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Historic Roots and Impact of Ethnic Uzbeks on Political Circumstances in Afghanistan

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I. Introduction

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is situated in the eastern part of South– Western Asia. Sometimes, according to the geographical location, the country is included in Central Asia.[1]

In the 17th century, Uzbeks ruled around ten autonomous Bekdoms (in Uzbek Bekliklar) such as Balkh, Maimana, and Shiberghan of Northern Afghanistan.[2] In the 18th century today's Afghanistan territory belonged to Iran (Persia). In 1747 after Persian Ruler Nader Shah's death, Ahmad Shah occupied Kandahar with the help of Afghan and Uzbek troops (3000 horsemen). In that year, Nadir Shah's former Uzbek commander Khoja Khan (at his own request) appointed by Ahmad Shah as Wali (local governor) of Balkh and Maymana with the condition of armed support if necessary.[3] This was the beginning of the political activity of Uzbeks in the Afghan government.

Ahmad Shah was from the Sadozai clan. After election as a Supreme ruler of the newly established state of Afghanistan, he renamed the Abdali tribe, to which the Sadozai clan belonged, as Durrani. That is why he is also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani. Later this country was used as buffer land between two colonialist British and Russian Empires.[4]

Afghan people have been through numerous political regimes, coups, countercoups, civil wars, clashes, and unrests. For many years Afghanistan remained in the central attention of Super Powers in terms of security issues and terrorism. In this way, there are certain factors that shape the vectors of their policies in the region. The state suffered from various religious and ethnic groups' battles for the government. Today, Afghanistan is more highly divided than any time before. In this division, ethnic Uzbeks also have a share to reach the sustainability. I try to examine the engagement of this community with the politics in Afghanistan through a retrospective approach.

II. Ethnic Composition and Uzbeks in Afghanistan

The number of Afghanistan's population is 34,124,811 (July 2017 est.) people. [5] Pursuant to *Article Four of Afghanistan's constitution* (2004), officially there are 14 recognized big ethnic groups in the country. The article reads, "National sovereignty in Afghanistan shall belong to the nation, manifested directly and through its elected representatives. The nation of Afghanistan is composed of all individuals who possess the citizenship of Afghanistan. The nation of Afghanistan shall be comprised of *Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkman, Baluch, Pachaie, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujur, Brahwui* and other tribes. The word Afghan shall apply to every citizen of Afghanistan. No individual of the nation of Afghanistan shall be deprived of citizenship. The citizenship and asylum related matters shall be regulated by law."[6] (see Figure 1)[7]

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[1] M. Aminov et al., 'Afghanistan', in *Uzbekistan National Encyclopedia* (Tashkent: "Uzbekistan National Encyclopedia" government scientific publishing house, 2000).

[2] Eden Naby, 'The Uzbeks in Afghanistan', *Central Asian Survey* 3, no. 1 (1 January 1984): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634938408400451.

[3] 'История Афганистана — Энциклопедия «Вокруг света»', n.d., accessed 19 September 2017.

[4] South Asia:: Afghanistan- The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency', accessed 3 January 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html.

[5] 'South Asia :: Afghanistan — The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency'.

[6] 'The Constitution of Afghanistan' (2004), http://www.afghanembassy.com.pl/afg/images/pliki/TheConstitution.pdf.

[7] 'Afghanistan and Pakistan Ethnic Groups | National Geographic Society', accessed 3 January 2019, https://www.nationalgeographic.org/maps/afghanistan-and-pakistan-ethnic-groups/.

