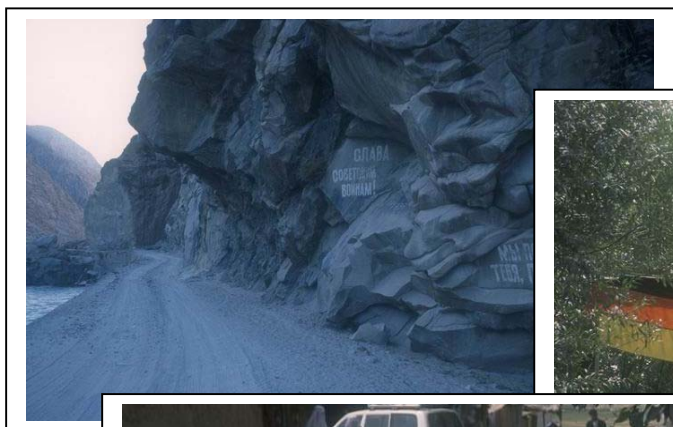




Analysis of Peace and Conflict Potential in Afghan- Badakhshan, Afghanistan



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Kristóf Gosztanyi with Romin Fararoon

PREFACE

This research was conducted to provide an understanding of the peace and conflict potential in Afghan Badakhshan province.

The report is part of an analysis conducted in the GTZ target regions of the programme “Promoting Food Security, Regional Co-operation and Stability in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan”.

The findings are used for AKDN programme activities and for the implementation of the GTZ project “Promoting Food Security, Regional Co-operation and Stability in Afghanistan”.

A one-week training workshop in Faisabad preceded the fieldwork.

Fieldwork was conducted in September and October of 2003 in the four original locations plus three extra locations by the following local teams:

Kako, AKDN (in Wakhan)
Nawrooz, AKDN (in Wakhan)
Faizullah, AKDN (in Yakh Duroo and Ishkashim)
Alaudin, AKDN (in Yakh Duroo and Khoustak)
Shakila, AKDN (in Yakh Duroo, Khoustak and Faisabad)
Alim Bik, AKDN (in Wardooj and Ghuaran)
Kazim, AKDN (in Wardooj-e Bala and Ghuaran)
Fahima, AKDN (in Wardooj-e Bala and Wakhan)
Mahbub, AKDN (in Khoustak)
Zuhurudin, AKDN (in Khoustak)
Mirwais, AKDN (Faisabad)

The GTZ project in Dushanbe and AKDN in Faisabad provided support. The AKDN programme structure in Afghan Badakhshan provided supervision of the fieldwork (Marc Theuss, AKDN and Romin Fararoon, AKDN) under the guidance of Kristóf Gosztanyi (FU Berlin). Jan Koehler (ARC GbR Berlin) was responsible for the overall research and was in charge of the general supervision.

Marc Theuss (AKDN) contributed to the report. The final report was written by Kristóf Gosztanyi and Romin Fararoon.

Executive Summary

From mid-September until the end of October 2003 GTZ and AKDN have carried out a conflict study in six sub-districts of Badakhshan province. The sub-districts were all located in AKDN project areas. In accordance with the general strategic goals of the GTZ Food Security Programme, the aim of the research was to gain an understanding of ongoing project activities in relation to the local conflict context. By better understanding the local conflict setting, project implementation can: (a) ensure that it avoids creating new conflicts or fuelling old ones ('doing harm'); and (b) modify its activities to consciously support more effective conflict regulation at a local and even regional level thus strengthening stability and contributing to peace building in Afghanistan.

The six-week GTZ / AKDN conflict research fieldwork has uncovered a number of surprising results. Firstly, the state (which is the most powerful conflict management framework in most contemporary societies) appears to have emerged in Badakhshan as an important actor on the scene. It does not yet have a monopoly of power or force (and it is questionable whether such a stage will be reached in the near future) but it has become a player that significantly shapes events. Moreover, government structures can now definitely be considered an important partner for any project activities aiming at strengthening constructive, non-violent conflict management.

Among the identified and currently **most salient and active conflict arenas**, the gravest conflicts were observed **in connection with state building and power struggles** among the regionally strong. State building becomes conflictual when it begins to impinge upon the position of non-state actors, such as commanders.

