016. Their view is that the causes of the incidents in 2015–2016 are complex and can be explained on the basis of factors other than ethnic and religious factors. The sources agreed that the incidents did not seem to be based on sectarian violence, but local conflicts, or that the abductions were a bargaining chip in negotiations with central or local authorities. The exception is the attack in Kabul on 23 July 2016. There is widespread agreement that Daesh is responsible for the attack, and everything indicates that this was a targeted attack on the Shia Hazaras (see sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3).

A well-informed international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) was of the view that the incidents are often related to unresolved conflicts between two local communities; they may concern grazing rights, rights to water resources or access to travel through an area. Some of the incidents can also be directly linked to the unresolved Hazara-Kuchi conflict. A large number of the incidents on the road network are explained by insurgents looking for persons affiliated to the authorities and security forces.

An international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) pointed out that the Hazara areas in the central highlands still experience few security incidents compared with the rest of the country. If the intention was to target Hazaras, the source believed that these areas would experience attacks.

The unclear situation creates fertile ground for rumours. It is difficult to confirm or dispel these rumours. For a long time, IS-loyal groups were held responsible for the brutal killings of seven Hazaras in Zabul province in November 2015. News media concluded that such groups were behind both the kidnappings and the subsequent killing of the hostages (Ghosh 2015). There now seems to be widespread agreement that other groups were behind the killings. A well-informed international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) stated that the killings were the result of armed clashes between the newly established *High Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* (Mullah Rasul) (discussed in section 5.2) and the Taliban on 7 November in the districts of Arghandab and Kakar in the Zabul province. Intense fighting took place between the two insurgent groups. Estimates vary, but according to Global Security (n.d.), at least fifty insurgents were killed. The Hazaras who were killed were found in the Arghandab district on 8 November, the day after the clashes started. Rasul's group had taken the Hazaras hostage before the fighting broke out, and were held responsible for the killings by the Taliban. Eight members of the splinter group were taken prisoner and thereafter hanged by the Taliban as punishment.

A local think tank (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) pointed out that negotiations are taking place between the Taliban and Hazara groups, and that several matters have been resolved through such negotiations. In Ghazni, the situation has come to a point where Hazaras and the Taliban leave each other in peace, and, according to an international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016), they have signed a

'non-enemy pact'. The basis for the agreement is that the Taliban are allowed the use of certain roads through Hazara areas. In some areas, the Hazaras have their own defence forces.

UNAMA explains the background for the abduction of 22 civilian Hazaras in Sar-e Pul in June 2016 as follows:

> *Anti-Government Elements released all of the abducted civilians by 17 June, with sources reporting that the abductors intended to put pressure on the provincial government to release a Taliban commander held by the Government* (UNAMA 2016a, p. 65).

UNAMA describes the motive behind the abduction of Hazaras in 2015 as follows:

> *The motives for the abductions included holding hostages for ransom, exchange of detainees, suspicion of the hostages being members of the Afghan national security forces, and non-payment of illegal taxes. In some cases, the motive was unknown* (UNAMA 2016b, p. 49).

A large share of security incidents and conflict-related violence in Afghanistan take place in connection with the road network, and there are concerns about the general road security. Road travellers are exposed to different types of threats. It is well-known that the Taliban check road travellers to track down persons affiliated to the Afghan authorities and security forces (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2015).

A local think tank (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) referred to how the Hazaras have traditionally moved around a lot, and they are probably overrepresented among road travellers. They travel both within the country and across the borders to the neighbouring countries because they have relatives in other parts of the country or abroad. A large proportion of the Hazaras live in urban centres, many hold high-ranking positions in the government administration, earn good money and travel a lot. These are factors that may mean that Hazaras are overrepresented on the road network in parts of the country, which in turn means that they are more exposed to attacks from insurgent groups. Because the Hazaras, to a greater extent than other groups, support the authorities, they are more likely to experience reactions on the road network than people from other ethnic backgrounds (Landinfo 2015, p. 19).

