

Political Parties in Afghanistan

I. OVERVIEW

As parliamentary elections approach in September 2005, early hopes that a strong, pluralistic political party system would help stabilise Afghanistan's political transition are fading. Karzai government policies, accompanied by an inappropriate voting system, are sidelining the parties at a time when there is increasing popular dissatisfaction with the slow progress in economic reconstruction, rising corruption and continued insecurity. This is worrying since it was marginalisation and intolerance of political opposition that stunted the development of a pluralistic system, and was largely responsible for past violence in Afghanistan. If current laws constraining party functioning are not changed, political stability will be illusory.

In the absence of strong pluralistic and democratic institutions to mediate internal tensions, political bargaining and the competition for power will most likely continue to occur outside the institutions of government. Because of their past shortcomings, however, many Afghans regard political parties with suspicion. Yet, post-Taliban Afghanistan has witnessed the emergence of many small democratic parties that offer a break with this past, and the means to create a stable and democratic parliament. And many Afghans, especially young people, now recognise parties as an essential component of the legal democratic process.

The government of President Hamid Karzai would be best served by bringing any political party, regardless of its political leanings, into the legal fold if it demonstrates a willingness to work peacefully and democratically. In particular, it should:

- clarify Article 6 of the Political Parties Law relating to ethnic, racial and sectarian discrimination and violence;
- revise the Political Parties Law to remove unnecessary curbs on party formation and functioning and to clarify apparent contradictions with the application of sharia (religious law) regarding women's rights;
- simplify the registration process;

- ensure an even playing field in the September 2005 parliamentary elections by shifting oversight of parties from the ministry of justice to an independent election commission; and
- support healthy political development by providing government funds to parties so as to reduce the scope for private interests to buy influence, and by facilitating training to enhance the participation of women in the political system.

The government should also urgently reconsider the possibility of amending its decision to conduct the parliamentary elections under the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system, which is likely to produce unrepresentative results in a country that lacks well-organised parties.

Major donor countries and the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should support the above measures and should pay special attention to the provision of security for liberal, democratic parties that are operating in an uncertain environment.

II. BACKGROUND

The 2001 Bonn Agreement set the target date of June 2004 for the formation of a fully representative and elected Afghan government. That timeframe has been repeatedly changed. Elections were first delayed from June 2004 to September, then to October 2004. Finally, a decision was taken to hold only presidential elections in October, delaying parliamentary, provincial and district voting until April 2005.

Delayed once again, elections to the 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirga (House of the People, the Lower House of the National Assembly, and to the 34 provincial councils are now due on 18 September.¹ The Joint

¹ Each of the 34 provinces is a single constituency in the Wolesi Jirga. Ten seats are reserved for the *Kuchi* (nomad) community; with the remaining 239 seats distributed among provinces in proportion to their population, with each province having at least two seats. Provincial councils will have anywhere between nine and 29 members, depending on population.

Electoral Management Body (JEMB), a temporary merger of the Independent Election Commission and the UNAMA Electoral Component, will oversee the election process.

Candidates may be either independent, nominated or endorsed by a political party, although political party symbols will not appear on the ballot. The participation of political parties in direct elections for parliament is a major turning point in Afghanistan's post-Bonn political transition. This briefing concentrates on issues related to political party participation since a healthy multiparty system is vital to Afghanistan's still uncertain political transition. However, these issues cannot be understood without awareness of recent Afghan history.

The formation of political parties in Afghanistan dates back to the early twentieth century, with many emerging during the 1940s, the product of Zahir Shah's modernisation policies.² These included the Pashtun nationalist Afghan Millat (Afghan Nation), led by Ghulam Mohammad Farhad, its offspring Millat (Nation) and Prime Minister Mohammad Hashim Maiwandwal's Jamiat Democratie-yi Mottaraqi (Progressive Democratic Party). Although Afghan Millat, led by the current finance minister, Anwar Alhaq Ahady, still exists, most had disappeared by the mid-1970s, as the king reversed his liberalisation policies, and his cousin and successor, Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan, deliberately curbed party development in the interest of retaining absolute power.

While the right to form political parties was contained in Zahir Shah's 1964 constitution, he never ratified a law to authorise their formation.³ By the 1970s, the royal reforms had created a new class of educated youth that could not find jobs in the stagnant economy. Domestic discontent and the absence of political freedoms led to the creation of clandestine parties including the leftist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the Islamist Jamiat-i Islami.

Overthrowing the king in 1973, Sardar Daoud first used the leftist parties against his Islamist rivals, fuelling an armed revolt, led by the Jamiat. He then turned on the left, seeking to eliminate the PDPA. Had Afghanistan's

rulers legalised the functioning of political parties and had political change been institutionalised through periodic elections, competition for power and influence could have taken place through the ballot box. In the absence of institutionalised and democratic mechanisms for political change, however, the competition between the radical left and right soon assumed the shape of armed conflict.

A. THE POLITICAL LEFT

The PDPA, which was formed by Nur Mohammad Taraki on the eve of elections scheduled for September 1965, was founded on Marxist-Leninist principles in a country without a proletarian working class. It believed in a one-party, heavily secularised state, and was particularly intolerant of political opposition from its Islamist rivals. The party was quickly beset by internal factionalism, with Taraki, a member of the parliament, favouring working within the legislative system, while his principal rival, Babrak Karmal insisted on strict adherence to class struggle. In 1967, the party split into two factions, Khalq (People or Masses) led by Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, and Parcham (Banner) led by Karmal.⁴

A number of Maoist-oriented parties also emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, most prominent among which were the Shuala-yi Javid (Eternal Flame), a Hazara-dominated, anti-Soviet party, and the Sazman-i-Azadbakhsh-i Mardum-i-Afghanistan (SAMA, Liberation Organisation of the People of Afghanistan). A number of these groups joined the Islamic resistance, the mujahidin, in the fight against the Soviets after 1979, while others were assimilated into the PDPA government.⁵

After the Khalq faction of the PDPA deposed Sardar Daoud through a coup carried out by its supporters in the military in 1978 (the Saur Revolution), it formed a government that was violently intolerant of political opposition. Under Amin, Taraki's assassin and successor, in particular, the Soviet-supported government's attempts at forcible reform of polity and society resulted in a surge of support for its Islamist rivals, who attempted to oust it with Pakistani support. The Soviet Union's military intervention in 1979, which replaced the

Elections to the district councils have been postponed indefinitely. "Seat Distributions for Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council Elections", Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB), 30 April 2005.