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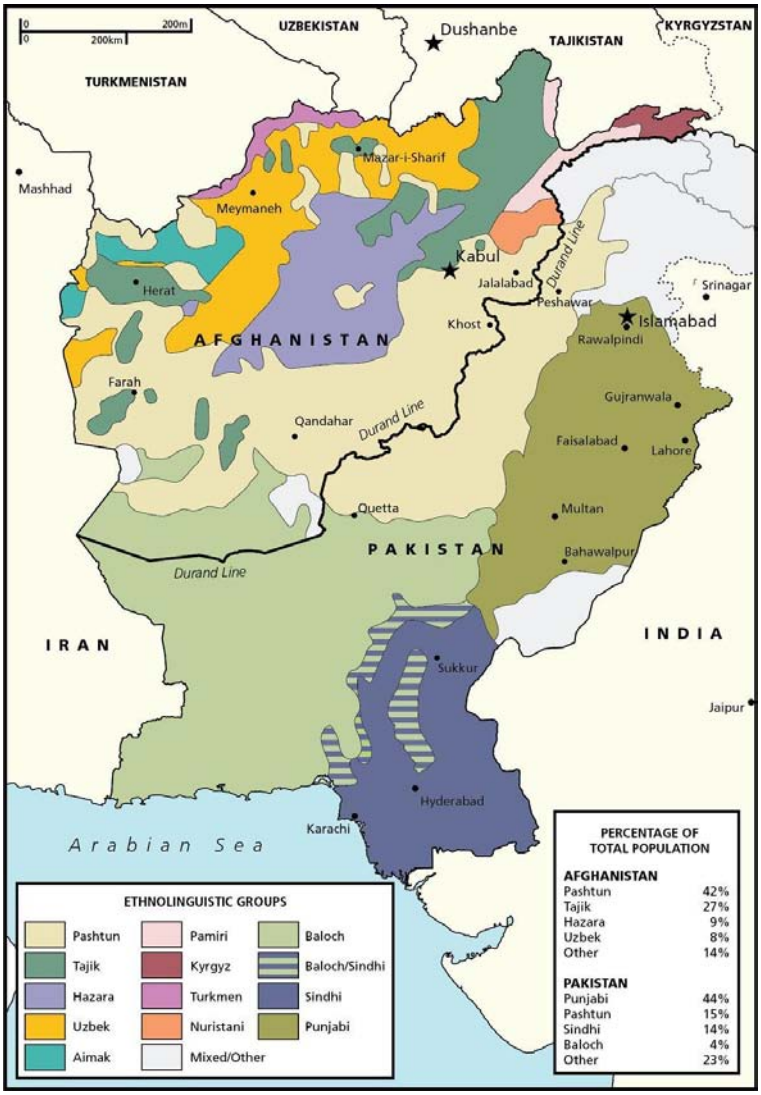


Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan and Pakistan Ethnic Groups.

Uzbeks are the fourth (some estimations claim the third) largest ethnic group in modern Afghanistan, according to various sources, between 2.8 and 4 million people. They are the largest group in Turkic-speaking class and profess Hanafi tradition of Sunni Islam[8] that reflects a primarily cultural rather than religious identity. Their dialect is closely related to the one spoken by the Uzbeks in the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in China.[9]

Indeed, the ethnonym "Uzbek" has a perplexing interpretation. It was never used in a purely political context prior to the establishment of Uzbek Khanate in 1428 by Abul-Khayr-khan with the support of Timurid ruler Mirzo Ulugbek, as the successor of Golden Horde. Abul-Khayr-khan was from the dynasty of Shiban, a grandson of Genghis Khan. In history, several states such as the Grey Horde, Uzbek Khanate, Shaybanids Empire, Khanate of Khwarezm (Khanate of Khiva), and Khanate of Sibir were ruled, and some were founded by this dynasty. Although there are no clear facts, some historians believe that one big group of Turkic-Mongol tribes adopted the name Uzbek from the longest-reigning and most appreciated Muslim khan of Golden Horde - Uzbek khan (Öz Beg Khan).[10] Timurid Mirzo Ulugbek mentions that people who followed Uzbek khan when converting to Islam divided into two groups: those who followed Islam Uzbeks, and those who refused

[8] Узбеки в Афганистане: Демография и расселение · Этнография · Культура и Образование · Известные узбеки Афганистана', accessed 3 January 2019, http://rossiya.takustroenmir.ru/m_uzbeki-v-afganistane.htm.

[9] 'Uzbeks and Turkmens', Minority Rights Group, accessed 3 January 2019, https://minorityrights.org/ minorities/uzbeks-and-turkmens/.

[10] 'Kingdoms of Central Asia - Grey Horde (Shaibanids)', The History Files, accessed 3 March 2019, https://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingLists FarEast/ AsiaShaibanids.htm.

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Kalmyks.[11] Other dominant views emphasize that "Uzbek" deviated from Oghuz bek, meaning Leader of Oghuz; it is linked to Oghuz Khagan (Oghuz Beg) too.[12] Also, "Uzbek" may have been an adjective used to describe certain Turkic tribes, which in translation means "Self lord"[13] that later grew into an ethnonym. The last view is less supported by the historians.[14] While neither of the above mentioned views is backed up by concrete historic narratives of that time, by today, we know that once the term "Uzbek" began to be actively used to refer to a particular group of Turkic-Mongol tribes, it first extended, then moved geographically to the south, towards Transoxiana (also in Arabic - Mawarannahr) and mainly the territory that is known as Uzbekistan in modern history and the southern part of Amudarya river (Oxus river). Thus some people have a misconception about what we call a certain nation Uzbeks today. In fact, Transoxiana and the southern part of the Amudarya River have been traditionally populated by people for ages even by the time of Genghis khan's conquest which resulted in the migration of other Turkic and Mongol tribes who later assimilated with the local Turkic and East Iranian (mainly Tajiks) people. And it is no surprise and worth emphasizing when Shaybanids (the dynasty who founded Uzbeks Khanate in 1428) headed by Muhammad Shaybani captured this land and founded Shaybanids Empire (later known as Bukhara Shaybanids Khanate), local Turkic and East Iranian people were already living in this region. The northern part of today's Afghanistan was also an integral part of the Shaybanids Empire.