5. VULNERABILITY CAUSED BY SECTARIANISM IN THE INSURGENT MOVEMENT

The Afghan insurgence is fragmented and consists of a number of different groups. The issue raised here is whether the different groups have sectarian conceptions, which has direct consequences for the Hazaras' security situation.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, there have been few attacks with an open sectarian agenda in Afghanistan. Among the exceptions are the attacks on Shias celebrating Ashura in December 2011. A Pakistani group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, is assumed to be behind the attacks (Nordland 2011). This is a militant, Sunni group that is held responsible for the widespread sectarian violence in Pakistan, targeting in particular Hazaras in the Balochistan province. Coordinated attacks were carried out

on Shia mosques in several Afghan cities; Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-e Sharif. A total of 63 people were killed (Nordland 2011). As far as Landinfo is aware, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi had not previously carried out attacks in Afghanistan, nor later.

Another exception is the violent clashes between Sunnis and Shias at several universities in Kabul in connection with the Ashura commemoration in November 2012. Students attacked each other with sticks and rocks. One student was killed and thirty were injured. The clashes were interpreted as sectarian, and the Interior Ministry closed three universities for a week as a precautionary measure (Radio Free Europe 2012). In recent years, Hazara leaders have made active attempts to reduce the conflict level by, among other things, encouraging Hazaras to donate blood in clinics instead of flagellating themselves, as is tradition during Ashura (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

A third exception is the attack on Hazaras in Kabul in July 2016 referred to above (see Chapter 4), that Daesh (discussed in section 5.3) allegedly was behind.

5.1 TALIBAN

In October 2001, the Taliban regime was defeated. Many surrendered or changed sides and returned to where they came from (Gopal 2014). The first signs that the 'new' Taliban was present in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan came as early as in 2002, however. This was the beginning of what is now the insurgent movement in Afghanistan.

The Taliban has not advocated sectarian views. The Taliban's guidelines – 'Code of Conduct' – do not distinguish between Sunnis and Shias, or between different ethnic groups. They consequently use the term Muslim and advocate that those who fight for the Islamic Emirate (of Afghanistan) shall conduct themselves so that all compatriots welcome them (Code of Conduct, Article 78, as translated in Clark 2011).

The long-standing leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, gave annual speeches in connection with the celebration of Eid-al Fitr. On several occasions, he underlined the need for Afghans to stand together. In his 2011 speech, Mullah Omar said the following (as cited in Arrahmah 2011):

> *Our manifesto is that Afghanistan should have a real Islamic regime which is acceptable to all people of the country. All ethnicities will have participation in the regime […].*

After Mullah Omar's death, the Taliban leadership has not addressed ethnicity or ethnic/religious minorities as a topic in their announcements or propaganda. A national think tank (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) referred to how the spring offensive *Operation Omari* on 12 Aril 2016 showed no traces of sectarianism, and that the content was of a very general nature. Nor is there anything to indicate that the newly appointed leader of the Taliban, Mullah Haibatullah Akhunzada, has a sectarian agenda. The new leader has had close ties to the former leaders, and there are no indications that he will advocate a different ideology than his predecessors, rather the contrary. A former Taliban leader is said to have stated the following to an Al Jazeera reporter:

> *He will help run the Taliban movement exactly the way Mullah Omar did because of his traditional mujahideen mindset* (cited in Qazi 2016).

A UN organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) pointed out that the Taliban has clearly expressed that they have no intention of attacking Hazaras or Shias. The Taliban was also quick to distance themselves from and condemn the attack on Hazaras on 23 July 2016 in Kabul. At the same time, the Taliban is a highly decentralised organisation. Despite clear signals from senior Taliban leaders in Quetta, there may be some commanders in particular areas with a sectarian agenda and a focus on ethnicity. Many young people have spent time in Sunni madrasas in Pakistani border areas. Here, the sectarian agenda and focus on Shias are more clearly expressed, and the Afghan students may be influenced by this. Militant individuals who were driven out of the Pakistani clan areas after the Pakistani security forces started a military offensive in summer 2014 have moved across the border to Afghanistan. There may therefore be sectarian attitudes simmering below the surface that have not yet emerged to any extent.