² For more on elections, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°88, *Afghanistan: From Presidential to Parliamentary Elections*, 23 November 2004.

³ Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven, 2002), p. 73.

⁴ The names "Khalq" and "Parcham" were derived from newspapers each faction published. *Khalq*, edited by Taraki, was published only six times before the government banned it. After the split, Karmal and his supporters published the *Parcham* newspaper. Khalq's membership was primarily Pashtun and rural, while Parcham was composed mainly of urban, middle class Tajiks.

⁵ Antonio Guistozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan* (London, 2000), pp. 203, 235.

Khalqis with the Karmal-led Parcham faction, was aimed at saving its PDPA allies but failed to prevent the conflict from escalating.

B. THE POLITICAL RIGHT

1. Sunni parties

Many leaders of the major Sunni Islamist parties, including Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar and Ahmad Shah Massoud, were influenced by the al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) and its Islamic revolutionary goals.⁶ Persecuted by Daoud, Sunni Islamist parties such as the Rabbani-led Jamiat-i Islami and the Hikmatyar-led Hizb-e Islami conducted a war of attrition against the regime from Pakistani soil and with Pakistani support.⁷ After the Soviet intervention, they and other Sunni Islamist parties were the main opposition to the Soviet-supported PDPA, supported in their anti-Soviet "jihad" by countries as diverse as the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China.

Under the tutelage of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, the Sunni Islamists were organised into seven parties or *tanzims* (organisations). These included Rabbani's Jamiat-i Islami, both factions of the Hizb-e Islami, Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf's Ittihad-i Islami, Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat-i Islami Inqilabi Islami-yi Afghanistan, Sebghatullah Mujaddedi's Jabhayi Nijat-yi Afghanistan and Ahmad Gailani's Mahaz-i Milli-yi Islami-yi Afghanistan. Divided along personal, ethnic, tribal and ideological lines, the mujahidin parties were internally undemocratic and confronted each other even more violently than they did the PDPA regime.⁸ The *tanzims* also operated along the lines of patron/client networks of regional and tribal militias. *Tanzim* leaders bought and paid for their parties, primarily by redistributing money and weapons received from their external patrons and income derived from the narcotics trade to their social and political networks. This allowed them to centralise power in their hands.

⁶ Rabbani, Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf and Khan Zia Khan Naseri were among the prominent Afghan leaders who had studied at Cairo's Al Azhar University.

⁷ In 1978, the Hizb splintered into two factions, with Mawlawi Yunus Khalis heading the new party. The Jamiat-i Islami was also internally divided, with Ahmad Shah Massoud forming a Panjshiri Tajik-dominated faction, the Shura-yi Nazar (Supervisory Council), although the Shura technically remained part of Rabbani's Jamiat. The Shura's members included Mohammed Qasim Fahim and Younus Qanooni.

⁸ Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *Afghanistan: The Bear Trap* (South Yorkshire, 1992), p. 129.

2. Shia parties

Many leaders of Afghanistan's Shia parties, such as Abdul Ali Mazari and Mohammad Mohaqqueq of the Hizb-e Wahdat, were educated at Shia centres of learning, including Qom and Najaf. During the anti-Soviet insurgency, Hazara Shias took advantage of Hazarajat's remote location to gain virtual control of their region. Despite Iranian support and urging, however, the Shias remained divided along ethnic lines.

In 1989, after the fall of the PDPA government, Abdul Ali Mazari formed the Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami-e Afghanistan. In 1992, Mohammad Akbari, an ethnic Qizilbash, and a group of other non-Hazaras formed a faction of the Hizb-e Wahdat. Karim Khalili, the party's spokesperson in Peshawar, assumed its leadership after the Taliban assassinated Mazari in 1995. The Hizb-e Wahdat was a key member of the Northern Alliance, the anti-Taliban alliance in the 1990s. Khalili was subsequently named a vice president in Afghanistan's post-Bonn (2001) interim administration and was reappointed to that position after the 2004 elections.

C. POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL WAR

During the lengthy civil war, even after the Soviet withdrawal, Afghan political entities, in power or in the opposition, functioned for all practical purposes as armed factions rather than parties. Loyalties were based not on well-developed party manifestos and programs or ideological concerns but on personal, ethnic and regional interests. It is not surprising that Afghans even today view these parties and their leaders with suspicion.

From the last days of the PDPA government to the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan's quarrelling leaders had little interest in establishing or institutionalising a functioning multi-party system. In a final attempt at regime survival, for instance, the last PDPA leader, Dr Najibullah, changed his party's name to Hizb-e Watan (Party of the Nation) and promulgated a new constitution that provided for a multi-party system. Yet, opposition parties were not tolerated, and many of the legalised parties were only independent in name. As the regime crumbled, many erstwhile leftists formed alliances of convenience with the Islamist opposition. Some did so along ethnic lines,⁹ while others, such as General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who controlled much of the north through his powerful Jowsjan militia, later renamed Junbish-i Milli-yi Islami joined hands with the Jamiat-i Islami and Hizb-e Wahdat, to oust Najibullah.

⁹ Some Tajik Parchamis joined the Jamiat and some Pashtun Khalqis Hikmatyar's Hizb.

Until the Pakistan-backed Taliban ousted them in turn, the country's Islamist parties fought among themselves to gain or regain power, mostly along ethnic, sectarian and regional lines. From 1992 to 1996, the mainly Tajik Jamiat-i Islami party, headed by President Burhanuddin Rabbani, controlled the central government, only to be overthrown by the even more religiously orthodox and politically intolerant Pashtun-majority Taliban.

The 2003 constitution legalised political parties but the success of democracy is contingent as much on international backing and overcoming the popular perceptions that are still coloured by this history of war as on the legal, constitutional and administrative mechanisms intended to institutionalise a viable multi-party system.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

A. POLITICAL PARTIES LAW

The Political Parties Law provides the framework for legal registration in accordance with the constitution but its anomalies need to be addressed urgently.

The law prohibits legalisation of political parties whose charters are "opposed to the principles of the holy religion Islam".¹⁰ Since Islamic principles are open to interpretation, influential Islamist groups have been given a tool to block parties they deem politically unacceptable, including those that question their own practices and/or religious preferences. They also have been given a window of opportunity to limit women's political participation as contradictory to sharia (religious law) and by blocking the registration of sympathetic parties despite Article 22 of the constitution, which affirms women's equality. This is a matter of concern since many powerful Islamists are in or have influence over governmental institutions, including the judiciary.