In general, the ruling dynasty has a great influence in shaping self-identity issues of the population throughout the whole human history eventually bringing about most of today's nation-states. Later all three Khanates in Transoxiana were founded by the Uzbek dynasties and this statesmanship lasted until the Russian invasion into the region. Not only Turkic-Mongol tribes moved to the region together with Shaybanids but also Turkic people who had already been residing by then later accepted the common name Uzbek under the political leadership of Uzbeks. Yet reading the poems (by Alisher Navoi[15] e.g.) that were written before the Shaybanids invasion as well as the epics by the Shaybanids palace poets (by Mohammad Salih[16] e.g.) and comparing them with today's Uzbek language, one may make sure that dialects and features of local Turkic languages dominated across the region even after the establishment of the Shaybanids Empire. Moreover, as Eden Naby claims, most of the Uzbeks and Turkmens of Afghanistan assert that the language in which they communicate is definitely Turkic not particularly Uzbek or Turkmen.[17] All is a matter of time and space. The destiny of Afghanistan's Uzbeks was also highly dependent on policies conducted by leaders of states in the region.

As was mentioned above, Uzbeks had their own Bekdoms/Khanates in Northern Afghanistan. Eden Naby points out that Transoxiana or Afghan gold and silver coins were equally in use with the local copper coins. This implies they were autonomous, at the same time, heavily influenced by both neighbors. In *1751 Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah occupied the lands* on the southern part of Amudarya river namely Maimana, Andkhoy, Shiberghan, Balkh, Bamyan, and other areas up to Badakhshan that were settled by the Turkic people who already perceived themselves Uzbeks.[18] In different periods, these Bekdoms sporadically gained back and lost their independence. In 1850, Afghan Amir Dost Muhammad Khan defeated them. Another Afghan leader Amir Abdul Rahman' rule (1880-1901) is known for weakening the Turkification of the country's north. During his reign, the Pushtuns exceeded all ethnic groups, even Uzbeks who were leading demographically in the region. Furthermore, commerce turned from Central Asia towards the Indian Subcontinent.[19]

Officially, in modern international law, the Uzbeks have found themselves in the territory of modern Afghanistan following *the Russo-Afghan boundary agreement*. The agreement was finalized in an exchange of letters between the British and Russian ministers of Foreign Affairs, Granville Leveson-Gower (October 17, 1872) and Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov (January 31, 1873).[20]

[11] Мирзо Улугбек, Тўрт улус тарихи, accessed 2 May 2020, http://www.ziyouz.com/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=57&func=fileinfo&id=831.

[12] Khurshid Davron, 'Xurshid Davron. «O'zbek» Atamasi (Etnonimi)Ning Kelib Chiqishi Bilan Bog'liq Bir Faraz Haqida | Xurshid Davron Kutubxonasi', accessed 25 March 2019, https://kh-davron.uz/ijod/maqolalar/ozbek-atamasi- haqida.html.

[13] Ахмедов Б.А., *Государство кочевых узбеков* (Москва: Наука, 1965).

[14] Ўзбек халқининг келиб чиқиши: Илмий-методологик ёндашувлар, этногенетик ва этник тарих (Республика илмий-назарий семинари, Tashkent, 2004), 84 http://khorezmiy.uz/media/85b92c5e-93cc-2c2a-dd10-a857d258fb69. pdf.

[15] 'Alisher Navoiy: Favoyid ul-Kibar Alif harfining ofatlarining ibtidosi «Favoyid»din', Uzbekistan National Library, accessed 10 February 2020, http://navoi.natlib.uz:8101/uz/xazoyin_ul_maoniy_favoyid_ul_kibra_oltinchi_tom/alif_harfining_ofatlarining_ibtilosi_favoyiddin/.

[16] Ваҳоб Раҳмонов, *Муҳаммад Солиҳ* Шайбонийнома (Ғафур Ғулом номидаги Адабиёт ва санъат нашриёти, 1989), http://www.ziyouz.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7075.

[17] Naby, 'The Uzbeks in Afghanistan'.

[18] Q. Usmonov, U. Jo'rayev, and N. Norqulov, *O'zbekiston Tarixi*, 3rd ed. (Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 2014).

[19] Naby, 'The Uzbeks in Afghanistan'.

[20] Daniel Balland, 'BOUNDARIES Iii. Boundaries of Afghanistan – Encyclopaedia Iranica', Encyclopaedia Iranica, 30 December 2012, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/boundaries-iii.

