



# Typologies of nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi  
January 2018





Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Issues Paper

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## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul that was established in 2002 by the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice by conducting high-quality, policy-relevant, evidence-based research and actively disseminating the results and promote a culture of research and learning. As the top think-tank in Afghanistan and number six in Central Asia according to the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report at the University of Pennsylvania, AREU achieves its mission by engaging with policy makers, civil society, researchers and academics to promote their use of AREU's research-based publications and its library, strengthening their research capacity and creating opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate. AREU is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives of donor organisations, embassies, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, Afghan civil society and independent experts.

AREU's core donor is the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Specific projects in 2018 are being funded by the European Commission (EC), United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Overseas Development Institute (ODI-UK), Promundo (US), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Economic and Social Research Council United Kingdom (ESRC-UK) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

AREU holds memberships in multiple international development consortiums including the RESOLVE Network, Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) and A Conflict Sensitive Unpacking of The EU Comprehensive Approach to Conflict and Crisis Mechanism (EUNPACK).

## About the author

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi has researched and published extensively on Afghanistan. For AREU he has released 'Thirty years of conflict' (2012), 'The Resilient Oligopoly: A Political-Economy of Northern Afghanistan 2001 and Onwards' (2012), 'The Afghan National Army: Sustainability Challenges beyond Financial Aspects' (2014), 'The Politicisation of Afghanistan's High Schools' (2015), 'Reaching Boiling Point: High School Activism in Afghanistan' (2015), and 'The Afghan National Army After ISAF' (2016). Dr. Giustozzi holds a PhD from the London School of Economics in International Relations and a BA in Contemporary History from the University of Bologna.

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## Foreword

AREU is proud to present its readers with an Issues paper on “Typologies of nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan” produced by AREU researcher Dr. Antonio Giustozzi and with the generous support of the European Union Delegation in Afghanistan. The paper is part of a larger EU-funded AREU project: Three-pronged research effort into essential areas of Natural Resources Management (NRM).

The histories of Afghanistan’s nomad and settler populations are rich, intricate and inexorably intertwined. Conflict has been a consistent feature between these groups for generations. However, through the research found in these pages, we learn that new types of conflict have emerged. We can also see from these findings that there is an urgency for policies that allocate spaces for either urban development or farming, thereby contributing to greater economic sustainability and proliferation.

The lack of a current concrete policy framework is largely due to the complex nature of these challenges. At AREU, it is our anticipation that through ongoing research and open dialogues with key stake holders as well as policy engagements at the national level we continue to expand research on the topic. With the support of partners like the EU, these complexities will be broken down and explicated to more clearly inform policies and practices through AREU’s mandate to produce and disseminate objective, evidence-based research.

With best regards,



Dr. Orzala Nemat

Director, AREU

## Executive summary

The AREU project on nomad/settler conflict started at the end of 2016. This is the first issue paper coming out of it.

While conflict over boundaries and migration timetables is an old feature of nomad/farmer relations in Afghanistan, this on-going AREU project found that new types of conflict have emerged. Political parties, organisations and lobbies play a much greater role in Afghanistan today than they did before the war and unsurprisingly Afghan communities have a much greater ability for collective action than before. One direct result of this development is conflict over access to pastures: only in the presence of some ability to organise for action can communities block nomad access to large areas, as has been happening in Hazarajat.

However, in terms of the overall picture, the most important (in terms of potential consequences) form of nomad/farmer conflict is now over the appropriation of state land, typically pastures. Both farmer and settled nomad communities are trying to build on pasture land or to farm it, as a result of demographic pressure and of urban development. This gives rise to conflicts between settlers and settling communities, or between settlers/settling communities and nomad communities, who want to keep taking their livestock to the pastures which are being grabbed.

Conflict over boundaries and encroachment of farming land remain an issue, contributing to motivate farming communities to block nomad access, but violent clashes rarely occur directly as a result of trespassing only.

The main policy recommendation emerging from the project at this stage is that the Afghan authorities can no longer postpone formulating a policy for allocating some pastures for urban development or farming.

# 1. Introduction: traditional views of conflict involving nomads<sup>1</sup>

In December 2016 AREU launched an EU-funded project on Natural Resources Management. It is a three pronged research project which has a component about nomad-farmer conflict. The project will unfold over a period of three years and is organised in stages. This paper is part of the output of the first stage, which involved carrying out eight case studies of nomad-farmer conflict, spread around Afghanistan. It also involved interviews with government officials, community leaders and other conflict observers, in Kabul, Bamiyan, Khost, Ghazni, Farah, Logar and Wardak provinces. This paper illustrates the findings of stage one, drawn from the eight case studies.