Article 6, paragraph 3 stipulates that political parties shall not incite violence on ethnic, racial, religious or sectarian grounds. The vague wording can be used to deny or revoke registration on spurious grounds, of parties that are deemed politically unacceptable. While it is essential to outlaw any group that advocates violence, restrictions on the legalisation of ethnic, sectarian and language-based parties would run contrary to the country's political realities. Indeed, most political parties, regardless of their formal manifestos and platforms, derive popular support

along those lines. Narrowing legal channels within which to articulate ethnic, sectarian or regional priorities and grievances could promote sub-state tensions and discord.

Because the law also prohibits the legalisation of political parties with links to military or quasi-military formations, it has usefully forced some of the militarised groups to cooperate with the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process.¹¹ However, because illegal armed groups, which are outside the mandate of the formal DDR process, have yet to be identified, some parties that have continued to maintain armed wings could gain accreditation, thus undermining the disarmament process.

While the law stipulates that parties must not receive foreign funding, a senior ministry of interior official admits that the government lacks "the capacity to assure a party is truly free from outside pressure".¹² The government's incapacity to enforce this legal restriction, combined with its inability to monitor the funding of the many candidates intending to contest the parliamentary elections, could result in external manipulation of the outcome.¹³ But this restriction could also be misused to undermine the newly formed democratic parties that are not yet able to finance themselves through membership fees and contributions.

A more effective way of supporting healthy political development would be through the provision of government funds to parties. Public funding would reduce the scope for private interests to buy influence and could also be used to reinforce limits on spending. Oversight of public funding for political parties by a non-partisan, independent authority would ensure official even-handedness in the disbursement of such assistance.

B. REGISTRATION PROCESS

The ministry of justice's Department of Registration of Political Parties and Social Organisations is responsible for reviewing and registering political parties after

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of Afghanistan's DDR process, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°35, *Afghanistan: Getting Disarmament Back on Track*, 23 February 2005, and Crisis Group Asia Report N°65, *Disarmament and Reintegration in Afghanistan*, 30 September 2003.

¹² Crisis Group interview with ministry of interior official. Kabul, 17 February 2005.

¹³ The JEMB has announced that 2,915 people, including 347 women, have registered to run for the Wolesi Jirga while 3,170 candidates, including 279 women, have been nominated for the provincial councils. "Further progress toward parliamentary elections", IRIN news, 30 May 2005. The final list, after excluding candidates who do not fulfil eligibility criteria, will be made public on 12 July.

¹⁰ Political Parties Law, Article 6, paragraph 1.

ensuring they conform to the terms of the Political Parties Law, the constitution and other laws. It refers registration applications to the ministries of interior, finance, defence, the national security directorate and the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to verify whether an applicant has links to military or quasi-military groups; if funding is received from foreign sources and/or illicit domestic sources; and that party members do not hold government posts which are prohibited by the Political Parties Law, including as judges, prosecutors, military personnel, police officers and personnel of national security agencies.¹⁴

The very fact that the authority to register parties and request their dissolution by the supreme court lies with the ministry of justice undermines political party development. Although the law bars the arbitrary dissolution of a party, it fails to provide an adequate guarantee of due process against proceedings initiated by the ministry, and the decisions of the supreme court -- the sole avenue for legal recourse -- are "definite and final".¹⁵ Instead of the ministry of justice, the authority to register a political party and to refer the dissolution of a party to the supreme court should rest with an independent electoral commission.

As of early May 2005, over 60 political parties have been registered, eighteen are awaiting verification by the ministries and UNAMA, and one has been refused registration.¹⁶ Rabbani's Jamiat-i Islami, Sayyaf's Dawat-i Islami, Dostum's Junbish-i Milli and Noorul Haq Olomi's Hezb-e Muttahed Milli [United National Party (UNP)] are among the major parties recently registered.

Party officials complain that the registration process is overly complicated and slow because the ministry of justice has to wait for approval from the other ministries. Ministry of justice officials, however, blame delays on the party leaders who, they say, fail to provide the necessary documentation.¹⁷

However, the process is highly politicised. For example, the Islamists, who have considerable influence within and outside government, have tried with some success to obstruct registration of their leftist rivals. Thus, Islamist leaders and officials such as Abdur Rab Rasul Sayyaf and Supreme Court Chief Justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari delayed the registration of the United National Party led

by Noorul Haq Olomi, a former Parchami general, for almost a year and half.¹⁸ Olomi criticised the government, the UN and the international community for their indifference towards this political manipulation of the registration process.¹⁹

Moreover, a ministry of justice official told Crisis Group that the Department of Registration of Political Parties and Social Organisations lacks the means for effectively verifying the adherence of political parties to the law outside Kabul:

We cannot go to the provinces to find persons who are on the list of political parties. We don't have the resources to travel. We need to know whether the persons on the list of political parties are aware of it or are familiar with the aims and objectives of the party. [Because] we ask the political parties to bring members to our office, [this] leaves room for manipulation of the process.²⁰

The ministry of justice also lacks the means to ensure that parties are not receiving external funding or illicit income from the drug trade. Greater political will, inter-ministerial cooperation and improved resources for investigation are needed to trace illegal monies such as may be acquired through the *hawala* transfer system, which is still commonly used for both domestic and foreign transactions in Afghanistan.²¹

Moreover, the ministries associated with the process do not themselves have the culture of accountability they demand of parties. Procedures need to be simplified, and registration and dissolution of parties alike should rest with an independent election commission, not with government departments that lack professionally trained staff committed to a democratic and transparent political process.

C. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Despite its obvious flaws, President Karzai has reaffirmed Article 20 of the Election Law that provides for the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system to be used at the 18 September 2005 parliamentary elections. Political

¹⁴ Political Parties Law, Article 13.

¹⁵ Political Parties Law, Article 22.

¹⁶ Hizb-e Maihan (Homeland Party) was denied registration on the grounds that it had falsified names and signatures of members. According to Article 6 of the Political Parties Law, parties must prove that they have at least 700 members in order to register. Crisis Group interview with ministry of interior official, Kabul, 17 February 2005.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, February 2005.

¹⁸ The law says, "The Ministry shall, within one month, decide to accept or reject the consideration of the application".

¹⁹ Crisis Group interview with General Noorul Haq Olomi, Kabul, 16 February 2005.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview with ministry of justice official, Kabul, 17 February 2005.