Further important conflict arenas relate to resource conflicts, discrimination, religious issues, drug trafficking, various conflicts around the border, etc. As in most other conflict zones, there were also some conflicts observed around NGO activities. Interestingly, all conflicts appear to be graver in those areas that are controlled by commanders and where the state has only little or no influence. In contrast, **in areas firmly under state control, conflicts tend to be more manageable and less violent**. This is once again a strong sign of the positive conflict resolution impact of the state.

A number of conflict arenas that were suspected of being significant were confirmed to be, at least currently, dormant or less prominent. E.g. even though the *proliferation of small arms still retains a significant conflict escalation potential*, the current trend in conflicts is that of decreasing violence with firearms being less frequently used in the course of local disputes. Also, demobilisation has so far failed to trigger large-scale conflicts. The reason appears to be the militia structure of most of the resistance army; i.e. fighters never fully stopped following their civilian occupations as well. There is a significant and current conflict potential with regard to commanders seeking new roles for themselves. The concept of demobilisation, however, does not adequately describe the problem: it is more about the impact of state building, with commanders losing their locally or regionally supreme power position to the expanding state. A further potential source of serious conflict, Islamic

extremism, did not appear to be a significant problem in the research area. Contrary to expectations, the opium economy seems to have had a positive effect on local conflicts as it has eased pressure on local resources and thus reduced violent competition for them. In connection with state building, however, drug trafficking did emerge as a potentially grave conflict arena in one research area. This conflict is over the control of a narrow strip of borderland where, until recently, intense drug smuggling was taking place.

We found a diversity of institutions dealing with conflicts. These range on the local level from various traditional and 'NGO-established' shuras to government officials, commanders and local notables on the district level. Decisions made at the local level by various shuras are usually negotiated compromise solutions without any real binding power. If binding decisions are needed, local parties to a conflict usually turn to a court of higher instance - commanders and increasingly also to government officials. While at this level binding decisions can be made, the compromise principle still frequently dominates the verdicts thus reinforcing the local balance of power. While in the short run, such conflict management can resolve conflicts, in the longer term it tends to encourage the use and abuse of relative power in conflicts as decisions are not based on law, but instead sanction the status quo. Finally, there are hardly any viable institutional venues for local complaints against abuse by the hierarchically superior, i.e. commanders or government officials abusing the rights of the subordinate and weaker local population.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings on conflict structures and conflict management systems, the Badakhshan conflict research came up with the following recommendations:

Strengthening and Improving Local State Capacities:

- A principled decision to work with and strengthening state authorities;
- Efforts should mostly focus on the district level;
- District level capacity building and training;
- Logistic and material support might also be considered;

Weakening the Grip of Commanders on Society:

- A principled decision to keep a correct distance from commanders;
- Special care should be taken to *avoid* commanders exerting undue influence on project implementation or receiving other benefits from NGO presence;
- What we propose here is not a hostile and (from the perspective of project implementation) self-destructive attitude towards commanders, but a *correct distance*.

Improving Local Resource Base and Usage

- Improving the resource base and usage efficiency through technical development;
- Improving the social management of resources;
- Written statutes of resource management organisations and written minutes of decisions made.

Improving Conflict Processing Institutions:

- Supporting the introduction of less compromise and more legal principle-based conflict decision making;
- Supporting the binding nature of decisions made in courts of higher instance (naturally with possibilities for further appeal);
- Supporting possibilities for appeal against abuse of power by authorities;
- Supporting a more formal linkage of local shuras to second instance judicial bodies at the district level.
- Since conflict management *between* villages is a very weak spot in the according to the circumstances rather efficient local and traditional system of conflict resolution *within* the villages, the investigation of a mantaqa level conflict resolution system is suggested. The aim should be to identify possibilities for improved conflict resolution *between* villages.
- In cooperation with state authorities considering facilitating the establishment of special commissions dealing with the accumulated case load of past conflicts, e.g. land disputes.

Improving NGO Capacity to Monitor Project Impact on Local Conflict Context:

- Establishing a peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) system;
- Training of own staff and developing standard operational procedures with regard to how to deal with the shortfalls identified by the conflict research as fuelling conflict;
- Establishing internal institutionalised venues to investigate complaints in connection with project implementation.