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When British rulers tried to include the northern frontier of Afghanistan under control, they spread a series of disgusting information about Uzbeks' living conditions, their "dirtiness" and "wildness". It was aimed to urge Afghan leaders to occupy those areas and realize the campaign referred to as '*Pashtunisation*' or '*Afghanisation*'.[21] Admitted by the Pashtuns themselves, Uzbeks in Afghanistan are rather aggressive than other ethnic groups.

According to the publication by *Minorities at Risk Project* on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees official web-site, Uzbeks moved into the area during the raids of Turkic people across Central Asia in the sixteenth century. Large numbers of Uzbeks also moved into Afghanistan in the 1920s and 1930s from Central Asian territory where population was undergoing Sovietization. Audrey C. Shalinsky mentions that those migrants were called muhajerins in Afghanistan. They ethnically identify themselves as linked to town or cities like Namanganis, Kokandis or Andijanis back in their homeland. These were also added to names reminding their personal identity.[22] The second wave muhajerins were mostly of urban origin. Except for agriculture, they got engaged in the textile industry and small trades. Also today Uzbek women are well known for their carpet factories.[23]

After the establishment of the communist regime with the direct participation of the USSR, the ethnic groups policy context was modified. If before the emphasis was placed on 'privileges', this time 'equality' gets central. Some ethnicities, especially Uzbeks, got the opportunity to support their languages through issuances of various periodical papers ("Yulduz" weekly newspaper, e.g.), radio broadcastings, publishing poems in Afghanistan press and many more. Reportedly, Soviet and Afghan governments' concern regarding the possible union of the Uzbeks at both sides of the Oxus to fight for independence served as a ground to shun too much focus on cultural autonomy.[24]

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Uzbeks fought for a commensurate political power in the authority, and for the autonomy. Uzbeks did not have their own political organization until General Abdul Rashid Dostum defected from the Najibullah regime and, with his control over the Northern provinces, became self- appointed spokesperson for the rights of Uzbeks in Afghanistan. Uzbeks were part of the Northern Alliance, which fought against the Taliban regime. Thus after the fall of the regime Uzbeks gained an even more influential character into the military and political life of Afghanistan.[25]

III. Striving for Governance in Recent Past

At the June 1988 session of the National Council, Uzbek deputies (members of local councils) sharply criticized the policy of the *People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan* (PDPA) leadership on the national issue, which "pushed the people away from it", with regard to the principles of recruiting the country's armed forces and its command staff, demanded the inclusion of representatives of Uzbeks as well as Turkmens. The processes of ethnic politicization took place also in the Afghan army. So, for example, the personnel of the 53rd Infantry Division, formed in the province of Jawzjan, consisted mainly of Uzbeks living there.[26] In June 1990, in Moscow General Abdul Rashid Dostum stated: "*Uzbeks and Turkmens in the north of Afghanistan will not allow the Pashtuns to command the old way*".[27] Contemporary Afghanistan Uzbeks' political activity couldn't have existed without Dostum's great role. In 1992 he created the *Jombesh-e Melli-ye Islami-ye Afghanistan* (National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan – NIMA or in brief, Jombesh). In the 1990s, he formed a full-fledged structure of government bodies that did not depend on Kabul. As a result, quasi-state organizations arose in the four Northern provinces inhabited by the Uzbeks.

The Government of Uzbekistan also tried to mediate the parties advancing its *Six plus Two Group on Afghanistan* in 1997 followed by the adoption of Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan in 1999.[28]

The fragile political balance was violated already in early December 2001 by Dostum, who considered himself deprived when sharing power and refused to recognize the new government. And as Yuri Laletin claims the case was corrected thanks to *Donald Rumsfeld* (the 13th and 21st Secretary of Defense [29]), who

[21] Christian Bleuer, 'From "Slavers" to "Warlords": Descriptions of Afghanistan's Uzbeks in Western Writing', *Afghanistan Analysts Network* (blog), 17 October 2014, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/from-slavers-to-warlords-descriptions-of-afghanistans-uzbeks-in-western-writing/.

[22] Audrey C. Shalinsky, 'Islam and Ethnicity: The Northern Afghanistan Perspective', n.d., 72–83.

[23] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Assessment for Uzbeks in Afghanistan', Refworld, 31 December 2003, https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f3a521d.html.

[24] Naby, 'The Uzbeks in Afghanistan'.

[25] 'Uzbeks and Turkmens'.

[26] Ю.П.Лалетин, **Межэтническое взаимодействие в Афганистане** n.d., https://mgimo.ru/upload/iblock/891/891ca817af5196cc95fada903aa5e910.pdf.

[27] Х. Хашимбеков, *Узбеки Северного Афганистана*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Российская Акад. Наук, Инст. Востоковедения, 1998).