²¹ *Hawala* is an unofficial alternative remittance and money exchange system that enables the transfer of money without its actual physical movement.

parties can endorse or nominate candidates but they will not be allowed to use party symbols on the ballot, making it difficult for voters to identify their chosen candidates on election day.²² Moreover, SNTV is ill suited for a country like Afghanistan that lacks well-organised political parties.²³ Under it, party leaders must be able to educate their supporters in each contested region on how to allocate votes among candidates in the most effective manner or the party risks obtaining more votes than needed for some candidates and too few for others. A party could easily gain a very different number of parliamentary seats than its percentage of the vote might suggest it deserved.²⁴

The Karzai administration has justified its support for SNTV on a number of grounds. It argues that it will prevent large regional or ethnic parties or parties associated with violence, illegal militias or the drug trade from entering and controlling the parliament through bribery and coercion, that votes can be counted more easily, and that it would also be easier to convey election results to a largely rural and uneducated population. Yet, President Karzai's support for a system that disadvantages parties probably cannot be separated from his attitude toward parties, which, despite his rhetoric, sources close to him say, he views as a cause of Afghanistan's wars and instability.²⁵

Some party activists and officials, however, believe Karzai's stance can be attributed more to rising domestic dissatisfaction with his performance, particularly in his home base, Kandahar. A member of an opposition political party there argued, "Karzai is playing politics with the election system to prevent signs of discontent with his presidency, especially in his traditional areas of support".²⁶ According to an official, "Karzai does not want to see the

creation of Pashtun protest parties in his home province".²⁷ An observer added that if Karzai were to "form his own party, and it does not perform well here [Kandahar], meaning it does not win an outright majority", it would be evidence of "his weakness and lack of support" and thus strengthen his political opposition.²⁸

Some international officials and observers do not attribute adoption of the SNTV system to the Karzai administration's cynicism or opposition to parties. According to a member of the Joint Electoral Management Body [JEMB]:

The Election Commission should have been formed in November [2004], instead of January to give it adequate time to understand the complexities of the two voting systems....The Election Commission and the Cabinet members just don't have a good understanding of electoral systems at this point.²⁹

An election expert close to the debate added:

The international community focused its energy on the Election Commission, a weak body that did have not the authority to amend the original election law. There has not been a coordinated strategy advocating a PR [Proportional Representation] system.³⁰

Yet others pointed out that, "it was not until recently that UNAMA came down on the side of a list PR system, too late to change any minds".³¹

Regardless of the reasons, SNTV will hamper the role of parties in Afghanistan's political transition. Ironically, it could benefit President Karzai's rivals. For example, large ethnic and regional parties like Hizb-e-Wahdat and Junbish with the ability to discipline their voters are likely to do well. This could result in disproportionate representation of a few large regional or ethnic parties.³² Conversely, the system could even result in a fragmented parliament where individual leaders are dominant but parties are unrepresented or under-represented and hence outside formal decision-making processes.

²² Justifying the decision to disallow the use of party symbols, the JEMB said, "Consideration was given to the possibility of using the symbols of the political parties that are registered with the ministry of justice. However, as political parties are likely to be supporting more than one candidate...the use of these symbols would not uniquely identify candidates on the ballot". JEMB Symbols Background Information, 17 April 2005.

²³ SNTV is presently used only in Jordan, Vanuatu, the Pitcairn Islands and (partially) Taiwan. Since voters cast their ballots for individuals, a party's performance depends on how well each of its candidates fare. If, for instance, a party fields too many candidates, it could win fewer seats than the percentage of votes cast. Andrew Reynolds and Andrew Wilder, "Free, Fair or Flawed: Challenges for Legitimate Elections in Afghanistan", Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), September 2004, p. 12.

²⁴ For a detailed examination of Afghanistan's SNTV system, see *ibid*.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews with Ahmad Wali Karzai, Kandahar, 5 March 2005 and Jamil Karzai, Kabul, 14 March 2005.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 5 March 2005.

²⁷ Crisis group interview with government official, Kandahar, 4 March 2005.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview with an Afghan journalist, Kandahar, 5 March 2005.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview with a JEMB member, Kabul, 7 March 2005.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview with a Western diplomat and elections expert, Kabul, 2 March 2005.

³¹ Crisis Group interview with a senior elections advisor in Kabul, 2 March 2005.

³² Presentation by Andrew Reynolds at AREU, Kabul, 18 January 2005.

IV. POLITICAL PARTIES OVERVIEW

The September 2005 parliamentary elections will take place in an atmosphere that is strongly reminiscent of the 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga.³³ There are very few strong, non-militarised parties, and many influential political actors continue to favour deal-making over constituency-building. Voting could thus primarily reflect patron-client relations along ethnic, regional and sectarian lines. This pattern will be repeated in the Provincial Council elections where contending actors will appeal to the electorate along ethnic, regional and sectarian lines, with many using their political, financial and military clout to dominate the Provincial Councils.

Former mujahidin leaders, whose vote base is limited to their own ethnic groups and regions, lead many of the parties that are registered or seeking registration. That said, in multi-ethnic, multi-regional Afghanistan, political bargaining inevitably takes place along regional, ethnic and sectarian lines, and will likely continue to do so even when the democratic transition has been consolidated and mature parties have become vehicles for broader participation.

This section describes, in alphabetical order, the major parties that will likely contest the parliamentary elections. The registration applications of some with suspected links to militias, remain in abeyance, however, pending compliance with the DDR process.

Afghan Millat (Afghan Nation). Led by Finance Minister Anwar-Al Haq Ahady, the party has a substantial following among urban, educated Pashtuns in the east, which dates back to its first, more stridently ethno-nationalist incarnation during the 1960s. It is also canvassing support among Pashtun communities in the north, who form majorities in a number of districts. The party, which supported Karzai's presidential candidacy, is expected to win a number of seats in these areas.

Congra-i Milli (National Congress). The party has a clearly articulated and liberal platform. Its spokesperson is Latif Pedram, a former member of SAZA (see below) who ran for president in 2004. Its support base consists primarily of non-Pashtun, leftist intellectuals, including former SAZA and Parcham members in Kabul and the north, as well as younger constituents.³⁴ It will likely be

strongest in Pedram's native province and one-time SAZA stronghold, Badakhshan, but based on presidential election results may also claim a few seats in neighbouring Takhar, as well as Kabul. The party is considering an alliance with SAZA to attract votes in Badakhshan and other regions with a Tajik population.