5.2 HIGH COUNCIL OF THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN

There was widespread unrest and frustration in the Taliban after the announcement of Mullah Omar's death and the subsequent change of leadership. When Landinfo visited Kabul in autumn 2015, the partners were uncertain about how deep the schisms in the movement were, and to what extent this would lead to widespread fragmentation of the Taliban (Landinfo 2015, p. 8).

In early October 2015, a splinter group led by Mullah Rasul was established and given the name *High Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.* The group operates in a geographically limited area; in the Zabul province and some western areas. In Zabul, the splinter group was supported by commander Mullah Dadullah and his men. There has been fighting between Rasul's group and the Taliban in the Zabul province, and in the districts of Shindand and Adraskan in the Herat province (conversation with international organisation in Kabul, April 2016). Most of the security incidents linked to Rasul's group are registered in the Shindand district. The group is held responsible for the brutal killings of seven Hazaras in the Zabul province in November 2015. Read more about this in Chapter 4.

It was uncertain for a while whether Rasul's group had ties to or was supported by IS. In November 2015, news media reported that Mullah Rasul was 'backed by Daesh' (Khaama Press 2015). The information has not subsequently been confirmed. Rasul allegedly said that they support IS in principle, but with reference to ideological differences and different historical backgrounds, IS is nonetheless not welcome to operate in Afghanistan:

> *They are our brothers; [but] we will not let them in [Afghanistan] nor will we agree with them in this country. They should not interfere here* (Global Security, n.d.).

According to a national think tank (conversation in Kabul, April 2016), Rasul's group is '[…] perceived to be softer than Taliban', and they have allegedly expressed willingness to negotiate with the Afghan authorities. They have only one demand: the withdrawal of all international troops.

The Taliban's new leader seems to have more widespread support in the organisation than his predecessor, Mullah Mansour. Mansour's opponents believed that Mullah Omar's relatives would be better suited to lead the Taliban (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2015, p. 8). The current leader, Mullah Haibatullah, has made Mullah Omar's oldest son Yaqub deputy of the movement (Qazi 2016b). There is therefore a possibility that Rasul and his men will go back to its parent organisation Taliban, or that Taliban and/or US forces defeat such splinter groups (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

Landinfo is not aware of any other independent splinter groups that have broken off from the Taliban. An international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) was of the view that there has been considerably less fragmentation of the Taliban than many people feared, and that the Taliban does not appear to have been significantly weakened by the death of Mullah Omar.

In other words, there is no information to support the claim that direct security threats against Hazaras have been issued by the splinter group High Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

5.3 DAESH

In autumn 2014, the first rumours arose about the presence of the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh, in Afghanistan. There is widespread agreement that, sometime during 2015, groups loyal to IS gained a foothold in parts of the eastern Nangarhar province, and possibly also in the Laghman and Kunar provinces, where Salafism and Wahhabism have traditionally had a strong position. In the course of a few months, they more or less gained control over three districts in the southern parts of Nangarhar. Daesh partly consists of groups that broke with the Taliban after the death of Mullah Omar because they were dissatisfied with the new leadership and their own career opportunities, and partly of Pakistani fighters who have crossed the border from Pakistan, especially from the clan areas where they have been under attack by the Pakistani army and US drones (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2015, p. 9).

The Taliban is the dominant insurgent group in Afghanistan, and will use all means available to fight a geographical spread of groups loyal to IS. According to the BBC, the two groups declared war on each other in January 2015 (Azami 2015). It is probably primarily a question of territorial control, but also to some extent ideological differences. A UN source (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) claimed that, in Februaryy 2016, the Taliban sent reinforcements to Nangarhar to prevent Daesh from taking control of important districts in the western part of the province.

According to the sources that Landinfo had conversations with in Kabul in April 2016, Daesh enjoys very little support in the population, with the exception of some radical young people. Daesh's vision of a caliphate and global jihad holds less appeal in Afghanistan than in other areas where the movement operates. Taliban's vision is limited to Afghanistan; their philosophy is in line with the Pashtun tradition and resonates with large parts of the Afghan population. An international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) underlined that there are big differences between how Daesh and the Taliban treat the population. While the Taliban in many areas supports development, builds roads, allows schools and adapts to the local culture and norms, Daesh displays brutality and violence with the intention of instilling fear in the population and thereby achieve discipline and control.

