

Nils Wörmer

THE NETWORKS OF KUNDUZ

A History of Conflict and Their Actors, from 1992 to 2001

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

Status, reputation, alliances and behaviour of most individual actors and organizational groups that make up Kunduz' post-2001 power architecture cannot be explained without examining the province's history of conflict. Between 1992 and 2001, the history of Kunduz province was marked by heavy fighting, atrocities, expulsions, looting and shifts of alliances as the region was a major battleground of the civil war.

During the rule of the mujahedin that lasted until 1997 in that province, the local power structures of Kunduz were highly fragmented. In fact, the province reflected the national-level conflict constellations in a smaller dimension, as nearly all relevant national actors had a social or ethnic base there. However, in 1993 local commanders in Kunduz formed alliances and fought each other in contradiction to the national-level conflict formation. Basically, alliance formation among the mujahedin parties followed a power-political calculus and was purposive.

Between 1997 and 2001, Kunduz province was the Taleban movement's major stronghold in northern Afghanistan and its rule over Kunduz was marked by Pashtun domination of the provincial administration. The province still has a strong potential of support for the Taleban.

Commanders² were the key figures in Kunduz' local politics between 1992 and 2001. Often they had to make sure, however, to get the support of some relevant religious or secular dignitaries, in order to legitimise their policies or actions. The personal backgrounds of individual actors – for example, their ethnicity, tribal

¹ This paper is based on relevant published material, key informant interviews and personal observations of the author over the past five years, both in Kabul, Afghan provinces and abroad. The author thanks the Kabul Centre - American Institute of Afghanistan Studies for the logistical support during the field research. The paper exclusively reflects the author's personal perceptions.

² The author adopts Gilles Dorronsoro's definition of the term 'commander': 'In response to the violence of the state, and afterwards to invasion by a foreign power, the population rose up in revolt and embarked on a Holy War, a jihad. The mobilisation of the countryside took place in the context of local solidarity networks, organised around 'commanders'. The social backgrounds of these leaders provide an explanation of the different kinds of organisation which were set up.' Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution unending. Afghanistan: 1979 to the present*, New York, Columbia University Press 2005, 93.

affiliation, level of religious education, party affiliation during the 1978–92 jihad, reputation as a ‘warrior’, etc. – are of great importance for understanding Kunduz province’s micro politics.

The collapse of the Taleban administration in Kunduz province in November 2001 had at first led to a vacuum of power, out of which strongly fragmented, informal power structures emerged in the following years. These were encountered by German soldiers and development workers when they came to northeastern Afghanistan in 2003 in Phase 1 of the ISAF extension from Kabul to the provinces. The power structures by this time mainly reflected the situation as it stood between 1992 and 1997, when Jamiat-e Islami, Jombesh-e Melli, Hezb-e Islami and Ittehad-e Islami dominated the area.

The organisations participating in the Kunduz insurgency since 2007 mainly correspond to the actors that fought in northeastern Afghanistan between 1998 and 2001 and finally found themselves surrounded in the pocket of Kunduz in November 2001: the Taleban (including partly autonomous Haqqani linked commanders), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and al-Qaeda. All of them could fall back on existent networks that had persisted over time when they re-emerged in Kunduz province.

Conflicts about land distribution, water rights, accession to resources and political representation occurred as a result of immigration waves throughout the last two centuries. Until today, these fields of conflict have aroused prejudices and caused tensions between the ethnic groups of northeastern Afghanistan, particularly Kunduz province.³ This was an important pre-condition that allowed the parties fighting in Kunduz province to mobilise supporters along ethnic lines.

³ For a detailed report of the colonization of Kataghan, refer to Erwin Grötzbach, ‘Kulturgeographischer Wandel in Nordost-Afghanistan seit dem 19. Jahrhundert’, *Afghanische Studien* Band 4, Meisenheim am Glan 1972. For a comprehensive analysis of ethnic conflicts in northern Afghanistan, refer to Conrad Schetter, *Ethnizität und ethnische Konflikte in Afghanistan*, Berlin, Reimer 2003.

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