***Da Afghanistan Da Solay Ghorzang Gond³⁵ (Afghanistan Peace Movement).** The party is led by Shahnawaz Tanai, the army's chief of staff from 1986 to 1988 and minister of defence from 1988 to 1990, when he fled to Pakistan after a failed coup attempt against President Najibullah and formed an alliance in exile with Hikmatyar's Hizb-e Islami party. The party draws support from intellectual Pashtuns and former Khalqis and is likely to gain only marginal representation in parliament.

Hizb-e Afghanistan-e Nawin (New Afghanistan Party). The party leader, former Shura-yi Nazar³⁶ member and interim Education Minister Younus Qanooni, was runner-up in the 2004 presidential elections. That result made him, in effect, leader of the opposition and prompted his formation of an anti-Karzai alliance. The creation of New Afghanistan also reflects internal Tajik and more specifically Panjshiri political divisions. Qanooni's party presents a Tajik Panjshiri alternative to Ahmad Wali Massoud's Nazhat-e Milli. New Afghanistan is also likely to harness Panjshiri frustration with the Karzai government's exclusion of former Shura-yi Nazar members from leadership positions in the security ministries.

Hizb-e Hambastagi-yi Milli-yi Jawanan-i Afghanistan (National Youth Union of Afghanistan). Led by President Karzai's nephew, Jamil Karzai, the party was founded in Pakistan in the late 1990s. According to a party official, this was "a response to the military parties' recruiting and exploiting the young generation of Afghans".³⁷ Now based in Kandahar and with a membership estimated at 20,000, it seeks to raise the educational levels of youth and is expanding rapidly countrywide. It supported President Karzai in the presidential elections and will likely remain supportive of his government in parliament.

³³ The Emergency Loya Jirga met in June 2002 to select the Transitional Administration that replaced the Afghan Interim Authority. See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°17, *The Loya Jirga: One Small Step Forward?*, 16 May 2002.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview with Dastgir-e Hojabber, National Congress Party, Kabul, 1 February 2005.

³⁵ The three parties marked with an asterisk (*) have had links with the predominantly Pashtun and rural-based Khalq. Some former Khalqis held influential positions in Karzai's interim cabinet, a connection that Afghan observers believe helped the parties gain registration. None is a significant political force, however, and there was little or no Islamist opposition to their registration.

³⁶ For the origin of the Shura-yi Nazar, see fn. 7 above.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview with Torayalai, political officer, National Youth Union of Afghanistan, Kandahar, 5 March 2005.

Hizb-e Islami Hikmatyar (Party of Islam Hikmatyar).

In May 2004, a delegation from the party's executive committee, based in Peshawar, Pakistan, travelled to Kabul to pledge support for the Karzai government. Led by Khaled Farooqi, a Pashtun from Paktiya province, the group claimed to have broken with Hikmatyar and declared its intentions to participate in the political process. The registration of Farooqi's group as a political party has been delayed by its insistence on retaining the party's original name. Ministry of justice officials argue that Farooqi and his group must then assume responsibility for the weaponry of a party that was a major contender during the civil war. Given Hikmatyar's long-time absolute control over the party machinery, many observers believe he may still have influence, especially since Farooqi has yet to demonstrate his ability to lead the party. However, many former Hizb-e Islami commanders in the north and south did support Karzai during the presidential elections, and many of them now hold key positions in Kabul and provincial administrations.

Hizb-e Jumhuri-i Khihan-yi Afghanistan (Republican Party of Afghanistan). Based in Kabul and led by a liberal former Emergency Loya Jirga commissioner, Sebghatullah Sanjar, the party was the first to be registered. It was a member of the National Democratic Front, a coalition of liberal democratic parties in the Constitutional Loya Jirga. It is currently a partner in the thirteen-member liberal political coalition, the Advisory Commission of National Democratic Parties. The party intends to contest parliamentary elections in Kabul, Herat, Khost and Nangarhar provinces and is specifically targeting young people in the urban centres of Kabul and Herat. It supported Karzai during the presidential elections in both those areas.³⁸

Hizb-e Kar wa Tawse'ah (Labour and Democracy Party). Led by Zulfiqar Omid, former member of the National Youth Movement of Afghanistan, the party was established in 1999 in Pakistan and was a member of the National Democratic Front coalition in the Constitutional Loya Jirga. It is one of the many newer parties based on Western democratic principles. Targeting the unemployed, its primary focus is on providing job opportunities and defending workers' rights. Its internal leadership is intended to be multi-ethnic and chosen through regional jirgas.³⁹ In early April 2005, the party decided to field twenty parliamentary candidates in eleven provinces. Omid claims the party has national support but admits its base is Kabul. It supported Karzai in 2004 and is likely to continue to support him in parliament.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview with Sebghatullah Sanjar, Kabul, January 2005.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview with Zulfiqar Omid, Kabul, 26 January 2005.

***Hizb-e Milli (National Party).** The party, which has its roots in the Khalq faction of the PDPA, is led by Abdul Rashid Aryan, who was minister of justice under Taraki and then a Revolutionary Council member under Amin. It is likely to seek support from former Pashtun Khalqis.

Hizb-e Mutahid-e Milli (United National Party, UNP). With a well-developed platform based on Western European social democratic principles and headed by two former Parcham leaders, General Nurul Haq Oloomi and Suriya Parluka, the party is the principal heir to the Parcham faction of the PDPA. Its support base cuts across ethnic, regional and gender lines. Many former Parchamis have retained important positions in the bureaucracy and security institutions, and analysts believe it is capable of mobilising existing Parchami networks countrywide.⁴⁰

Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami (Party of Islamic Unity). The rump faction of the party led by Vice President Karim Khalili maintains a larger and more powerful network of former commanders than its competitor led by Mohaqeq but appears to have comparatively little infrastructure or public support. It did badly in the elections to the Constitutional Loya Jirga, when Khalili was criticised by Hazara delegates for soft-peddling the issues of language and parliamentary powers.⁴¹ He has yet to regain lost ground with his Hazara base.⁴²

Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Mardum Afghanistan (Party of Islamic Unity of the People of Afghanistan). Led by Mohammad Mohaqeq, this faction of the Wahdat has gained support, evident in its chief's credible performance in the presidential elections. It appears to have shifted its identity from primarily Shia to Hazara nationalism. Avowedly anti-Karzai and fearful of "re-Pashtunisation" of the government -- which plays on historical Hazara concerns about political and economic marginalisation⁴³ -- the party has gained support from many Hazara intellectuals. However, Mohaqeq will have to give up his personalised style of decision-making and build up his party's local infrastructure in Hazara-populated areas if it is to perform credibly.