A total of 46 case studies interviews were conducted in eight locations (see Map 1 and Tables 1 and 2), where conflict between nomads and farmers occurred at one point or another. Similar numbers of nomads and farmers were interviewed, either in the the eight locations shown on the map (all the farmers and most nomads) or somewhere else along their migration route (some of the nomads). Another 15 interviews were carried out in Kabul with individuals knowledgeable about nomad-farmer conflict, such as those working in the ministries, with the nomads Commission, or as nomad representatives, etc. Three interviews were carried out with individuals familiar with the situation in Bamiyan, where lands owned by nomads were reported to have been seized. In total, 64 interviews were carried out up to September 2017.

The conflict between nomads and farmers is not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan, nor is it something that has never attracted scholarly attention before. However, in previous studies the focus of attention was the conflict between Hazaras and Pashtun nomads on the southern fringes of the Hazarajat, which is the single conflict that attracted most (in fact almost all) media attention.<sup>2</sup> Because of the attention and the past history of political and ethnic conflict between the two communities, which were at various stages sponsored by the state and/or political groups, Hazara/nomad conflict makes it difficult to insulate the social, agricultural, economic and demographic sources of conflict. Case studies of Hazara/nomad conflict have been included in this study because they represent an important part of the wider nomad-sedentarist conflict, but several case studies of conflict between nomads and other communities have been included as well, as detailed in Table 1. Although the large majority of nomads are Pashtuns, there are also Uzbek, Pashai, Aimaq, Baluch, Turkmen and Gujar nomadic communities. The eight case studies selected include in fact one involving Uzbek and one including Baluch nomads. The sample of case studies selected is not representative of the universe of nomad-farmer conflicts, as no accurate mapping of such conflicts has been carried out. The case studies were selected on the basis of the following considerations on the basis of a list of known cases of conflict, supplied by various nomad shuras in Kabul:

- The logistics of reaching the location for the interviewers;
- The inclusion of various types of social, ethnic and economic environments;
- The inclusion of a mix of successfully negotiated resolutions and of on-going conflicts;
- The inclusion of mostly conflicts taking place in relatively densely populated areas, where the impact of violence and disruption would be greatest.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper the term “nomad” is used to refer to all type of nomads, whereas the term “Kuchi” is used only to refer to Pashtun nomads.

<sup>2</sup> For previous AREU output on this topic see Liz Alden Wily, ‘Looking for Peace on the Pastures: Rural Land Relations in Afghanistan’, Kabul : AREU, 2004; Mervyn Patterson, ‘The Shiwa Pastures, 1978-2003: Land Tenure Changes and Conflict in Northeastern Badakhshan’, Kabul : AREU, 2004; A. Giustozzi, ‘Mapping nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan’, Kabul : AREU, 2017.

Map 1: Case study locations



Table 1: Surveyed communities in conflict

Malistan (Ghazni)	Hazara farmers vs Pashtun nomads
Behsud (Wardak)	Hazara farmers vs Pashtun nomads
Azra (Logar)	Pashtun farmers vs Pashtun nomads
Derai (Matoon district, Khost)	Pashtun farmers vs Pashtun nomads
Farah	Baluch farmers vs Pashtun farmers
Farah	Baluch nomads vs Pashtun nomads
Deh Sabz (Kabul)	Tajik farmers vs Pashtun nomads
Khaki Jabbar (Kabul)	Tajik and Pashtun farmers vs Pashtun nomads
Imam Sahib (Kunduz)	Uzbek nomads vs Pashtun farmers

This range of case studies is not exhaustive of all types of nomad/sedentarist conflict in Afghanistan. There are cases of conflicts reported between Pashais and Pashtuns, for example.<sup>3</sup> However, overall, the eight case studies are representative of the large majority of nomad-sedentarist conflicts, not least because they are distributed around much of the areas of Afghanistan where nomads migrate.

Table 2: Summary of interviews carried out

	Nomad elders	Village elders	Government officials	Politicians and representatives in Kabul	Analysts	Grand TOTAL
Behsud	3	4				
Malistan	3	2				
Deh Sabz	3	3				
Khaki Jabbar	3	3				
Azra	3	3				
Farah	4	2				
Imam Sahib	2	2				
Khost	3	3				
Other locations	2	1	6	7	2	
TOTAL	26	23	6	7	2	64

The present paper is structured in five sections. The first one (Nomads and Farmers in Afghanistan) introduces the topic by reviewing some features of nomad/farmer interaction in Afghanistan, both before and after the war. The following three sections review the three main types of conflict, as they emerged from the interviews carried out:

- Farmers blocking nomad access;
- Friction over absence of demarcation and violation of boundaries;
- Land grabbing and illegal occupation of state land.

The fifth and last section looks at the underlying causes of the types of conflicts described in the previous three sections. The conclusion then looks at the implications of the findings of this paper both in terms of policy making and of further research.

<sup>3</sup> Communication with Kuchi Shura member, March 2016.