A national think tank (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) claimed that Daesh violates Afghan culture, among other things by not showing respect for women and the elderly. They have crossed some 'red lines' for what is acceptable in Afghanistan, and that is why they have minimal support in the population. According to a diplomatic source (email, July 2016), Daesh have taken women and children hostages in the Kot district. This is unheard of in Afghan culture.

A local journalist (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) said that it is first and foremost the brutality against civilians that has led people to reject Daesh; there have been several cases of public beheadings and killing of opponents, clan leaders have been murdered, schools and clinics have been shut down, locals are not allowed to use mobile phones or smoke cigarettes. Many people have been driven away from their homes as a consequence of Daesh's presence. Those displaced have travelled to calmer parts of the Nangarhar province, families with financial means have taken up residence in the city of Jalalabad, and some have probably also left the country.

A well-informed international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) believed that Daesh in Afghanistan can be compared with an embryo, and considered it highly unlikely that Daesh has the power to become a nationwide phenomenon. The goal of establishing a caliphate in the area – the idea of Wilayah Khorasan – is an unrealistic dream with no root in reality. A local journalist (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) explained that those who join Daesh are largely Salafis, and in Afghanistan they are relatively few. Their potential for growth is thereby limited as long as the Taliban movement stays united and there are no drastic changes in the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

5.3.1 Area of operation for Daesh

Until recently, Daesh's area of operation has been geographically limited to the Nangarhar province. Seen in light of the movement's vision of a caliphate, it is obvious that Daesh has ambitions that extend far beyond Nangarhar. One strategy has been to establish a corridor through Kunar and Nuristan, and to use it to get to the northern parts of the country (conversation with local journalist in Kabul, April 2016).

The sources we talked to during the fact finding mission to Kabul in April 2016 all agreed that Daesh has encountered strong resistance in Nangarhar. During 2016, the movement has been put on the defensive and appears considerably weakened. It is fought by both the Taliban and Afghan security forces (ANSF), and has lost a lot of territory and many men. A UN organisation (B, conversation in Kabul, April 2016) estimated that the number of Daesh fighters had fallen from 2,500 to 1,000. The movement is under pressure in all areas where it is present, including in the Achin district, which is where its headquarters are. International forces have carried out several air raids against Daesh in Nangarhar. According to news media, the Governor of Daesh, Hafiz Saeed, was killed by a US drone in August 2016 (Muñoz 2016).

Because of strong resistance in the province, Daesh has been driven out of the inhabited areas and into the mountains. There is speculation that the movement is on the brink of collapse in Nangarhar (email from diplomatic source, July 2016). At the same time, it has been reported that the movement has run its own radio station in the province, *Khilafat Ghag Radio*, which has broadcasted Daesh propaganda and urged young people to join the armed fight. Threats against individuals and groups are also

said to have been spread through the radio channel (UNAMA & OHCHR 2016, p. 71). According to the organisation British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), which bases its information on different news sources, the radio station was destroyed in an air raid on 14 July 2016 (BAAG 2016).

Due to strong military pressure against Daesh in Nangarhar, some Daesh groups have made their way to the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan looking for safe havens, among other things – this according to the Secretary General's report to the Security Council in June 2016 (UN Secretary-General 2016, p. 6).

Other sources have also confirmed that Daesh over the summer 2016 has gained a broader geographical presence than what has previously been reported. In Kunar, it is present in almost all the province's district. Here, parts of the population have traditionally supported Salafis, and it is therefore easier for Daesh to gain a foothold. The movement is in an 'establishment phase' and makes active use of propaganda to gain support in the population. Many of the cadre are reported to be of foreign origin, and there are still few armed attacks or clashes in the area (email from diplomatic source, July 2016).

The clan structures are very strong in the Pashtun eastern parts of Afghanistan, which makes it very difficult for insurgent groups to operate with support from and goodwill in the local community. The northern area is more fragmented – ethnically, culturally and politically – which can make it easier for new insurgent groups to gain a foothold. It appears as though Daesh has established a presence in the northern areas. In August, Mullah Baz Mohammad, referred to as the shadow governor of Daesh, was arrested in the Jawzjan province (TOLO 2016).