***Hizb-e Wahdat Milli (National Unity Party).** Led by Abdul Rashid Jalili, former education minister and dean of the agriculture faculty at Kabul University under the

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview with Dr Antonio Giustozzi, London School of Economics, 19 February 2005.

⁴¹ See Crisis Group Report, *From Presidential to Parliamentary Elections*, op. cit.

⁴² Crisis Group interview with Jolyon Leslie, Afghanistan expert, 19 February 2005.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview with Dr Yasa, political adviser to Mohammed Mohaqeq, Kabul, 26 January 2005.

PDPA's Amin, the party depends on support from intellectual Pashtuns and former Khalqi Pashtuns.

Jabha-yi Najat-i Milli-yi Afghanistan (Afghan National Liberation Front, ANLF). A new version of Sebghatullah Mujaddedi's ANLF, the party's secretary general is his son, Zabihullah Mujaddedi, but the father remains in control through his influence as a *pir* (living saint) of the Naqshbandi order. With a predominantly Pashtun base, the ANLF has somewhat revised its traditionalist Islamist ideology to attract moderate Islamists disaffected with parties such as Dawat-i-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami.⁴⁴ It supported Karzai in the presidential elections and will likely continue to do so in the hope of gaining seats in parliament with his help.

Jamiat-i Islami (Islamic Society). Led by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, the Jamiat is one of the country's oldest Islamist political organisations but its support has been undermined by internal fissures, stemming from discontent with Rabbani's leadership as well as sub-regional rivalries in the north. It is likely to have some success in his native province of Badakhshan, particularly in the more conservative districts such as Raag. His influence elsewhere in Tajik majority areas of the northeast is limited, however, and he is widely discredited in Kabul, where his refusal to abide by power-sharing arrangements during the 1990s is seen by many as a contributing factor of the civil war.

Junbish-i Milli-yi Islami (National Islamic Movement). In April 2005, General Dostum stood down as the party's head after entering the cabinet as Karzai's chief of military staff. Sayyid Noorullah, a former member of the Najibullah government, is assumed to have taken over the party leadership. However, Dostum will undoubtedly remain the de facto head. With its roots in the Parcham wing of the PDPA and a base in Uzbek majority areas of the north, Junbish has transformed itself from an armed militia to a political party, whose strengths include a distinct ideology, an established political network, and organisational experience. It has expanded in the northeast, initially by co-opting Uzbek mujahidin commanders who felt sidelined by former Defence Minister Fahim, and then, in 2003, by establishing its party headquarters in Taloqan, Takhar's capital. Much like the PDPA, Junbish is intolerant of political opposition. Opponents

such as Groh-e Kar (Labour Group), an Uzbek PDPA faction, are forced to maintain a low profile. Junbish's appeal among rural Uzbeks is undermined by its internal contradictions. At district level, abusive militia commanders represent the party more often than the socially liberal individuals who draft its party policies.

Nazhat-e Hambastagi Milli (National Solidarity Movement). Led by Sayyid Ishaq Gailani, a presidential candidate who withdrew a week before the elections in favour of Karzai, the party attempts to distance itself from the government even as Gailani says he will "support Mr Karzai for remainder of his years as president".⁴⁵ As the grandson of a Sufi *pir*, Gailani's standing among southeastern Pashtuns is based on his family's hereditary leadership of the Qadiri *tariqa* (Sufi order). He may also attract some support among urban conservatives who are uncomfortable with the more radical Islamic parties such as Jamiat-i Islami and Dawat-e Islami.

Nazhat-e Milli (National Movement). The party came into being in the wake of the Bonn Agreement as a modernising alternative to Jamiat-i Islami and a political vehicle for the Panjshiri Tajik-dominated Shura-yi Nazar. With its leadership contested by Younus Qanooni and Ahmad Wali Massoud, Afghan ambassador to the United Kingdom (and younger brother of Panjshiri mujahidin leader Ahmad Shah Massoud), it soon lost its mooring when Qanooni, along with Defence Minister Fahim, entered into a tacit alliance with Karzai. This cost the party the support of key commanders in the Panjshir region. Qanooni and Fahim's subsequent break with Karzai did little to mend these rifts, and Ahmad Wali Massoud has since cast his lot with the president, who has appointed Wali's brother, Zia Massoud, his vice president.

Zazman-i Inqilabi Zahmatkishanan-i Afghanistan (Revolutionary Organisation of the Toilers of Afghanistan, SAZA). Led by Mahboobullah Kushani and supported by northern Tajik leftists, the party is in the process of reorganisation. In 2002, SAZA and five other former leftist and Maoist groups forged an alliance called Payman-e Kabul (Kabul Accord),⁴⁶ whose members envision the creation of a modern political party with a social democrat ideology.

Tanzim-e Dawat-e Islami (Organisation for Invitation to Islam). Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf's reconstituted version of the Ittihad-i Islami (Islamic Union), this Salafist party benefits from the financial support he derives from

⁴⁴ According to Zabihullah Mujaddedi, "once elected to the parliament, the party aims at the re-Islamisation of the country in order to bring Islam back to the forefront of Afghanistan's cultural base and Sharia...We want an Islamic country and change must be done through education, however. Islam cannot be forced. As of now elections are a good way to go about decision-making but we want an Afghan democracy, not a U.S. democracy". Crisis Group interview with Zabihullah Mujaddedi, Kabul, 2 February 2005.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview with Sayyed Ishaq Gailani, Chairperson, National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan, Kabul, 17 February 2005.

⁴⁶ See Section V below.

fellow Salafists in the Middle East and extensive property holdings in Kabul. But Sayyaf's influence is eroding as the tenth division of the Afghan military forces currently undergoing DDR is dismantled, since this militia helped him assert control over much of western Kabul province, including his home district of Paghman. The poor showing of Sayyaf's former deputy, Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, in the presidential election is evidence of the party's limited support base. Ahmadzai's subsequent departure with the intention to form his own party has weakened it further.⁴⁷

V. COALITION BUILDING

Afghanistan's political history is riddled with coalitions that failed because of political differences, inexperience, and power struggles. With parliamentary elections only months away and the stakes particularly high, however, parties and politicians are trying again.

National Democratic Front. Based on the remnants of the National Front for Democracy that participated in the Constitutional Loya Jirga, and the coalition that emerged from the Advisory Commission of National Democratic Parties, the Front is composed of thirteen small parties that are attempting to cast themselves in a Western, liberal and democratic mould,⁴⁸ with the assistance of the Washington-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview with Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, 31 January 2005.