[28] Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan | UN Peacemaker', accessed 5 December 2018, https://peacemaker.un.org/node/645.

[29] 'DONALD H. RUMSFELD > U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE > Biography View', accessed 3 January 2019, https://dod.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Biography-View/Article/602800/.

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together with *Islam Karimov* (the first President of Uzbekistan) offered him the post of *Deputy Minister of Defense* in the government of Hamid Karzai. Dostum was supported by the ally of the Northern Alliance, *Abdullah-khan Wardak*, who took part in the negotiations in Germany and refused to sign the document that was adopted there. During the formation of the authorities after the completion of the military phase of the anti-terrorist operation, Dostum received the posts of the *deputy head of the provisional administration* and *the deputy defense minister,* and in May 2003 was appointed *special adviser on military and security issues.* In the presidential elections in October 2004, he took the fourth place as a candidate, gaining 10% of the vote. On March 2, 2005, he received a post specially created for him - *Chief of Staff Commander of Afghanistan Armed Forces.* In other words, he became the Chief of the General Staff. In the lower house of parliament, NIMA received more than 20 seats.[30] (see Table 1. below)[31]

Table 1: Largest Political Parties in Afghan Parliament. Results of 2005 elections.

Political Party	Party Leader	Est. # of Seats
Hezb-e-Jamiat Islami Afghanistan	Burhanuddin Rabbani	25 – 30
Hezb-e-Junbesh-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan	Abdul Rashid Dostum	23 – 25
Hezb-e-Wahdat Islami-e-Mardum Afghanistan	Mohammad Mohaqiq	20 – 25
Hezb-e-Afghanistan Naveen	Mohammad Younis Qanooni	22 – 26
Hezb-e-Tanzim-e-Dawat Islami Afghanistan	Abdul Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf	10 – 12
Hezb-e-Mutahed Milli Afghanistan	Nur al-Haq Ulemi	10 – 12
Hezb-e-Afghan Milat	Anwar al-Haq Ahadi	7 – 8
Hezb-e-Mahaz-e-Milli-e-Islami-e-Afghanistan	Sayyed Ahmad Gailani	6 – 8
Hezb-e-Wahdat Islami	Mohammad Karim Khalili	5 – 6
Hezb-e-Eqtedare Islami	Seyyed Mustafa Kazemi	5 – 6

According to the 2014 presidential elections, *"Ashraf Ghani/Abdul Rashid Dostum"* tandem won over the potential opponents *Abdullah Abdullah/Mohammad Khan.* For the first time in Afghanistan history, an Uzbek representative got one of the two most influential positions in the official Afghan government. Abdul Rashid Dostum became a vice-president. Yet this wasn't the sign of success of Uzbeks. On the contrary, the results divulged the recent *lameness of Dostum's party* that used to be a leading one in northern regions, especially among Uzbeks and Turkmens. Besides, it clearly revealed current circumstances within the institution that could become a potential source of risks in the future.

IV. Political Risks Stemming from Current Circumstance

Nowadays, the political climate in the country more, exactly within the Northern Alliance and Jombesh party is fragile. Whether Dostum is capable of settling the current problems or not highly depends on how well he changes his previous behavior. Complete or partial collapse of the party also depends on whether changes will be made or not.

Uncertain integrity

It all dates back to the 2014 Presidential elections in Afghanistan, whose results showed that unity in the power struggle among Uzbeks as well as is damaged. The apparent split occurred. (see Table 2. below)

[30] Ю.П.Лалетин, Межэтническое взаимодействие в Афганистане.
[31] 'The September 2005 Parliamentary And Provincial Council Elections In Afghanistan' (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), n.d.), https:/www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2004_af_report_041006.pdf.

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Table 2: Votes by Uzbek and Turkmen majority provinces. Results of 2014 presidential elections.

#	Province name	Percentage of Uzbeks (and Turkmens)[32]	Percentage of votes for Ghani-Dostum	Percentage of votes for Abdulla-Mohammad
1.	Faryab	57.0 % (6.6 %)	65.39 %	29.31 %
2.	Juzjan/Jawzjan	27.0 % (54.0 %)	69.23 %	19.34 %
3.	Takhar	44.0 %	38.25 %	50.35 %
4.	Samangan	33.3 %	26.58 %	61.33 %
5.	Sar-e-Pul	31.0 %	50.41 %	38.53 %
6.	Badakhshan	18.0 %	64.85 %	14.43 %
7.	Balkh	10.7 % (11.9 %)	60.92 %	28.01 %
8.	Baghlan	5.0 %	60.14 %	20.48 %

Source: Prepared by the author based on the data at Independent Election Commission web-site.[33]

[32] Obaid Ali, 'Elections 2014 (22): How Disenchantment with General Dostum Split the Uzbek Vote Bank', *Afghanistan Analysts Network* (blog), 22 May 2014, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-split-uzbek-vote-bank- disenchantment-with-general-dostum-spreads-from-hisparty-to-the-electorate/?format=pdf.