At the same time, Daesh is trying to infiltrate the Pashtun areas outside Nangarhar. In the outskirts of the province capital in Laghman, five IS flags with the words 'long live the Islamic State' were said to have been hung up in a tree in July 2016. In the Khost province, propaganda material is said to have been distributed to people living in the Gulan refugee camp. The material bore IS symbols and urged people to support IS. It is claimed that there are many IS recruits in the Zabul province, but this information has not been verified (email from international organisation, August 2016), and may be related to internal schisms in the Taliban, perhaps expedited by the Afghan authorities' 'divide and conquer' strategy (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

Although Daesh has been under heavy pressure in the first half-year of 2016, UNAMA documents that Daesh has carried out a complex suicide attack and is being held responsible for several IED attacks and targeted killings in the Nangarhar province. In all, 25 civilians are reported to have been killed and just under 100 injured as a result of Daesh's attacks during the first six months of the year. By comparison, nine were killed and four registered as injured during the same period in 2015 (UNAMA & OHCHR 2016b, p. 71). The complex suicide attack targeted the Pakistani consulate in the province capital Jalalabad city, and six civilians were killed and ten injured (UNAMA & OHCHR 2016b, p. 74). The attack was followed by several hours of exchange of fire (Shirzad 2016).

Although there are credible reports of groups loyal to IS being present outside Nangarhar, the organisation's area of operation appears largely to be limited to the province. With the exception of the attack on the protesters in Kabul on 23 July 2016, most of the attacks attributed to Daesh take place in Nangarhar. A well-

informed source claimed in an email to Landinfo in mid-August that 99 per cent of all registered attacks initiated by IS were carried out in the Nangarhar province (email from international organisation, August 2016).

5.3.2 Does Daesh in Afghanistan have a sectarian agenda?

When the self-appointed Islamic State was established in the north-western part of Iran and the eastern part of Syria in summer 2014, the members presented themselves as representatives of the real, authentic Islam. They follow a literal Sunni Muslim interpretation and practice of Islam/Sharia. There is widespread agreement that IS's fundamental beliefs are sectarian (see, inter alia, Hassan 2016). Those who do not follow IS's understanding of Islam are considered infidels. As a consequence, IS fights anyone who has a different interpretation of Islam, including Shias.

There is reason to believe that Daesh in Afghanistan share these ideas to a certain extent. A local journalist (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) knew that Daesh had destroyed Muslim shrines in Nangarhar. Couples who had been married for decades had to renew their marriage contract *Nikah* so that it was consistent with the pure teaching of Islam.

There are different views on the degree of sectarian ideology. An international organisation that follows developments in the security situation closely (conversation in Kabul, April 2016) was of the view that it is difficult to know whether Daesh in Afghanistan has a sectarian agenda and it is difficult to understand their ideology. Pragmatic reasons rather than ideology seem to be the reason why some have pledged allegiance to Daesh.

5.3.3 Daesh and the Hazaras

Daesh claimed responsibility for the suicide attack targeting Hazaras on 23 July 2016 (discussed in Chapter 4). It is important for insurgent groups in Afghanistan to carry out attacks in Kabul. It demonstrates their capacity and relevance, is good propaganda and gets widespread coverage in international media. This was the first large-scale attack that Daesh has carried out in Kabul. The movement probably sees the attack as a great success and boost for morale for the organisation. Nearly a hundred people were killed and several hundred injured, most of them Hazaras (Rasmussen 2016). There is reason to believe that the attack was planned and carried out by IS fighters based in Nangarhar.

The attack is consistent with IS attacks in other parts of the world and had a different profile than those normally associated with attacks initiated by insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Firstly, the attack targeted a clearly defined civilian target and not authorities or security forces. Secondly, the attack can be interpreted within the framework of sectarianism, because it was primarily Shias and Hazaras who were attacked.