⁴⁸ As of June 2005, the members include the Afghanistan Work and Development Party, the Afghanistan Liberal Party, the Afghanistan People's Welfare Party, the Afghanistan People's Prosperity Party, the Afghanistan Understanding and Democracy Party, the National Unity of Afghanistan Party, the Freedom and Democracy Movement, the Afghanistan People's Ideal Party, the Afghanistan National Progress Party, the Afghanistan Ethnic Groups' Solidarity Party, the Afghanistan Republican Party, the Young Afghanistan Islamic Party, and the Afghanistan People's Liberation Party. The United Afghanistan Party and Jamil Karzai's Youth Solidarity Party of Afghanistan have left the coalition.

⁴⁹ NDI's Country Director for Afghanistan, Peter Dimitroff, is concerned that the Front might face the same obstacles as those of similar coalition-building efforts in Bosnia: "The top-tier leadership was working in accord; it had access to information, and was the centre of decision-making. The problem was when it came to the election, the top-tier leadership made choices that the local leadership and candidates didn't understand". For example, after the parties coalesced into a single party, "it had a larger pool of candidates....Prior to the merger, some people who had intended to stand for elections at local level were told by the leadership they were being replaced by another candidate they thought would fare better. This led to problems with

To help overcome this hurdle, NDI is also trying to convince the parties to agree on a written definition of objectives and then to "convey its meaning to all levels of the coalition. And secondly, we're encouraging CBMs (confidence building measures) at all levels of the coalition through training and increased interaction between the parties".⁵⁰

According to Jamil Karzai, his party left the coalition, because it contained parties with links to former Marxist parties.⁵¹ A Western diplomat explained: "He [Jamil Karzai] does not want to be responsible for bringing the communists back to power".⁵² Jamil Karzai insists that his party "did not have problems with communists but the (Afghan) people did; therefore, we had to leave".⁵³

Despite these cracks in its unity, parties such as Dostum's Junbish and Pedram's Congra-i Milli are currently negotiating membership.⁵⁴

National Understanding Front (NUF). On 1 April 2005, the leader of the Hizb-e Afghanistan-e Nawin (New Afghanistan Party), Younus Qanooni, and a group of mainly Islamist parties announced formation of a new coalition, the National Understanding Front (NUF), comprised of eleven re-branded mujahidin groups and personalities, including three former presidential candidates.⁵⁵ Qanooni told Crisis Group it would be post-

coalition unity". Crisis Group interviews with Peter Dimitroff, 24 January 2005 and 2 June 2005.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview with Jamil Karzai, Kabul, 14 March 2005.

⁵² Crisis Group interview with a Western diplomat, Kabul, 12 March 2004.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview with Jamil Karzai, Kabul, 14 March 2005.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview with Zulfiqar Omid, Kabul, 7 April 2005.

⁵⁵ The National Understanding Front currently includes Younus Qanooni's Hizb-e Afghanistan-e Nawin (New Afghanistan Party); Mohammad Mohaqqiq's Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami-e Mardum Afghanistan Party (Party of Islamic Unity of the People of Afghanistan); Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai's Hizb-e Eqtedar-e Islami Afghanistan (Party of the Islamic Authority of Afghanistan); Sayed Ali Javid's Hizb-e Harakat-e Islami Afghanistan (Party of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan); Ahmad Nabi Mohammadi's Hizb-e Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami Afghanistan (Party of the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan); Taj Mohammad Khan Wardak's Hizb-e Istiqlal Milli (National Independence Party); Jawad Hussaini's Hizb-e Afghanistan-e Jawan (Young Afghanistan Party); Mohammad Akbari's Hizb-e Wahdat Milli-e Islami Afghanistan (Party of the National and Islamic Unity of Afghanistan); Nasrullah Barakzai's Hizb-e Wahdat-e Aqwam-e Afghanistan (Party of Unity of Ethnicities of Afghanistan); Qarahbeg Eazedyar's Hizb-e Ea'tedal-e Islami Afghanistan (Party of Islamic Moderation of Afghanistan); and

Bonn Afghanistan's first cohesive reformist political opposition and said it "aims to amend the constitution to allow for directly elected mayors and provincial governors and will seek to create an independent judiciary".⁵⁶

Although the NUF's leadership is multi-ethnic and includes Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai, a Pashtun, Qanooni, a Tajik and Mohammad Mohaqqueq, a Shia Hazara,⁵⁷ many of its parties share common perceptions that Afghanistan, under Karzai, will again become a Pashtun-dominated state. This is likely to shape their platform during the parliamentary elections and their policies in parliament. The Karzai administration is taking the challenge posed by this first broad opposition coalition seriously.⁵⁸

Payman-e Kabul (Kabul Accord). This alliance of a handful of parties is aimed at uniting the left. It includes SAZA, Wolesi Millat (People's Nation), a faction of Afghan Millat, and Shura-yi Democracy (Council of Democracy), led by a former leftist intellectual, Dadfar Ispanta. As with other attempts at alliance building, an unwillingness to submerge party identities and leadership status issues have prevented Payman-e Kabul from expanding its base, although informal discussions are ongoing. Some components "are not organised internally and don't want to go further without [achieving] organisation within their own parties".⁵⁹

Leftist parties, including those in this emerging alliance, have a new and younger generation of leaders and thus the potential of attracting youth. They have yet to maximise this advantage for a number of reasons, including a failure to articulate political, economic and social policies, without which there is little to distinguish them from traditional parties in the eyes of the electorate.

While some of these new parties and coalitions may be able to make at least modest gains in the parliamentary elections, they will also need to expand narrow support bases if they are to challenge their well-entrenched conservative adversaries effectively. "The former leftists want to rethink in light of the present circumstances, but are still limited to their past networks", said a Kabul University professor and former leftist himself.⁶⁰

Abdul Hafiz Mansur, independent and former presidential candidate.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview with Younus Qanooni, 9 April 2005.

⁵⁷ Dostum's Junbish and Pedram's Congra-i Milli were involved in the initial negotiations on the Front but did not join. As indicated above, they are negotiating possible membership in the Advisory Commission of Democratic Parties.

⁵⁸ "First Afghan Opposition Party Important for Democracy: Karzai", Agence France-Presse, 3 April 2005.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview with Saifuddin Saihoon, head economics professor at Kabul University, Kabul, 26 June 2004.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview with Kabul University political science professor, Kabul, 24 January 2005.