[33] '2014 Afghanistan Elections Results', Independent Election Commission (IEC), accessed 22 September 2018, http://www.iec.org.af/results_2014/en/finalresults/show_pr_elected.

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Figures in the Table 2 illustrate the final results of the elections by Uzbek or Turkmen majority or with a significant portion of Uzbeks and Turkmens provinces. Among these provinces, "Ghani/Dostum" campaign succeeded only in Faryab and Juzjan. While in all others, they failed being defeated by "Abdullah/ Mohammad" project. Initially, "Ghani/Dostum" was expected to prevail at least half of these regions. As far as the districts dominated by Uzbeks are concerned, according to *Obaid Ali,* an expert in Afghanistan Anaylsts Network, Ghani/Dostum ticket in Badakhshan's Argu, with a 95 per cent of Uzbeks, was supported by less than one- third of the potential Uzbek voters achieving 26.1% in contrast to Abdullah's 33.6%. In another district Khash (with 85 of Uzbeks) "Ghani/Dostum" attained only 11% percent of votes.[34] Ghani's later report made clear that in his opinion shortcomings were mainly due to the poor campaign influenced by some problems. Moreover, he blamed the IEC staff of unfairness. Though General Dostum responsible for this terrible results. *Obaid Ali* also emphasizes young Uzbeks network that were irritated at the failed Party reform may have contributed to the loss of considerable Uzbek votes. In the end, the Ghani-Dostum tandem overcame their opponents. Ashraf Ghani became President whereas Abdul Rashid Dostum got first vice-presidentship. This five-year term was very critical for both of them. Especially Dostum was in for a number of troubles. During this period, he had a suspicious incident with Ahmed Ischi, a political rival.[35] Investigations and attempts to arrest Dostum and his guards created a public furor, forcing the Vice-President to flee the country on the pretext of seeking medical care. De facto sheltering in Turkey. Accused of war crimes and human rights violations by the US so far, General Dostum faced the unexpected position of his election partner, President Ashraf Ghani. Tensions between former allies kept growing as Ghani was not willing to welcome Dostum back from exile. Yet, he returned after weeks of widespread protests in the country's north, his traditional bastion, demanding that the government allow the self-exiled leader to return though the plane that was carrying him was not allowed to land.[36] This was followed by sentencing Dostum's seven bodyguards who allegedly attended at torturing Ahmed Ischi.[37] In terms of justice, Ghani's decision was appropriate, yet more or less General Dostum did perform a key role in obtaining the victory in the 2014 Presidential elections. Perhaps his reputation among the Afghanistan Uzbeks is badly damaged and is not as bold as before, however he is still the leader of that community. This all means he still has a lever. As far as Dostum is alive afghan politicians have a little chance to obviate him. He literally survived countless attacks even during his vice- presidentship.[38] President Ghani's attitude outraged Dostum and designed participation of Uzbeks in the 2019 presidential elections. This five-year term was also notable for the transition of power in Uzbekistan, whose role in the region is critical, after the President Islam Karimov's death in 2016, the defeats of ISIL forces which posed a potential threat to Dostum, by the hardest attempts of Russia and International Coalition headed by the US. The outcomes of these events would reflect in Dostum's position.

The 2019 Presidential election was even more compelling. Although Dostum didn't run this time, he remained in a win-win game. Elections that took place on 28 September, 2019 preceded a long-lasting political crisis in the country. According to the official final results announced on 18 February, 2020 by the Election Commission Mohammad Ashraf Ghani won his second election gaining overall 50.64 % of votes.[39] Nevertheless, Abdullah blamed Ghani and the Election Commission of falsifying the results and declared he would form his own government and held parallel inauguration ceremony.[40] This time Abdullah was backed by strongman General Dostum that bolstered his confidence. His victories in all Uzbek majority provinces and districts proved this once again (see Figure 2).[41] This also means lessons from the previous elections were learned well by Dostum. Part of the deal was in action when Abdullah's first two moves "at the office" became appointing a new governor in Sar-e-Pul and acting governor in Jawzjan[42] and Dostum was to ensure security of these ceremonies.

[34] Obaid Ali, 'Elections 2014 (22): How Disenchantment with General Dostum Split the Uzbek Vote Bank'.

[35] Matthew Rosenberg, 'Afghanistan's Vice President Is Barred From Entering U.S.', *The New York Times*, 25 April 2016, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/26/world/middleeast/abdul-rashid-dostum-afghanistan-barred- from-entering-us.html.