Up until 23 July 2016, the majority of attacks and security events for which Daesh is held responsible were geographically limited to the Nangarhar province. Landinfo does not have concrete documentation of or information about attacks against Hazaras for which groups loyal to Daesh are held responsible. The majority of people in the Nangarhar province are Pashtun and Pashai (Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, n.d.). Landinfo does not have information about Hazaras living in

Nangarhar. Also in Kunar, the vast majority are Pashtun, and there is no information about Hazaras living in this province (see, inter alia, Landinfo 2009).

Despite the attack in Kabul in July 2016 and Daesh's sectarian ideology, there is reason to believe that the organisation has limited capacity to carry out attacks against Shia Hazaras and their local communities. At the end of July 2016, the Afghanistan Analysts Network summarised Daesh's capacity as follows:

> *However, it does seem to enjoy an appeal much beyond Nangarhar and as far as Kabul in part due to the defection of militants who were previously Taleban, as well as to the presence of a more radical Salafi-jihadist cell in the largest urban centre in Afghanistan. There, it seems to be capable of planning and executing occasional operations against not so-fortified targets, with the help of local recruits, that can cause mass casualties, such as the 23 July 2016 attack. The prospect of ISKP establishing a territorial foothold in Kabul is, however, a distant one* (Osman 2016).

5.4 ISLAMIC MOVEMENT OF UZBEKISTAN

After Pakistani security forces initiated a military offensive in North Waziristan in summer 2014, militant groups have been driven out of the area and across the border to Afghanistan. According to a well-informed international organisation (conversation in Kabul, April 2016), this is the reason why the number of foreign fighters on Afghan soil has increased in recent years.

Among them are IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). There is great uncertainty about the size and spread of the group. An IMU group has established itself in the Zabul province, but the group's leader was killed shortly after, and the group has since kept a low profile. IMU has some supporters in the north, including in the Burqa district in Baghlan and some areas in Badakshan, but they have little influence and keep a low profile because of the strong Taliban presence in these areas (conversation with national think tank, April 2016).

It is unclear whether IMU in Afghanistan has pledged allegiance to Daesh, and there are probably regional variations in the extent to which IMU is considered to be loyal to IS. A UN source (B, conversation in Kabul, April 2016) stated that they consider Daesh and IMU to be two different groups in most areas of the country. Both groups have a flag with white letters on a black background, which can make reports about which groups are present in a given area unreliable.

The movement has so far not appeared to represent a real security threat to the Hazaras.

5.5 THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The struggle to achieve religious influence in Afghanistan has traditionally been between Saudi-Arabia and the Gulf states, on the one hand, and Iran on the other. The Sunni countries (and individuals) supported the more religiously conservative opposition parties and contributed to the establishment and running of madrasas in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. This led thousands of young Afghans to become Shia critics. Taliban later benefited from the financial support, regardless of whether it was sceptical of Salafism as an ideology. Nowadays, the religious competition is most visible in Kabul. In response to a Shia mosque and education centre opening in

2006, a similar, larger complex has been built with support from Saudi-Arabia, with room for 5,000 students (Strand, correspondence September 2016). Researchers Kristian Berg Harpviken and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh summarise the development as follows in the book *A Rock Between Hard Places*: *Afghanistan as an Arena of Regional Insecurity*: […] we are likely to see a continuation of the Iran-Saudi rivalry, contributing to uncompromising militancy among Afghan groups (Harpviken & Tadjbakhsh 2016, p. 138).

The rise of IS and the wars in Syria and Iraq have worsened the relationship between Iran and Saudi-Arabia, which has a negative effect on the Hazaras' situation in both Iran and Afghanistan. Both Sunnis and Shias in Afghanistan are actively being recruited for these wars (Strand, correspondence September 2016). In Iran, volunteers have been reported, but also the recruitment of Afghans without a residence permit. Those who survive are promised a residence permit in Iran. Those who die are buried in one of the sacred sites of Shia Islam, and their families are granted Iranian citizenships. An Afghan-dominated brigade, the Fatemiyoun brigade, has been established in the fight against IS, but is used to defend the regimes in Syria and Iraq supported by Iran (Middle East Eye, 2016). This gives the conflict an international dimension and increases the tension between Sunnis and Shias in Afghanistan. The situation creates fear among the Hazaras (Strand, correspondence September 2016).

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