Old political rivalries and ideological differences, such as those among the parties that have emerged from the Parcham and Khalq, also continue to impede formation of a broader party base and effective alliance building. The leftist parties that remained outside the PDPA or in opposition to it are also faced with bridging internal splits. The leftist parties that operated clandestinely during the Taliban period or have emerged since have distanced themselves more clearly from past affiliations than the Islamist parties and have adopted a liberal, democratic stance. But they, too, face multiple challenges, including Islamist influence within and outside government as well as security threats from Islamists that have forced them to keep low public profiles.⁶¹

Yet, the main challenge facing all political parties and alliances, whether of the left, right or centre, is to gain credibility with an electorate much of which is yet to be convinced political parties have the ability or will to help consolidate Afghanistan's fragile political transition.

VI. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

In a country yet to recover from a decades-long civil war, Afghans have mixed perceptions of the role political parties could play to stabilise society and entrench democracy. Some associate the words *hizb* (party), *harakat* (movement) and *tehrrik* (way) with the violent histories of former leftist and Islamist parties.⁶² Others are more supportive of what parties could do within an elected government and in opposition, "The more parties represented in the parliament, the more stable our county will be", said a young Afghan.⁶³ A member of a newly formed party succinctly stated, "the new democratic parties, as well as the old...will have to change minds and show people in the country we are new and democratic".⁶⁴

There is clearly a generational gap in terms of popular perceptions. Crisis Group researchers found in Kandahar and Kabul, for instance, that most young Afghans perceive parties as the best means to represent their views in the government. The former president of Kandahar University said:

⁶¹ Crisis Group Interview with Noorul Haq Olomi, leader of the National United Party of Afghanistan, 15 February 2005.

⁶² Crisis Group interview with Hiyatullah Rafiki, former Dean of Kandahar University, Kandahar, 3 March 2005.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview with Kabul University student, 4 March 2005.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview with Dr Saifullah Saihoon, head economics professor at Kabul University, Kabul, January 2005.

There is a visible difference between the young and old generations in their view of political parties. The youth, the newer generations, believe democracy cannot be consolidated in their country without political parties...they support the new parties because they know the old parties gained power through undemocratic means.⁶⁵

Explaining this generational difference, Khalilullah Hasni, President of the Kandahar Council of the National Youth Union of Afghanistan, said, "Most of the youth and young parties in Afghanistan have brought experience and dynamism with them from other countries. They have brought youthful ideas and are the future of the country".⁶⁶ An observer emphasised, "It is important at this stage in Afghanistan's democracy to empower those that represent a break with past, particularly the Afghan youth".⁶⁷ Indeed, if a primary function of parties is to represent the aggregate interests of their constituencies, thus ensuring a framework for political pluralism and participation, they must cultivate and create a new generation of leaders.⁶⁸

If parties are to be truly representative and to contribute to vibrant democratic development, they must also make greater efforts to gain the confidence and support of women and ensure that women are included in all ranks of leadership and policymaking. As a recent report has noted "Afghan women can provide an important counterbalance to the political and religious extremism that threatens to undermine democracy in Afghanistan...Women have also demonstrated their willingness to support ethnic pluralism."⁶⁹

Crisis Group conversations with women parliamentary candidates revealed many politically active women are well aware of what party development could mean for full participation in society and government. An

independent woman candidate in Ghazni province said, for instance:

I don't believe that any of the parties represent my interests at this point, so I will run as an independent. In the future if I feel a party from my area is good and democratic maybe I will join it and run for the parliament but now I am an independent.⁷⁰

Another female candidate stated:

Political parties are the only way women can ensure a voice in the new parliament...I don't have the resources, money and time, to run alone. My party will help me get elected.⁷¹

There is an overwhelming desire among most Afghans to break with the politics of the past and start anew, as emphasised by Dr Sima Samar, chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, "The Afghan people must trust and have faith in their political institutions...we must learn from the past in order to build our future".⁷² The Afghan government and the international community should extend their support to democratic and liberal voices attempting to do just that through their political parties.

VII. CONCLUSION

A sustainable democratic transition in Afghanistan needs more than elections. An elected parliament will certainly help but ultimate success depends just as much on expanding and sustaining an institutional framework for democratic functioning. For this, strong, vibrant political parties are an essential precondition. Healthy political parties can make parliament more democratic and government more responsive, thus preventing a return to autocracy.

Political parties were not the cause of Afghanistan's instability. The country suffered decades of civil war because ruling elites refused to share power and to accept political opposition as legitimate. The failure to legitimise political party functioning only served to distort political development but the country now has

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview with Hiyatullah Rafiki, former Dean of Kandahar University, Kandahar, 3 March 2005.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview with Khalilullah Hasni, President of the Kandahar Council of the National Youth Union of Afghanistan, Kandahar, 5 March 2005.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview with Mohammad Muslih, Youth Association of Kabul, Kabul, 10 March 2005.

⁶⁸ Ivan Doherty, "Democracy Out of Balance: Civil Society Can't Replace Political Parties", *Policy Review*, April/May 2001.

⁶⁹ "From Rhetoric to Reality: Afghan Women on the Agenda for Peace", *Women Waging Peace*, February 2005, p. xi. For example, during the Constitutional Loya Jirga, women supported requests by the Uzbek minority to gain official status for their language in regions where it is widely spoken in exchange for Uzbek support for increased representation of women in government, *ibid*.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview with independent candidate from Ghazni, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Women's Conference, Kabul, 7 March 2005.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview with Junbish-i Milli-yi Islami party member, Kabul, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Women's Conference, Kabul, 7 March 2005.

⁷² Crisis Group interview with Sima Samar, Kabul 31 January 2005.

the chance -- with donor support -- to break decisively with its past.

However, much more needs to be done and soon. The first step should involve significant revision of the Political Parties Law, which contains unnecessary curbs on party formation and functioning.

In the absence of legal channels for political representation, sub-state actors could once again resort to violent means to further the interests of the communities they represent. "No peaceful culture of opposition has existed in our politics", says opposition leader Younus Qanooni. "Respecting the opposition is a fundamental of political rationalism in our country. This is a tree we will plant".⁷³ It is essential that Qanooni and other stakeholders, and not least the Karzai government, translate this realisation into reality.

Kabul/Brussels, 2 June 2005

⁷³ Crisis Group interview with Younus Qanooni, Kabul, 9 April 2005.

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 100 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board -- which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media -- is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by Lord Patten of Barnes, former European Commissioner for External Relations. President and Chief Executive since January 2000 is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity), New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates sixteen field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Bishkek, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Pristina, Quito, Seoul, Skopje and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Sahel region, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda

and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

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