[36] Mujib Mashal and Najim Rahim, 'Afghan Vice President's Return Thwarted as Plane Is Turned Back', *The New York Times*, 18 July 2017, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/world/asia/afghanistan-dostum-ghani-plane.html.

[37] 'Afghan Vice President's Guards Sentenced over Abduction Case - World News', Tasnim News Agency, accessed 8 November 2017, /en/news/2017/11/05/1565367/afghan-vice-president-s-guards-sentenced-over-abduction-case.

[38] 'Afghan Vice President Dostum Escapes Blast on Return from Exile - Reuters', 22 July 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-dostum/afghan-vice-president-dostum-escapes-blast-on-return-from-exile-idUSKBN1KC0IU.

[39] 2019 Presidential Elections', accessed 18 February 2020, http://www.iec.org.af/results/en/home.

[40] Gani Sworn in as Afghan President, Abdullah Holds Parallel Inauguration', accessed 10 March 2020, https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/gani-sworn-in-as-afghan-president-abdullah-holds-parallel-inauguration-1.70261763.

[41] Joshua Project, 'Uzbek, Southern in Afghanistan', accessed 8 August 2020, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/15756/AF.

[42] 'Abdullah's Team Appoints "Acting Governor" to Jawzjan', TOLO news, 23 February 2020, /afghanistan/abdullah%E2%80%99s-team-appoints-%E2%80%98acting-governor%E2%80%99-jawzjan.

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The political unrest lasted until 16 May, 2020 when eventually Ghani and Abdullah reached a power-sharing deal.[43] Ghani remained President while Abdullah became head of the High Council for National Reconciliation. Tough the crux of this very agreement was promoting Dostum to a Marshal rank, which happened on 3rd of July, 2020.[44] From then on he received membership in the Supreme State Council and the National Security Council of Afghanistan. His cooperation with Abdullah wasn't in vain.



Figure 2: Ethnic Uzbeks in Afghanistan Provinces.

Emergence of brand new directions to lead and absence of a sole prominent future leader

Young members of the Jombesh Party who once were sent to Turkey enjoying scholarships provided by Dostum to obtain high-quality educational degrees in the last decade of the last century are now striving to spread fresh ideas towards reforms in the party that are failing almost every time. As claimed by Obaid Ali, those failures have born two main separate movements. The first *Reform and Justice* (Eslahat wa Edalat) by reformist Jombesh members – Sa'i and Turkoghli. Some former Ministers and members of Parliament were members of this movement. The second is *Reform and Participation* (Eslahat wa Mosharekat)[45]. It is said that the movement includes mostly former Jombeshi party members. Both of the above- mentioned unities advocate reforms.

Dostum figured out that if he continues blocking reformists' attempts he could to unite Uzbeks who already were on the eve of distancing him soon. The disgracing episode with Ahmed Eschi and Dostum's consequent escape from the country actually worked for him. The number of attacks against Uzbeks grew and when he returned, they warmly welcomed him gathering and waiting his speech to the crowd. They apparently missed their leader. Realizing previous risks coming from young reformists, Dostum made use of this awakened affection - the leadership of the Jombesh party underwent some revisions. Dostum's eldest son

[43] 'Rival Afghan Leaders Sign Power-Sharing Deal', *BBC News*, 17 May 2020, sec. Asia, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52699158.

[44] Ariana News, 'Abdul Rashid Dostum Officially Awarded Rank of Marshal – Jawzjan', accessed 15 July 2020, https://arianews.af/abdul-rashid-dostum-officially-awarded-rank-of-marshal-jawzjan/.

[45] Obaid Ali, 'Elections 2014 (22): How Disenchantment with General Dostum Split the Uzbek Vote Bank'.

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Batur Dostum became acting chairman of the party.[46] He didn't take part in any wars while there are, as I mentioned above, political challengers emerged in the region. After the mistakes at the 2014 Presidential elections, Dostum did a lot better pressuring any small political institutions which tried to shape the voters' opinions in Uzbek and Turkmen dominated provinces during the 2019 Presidential elections and granted those critical portion of votes for Abdullah Abdullah's team.

In general, viewpoints among the Jonbesh regarding the young Uzbek reformists vary. Some say that politics is not just uniting powers when needed and call the young Uzbek reformists as opportunists. To some extend, it is true that Afghanistan's modern history does not quite seem that any single idea could unite the people all at once. Those who have been through a number of clashes, conflicts and wars have pulled each other through those difficulties and hence don't want to lose the authority they gained along the way. On the other hand, history evinces that continuous coercion and "iron hand" rule rarely introduced a better future. Accordingly, Dostum should guide those young reformists and avail himself of their potential. They all represent the same community after all. Otherwise, as to me after Dostum, NIMA (Jombesh) may lose power because of inter-party fights for the authority and augmenting reformist movements amongst Uzbeks in Northern Provinces of Afghanistan.

The recent wave of peace talks between official Afghan government and the Taliban representatives gives a hope for all the ethnic minorities along with Uzbeks in Afghanistan. A member of the Taliban Council declared that they do share common assertion with other afghan people on several aspects.[47] Predicted scenarios regarding the political leadership of Uzbeks in Afghanistan will not be impacted drastically even if the parties reach long-awaited agreement to set peace in the country.

V. Conclusion

The geographical location of Afghanistan is very convenient since it borders with almost all key regions of Asia except far-east and south-east ones. In the last two centuries, the people there have been confronting with almost all those who have been consciously playing the role of Global Policeman or Arbitrator. The former USSR kept its military personnel for ten years to support the communist regime, even following which there was no success to set up peace in Afghanistan. The US involvement after 9/11, although achieved unique results, has failed to totally eliminate the signs of war.

Historically, Afghanistan has been landing for various ethnic groups that today find the other ends in neighboring states. Uzbeks have also been an essential part of afghan populations for many years. They always mattered in the policy of Afghanistan and had a series of attempts to rebel against afghan rulers aiming the autonomy and independence. While the ethnonym "Uzbek" is relatively young a number of Turkic tribes traditionally resided in the south of the Oxus river. The formation of the Uzbek community in the north of Afghanistan took place in 3 waves. First, during the conquest of Mohammad Shaybani in the 16th century. Second, after the continuous pressure of Tsarist Russia to the religious leaders in Central Asia as well as hardness caused by the first World War resulted in a big immigration of Transoxian Uzbeks to the south of the Amudarya river. The third one was made possible by the Sovietization policy of the USSR. These migrations led to the establishment of a fairly diverse Uzbek society.

Under the intense struggles for government, ethnic Uzbeks gained this increasing politically important stance in the north especially during the last years of Soviet military existence in Afghanistan. General Abdul Rashid Dostum played a key role in the Northern Alliance to fight against the Taliban. As a sole powerful leader, his activities have direct effects on Uzbeks across Afghanistan. Whenever he claimed more power in the government he achieved them and once even nominated in Presidential elections but his popularity was not far-reaching throughout Afghanistan. In the early 1990s he established his own party which acquired many supporters. The party granted scholarships to the talented youngsters to receive a secular and modern education in Turkey and other more developed states. Dostum's highest victory so far is reaching the post Vice-president and military rank of Marshal during Ashraf Ghani's first and second term administration, respectively. Yet as the most prominent leader of the whole ethnic group, his present condition is not desirable. His stable success dynamic is almost coming to an end.

At first, the 2014 Presidential elections revealed that Jombesh is suffering from disintegration. Dostum's disciples became his opponents. This is as I think the mistake committed by Dostum himself. He shouldn't have banned the attempts towards reforms but consider as the reality around him and the official Afghan government was altering. Any success should be measured by the scale of positive outcomes. The 2019 Presidential election results brought more personal privilege to him rather than the whole Uzbek community. Apparently, he should have been ready for initiatives that demand reforms. Otherwise, what was the purpose of giving the talented youth of his people the chance to obtain secular education? Those students who had the opportunity to compare the life in their homeland and

[46] 'Старший сын Абдуррашида Дустума занял его место', accessed 3 January 2019, http://afghanistantoday.ru/node/43145.

[47] BBC Uzbek, *Толибон вакили Би-би-си Ўзбек мухбирига нима деди?*, Interview, accessed 12 March 2020, https:/www.youtube.com/ watch?v=3GFGUib SMIo&t=145s.

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the life in more developed country, grew into reformists with fresh ideas that should have been shaped, not pressured by Dostum. The reformists' activity although was loosened, had some positive implications in terms of control. Unfortunately, it is a bit late now. One and only political unity of ethnic Uzbeks, Jombeshi Milliy got cracks. Dostum had to give the leadership of the party to his inexperienced son. The only thing that may defend Botur Dostum is his alive father. I think once Abdul Rashid Dostum entirely disappears from the political scene of Afghanistan, arduous days will come up to his son. Logically who runs Jombesh Party that heads the ethnic Uzbeks in terms of politics in Afghanistan. This is why the leadership issue should be profoundly addressed by Marshal Dostum in due course.

All in all, current political circumstances in Afghanistan are certain to be changed over the years. Dostum's loyalists may be defeated by opponents and his party may erode that reminds us Yassir Arafat's (former PLO leader) fate. I mean Mahmud Abbas is not as energetic as Arafat. Yet we don't know how powerful or influential may become young former Jombeshi reformist Uzbeks. The only thing ahead is observing…

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