## 2. Nomads and Farmers in Afghanistan

While the real number of nomads in Afghanistan is unknown, their presence is still significant and affects the rural economy. The 2004 assessment put the number of 'actively migrating' nomads at 1.5 million (including both entirely nomadic households and actively migrating members of partially settled households), but no matter that number's accuracy, the number is certainly lower today. Whatever the number of actual nomads in Afghanistan, livestock is estimated at 4 million currently, down from 17 million in 2004. Although the average size of herds is sure to have declined during these years, such a massive decline in livestock also suggests a continuing, steep decline in the number of nomads.<sup>4</sup> The finding of AREU's preliminary findings paper for this project also suggest an accelerating pace of sedentarisation.<sup>5</sup> To some extent this decline should be reflected in the declining number of nomads, although not necessarily in the same proportion. Around 365,000 nomads were considered to have settled as of 2004, while another 0.5 million or so belonged to nomad households but were not going on seasonal migration with the livestock. Fully nomadic households, who live in tents and have no fixed homes, are probably relatively few in numbers today.<sup>6</sup> Many nomadic communities have partially settled, creating a kind of hybrid, semi-sedentary community where some members live in houses and do not migrate seasonally while others migrate with the livestock towards greener pastures every year. There are also so-called semi-nomadic groups, who have houses but still take the whole household on seasonal migration routes every year. Government sources still estimate at nearly 1 million the number of nomads who have partially settled, leaving part of their households in a fixed place, while taking the rest with them in their seasonal migrations.<sup>7</sup>

Map 2 below shows the most recent assessment of the nomads' migration routes, carried out in 2008-2009 by a USAID funded project, PEACE (Pastoral Engagement, Adaptation and Capacity Enhancement). It is obvious from the map that the majority of the nomads were migrating towards the pastures of Hazarajat (central highlands), considered to be the best by the nomads, during the summer, but also that there have always been pastures used by the nomads along their long migration routes.<sup>8</sup> Much of the Afghan countryside was therefore affected by these migrations to some extent.

The relationship between nomads and farmers is a complex one. Before the war there used to be at least some symbiotic elements in it: the nomads would take goods, which they would struggle to obtain otherwise, for sale to remote villages, and also made abundant fresh meat and dairy products available for at least part of the year in many areas. Overall, it is estimated that about two-thirds of all animals sold in Afghanistan are raised by nomads.<sup>9</sup> However, as the Afghan road network developed, the trading activities of the nomads became increasingly redundant for a growing portion of the rural population.<sup>10</sup> At the same time there was obvious tension between nomads and farmers, particularly in some areas. The tension stemmed primarily from two sources:

- Under the monarchy, large tracts of land were transferred to the nomads by government decree, at the expense of settled communities, in particular Hazara ones. The Hazaras in particular question the validity of an order by Yaqub Khan, governor of Kabul in December 1878-February 1879, to hand over large tracts of land to the nomads during a time of disorder and political instability in Afghanistan.

4 Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

5 A. Giustozzi, 'Mapping nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan', Kabul : AREU, 2017.

6 Frauke de Weijer, "National Multi Sectoral Assessment on Kuchi," (Kabul, 2005); Frauke de Weijer, "Afghanistan's Kuchi Pastoralists: Change and Adaptation," *Nomadic People*, Volume 11, Issue 1 (2007): 9-37.

7 Emma Graham-Harrison, "Hidden casualties of Afghan war: Nomadic farmers adopt more settled life," *The Guardian*, 9 January 2013; Liz Alden Wily, "Looking for peace on the pastures" (Kabul: AREU, 2004).

8 For some background on conflict between nomads and Hazara farmers in Wardak, see K. Nawabi, "Fractured relationships" (Kabul: CPAU, 2010).

9 "Reducing Risk for the Afghan People" (USAID: Afghanistan PEACE Project) <http://afghanpeace.org/>

10 Klaus Ferdinand, "Nomad expansion and commerce in central Afghanistan" *Folk* 4, 1962.

- The herds of the nomads often encroached into the (undemarcated) village pastures and agricultural land, damaging harvests and hampering farmers' efforts to raise their own livestock.

Government attempts to regulate nomad-farmer relations were light footprinted. Pastures laws introduced from the 1960s recognised the right of farmers to their own pastures around the villages, but these were poorly defined and essentially not enforced.<sup>11</sup> There has been a widespread perception, at least among Hazaras, that the government backed the nomads and that complaining against their encroachment of farm land and village pastures would only bring more trouble to the farmers.<sup>12</sup>

Afghan governments, however, were not always fully supportive of the nomads; their smuggling across the Pakistani border undermined tax collection and could be used by opposition groups to move weapons inside the country. Moreover, as developmental policies became popular from the 1950s onwards, various plans to sedentarise the nomads were discussed and at times even attempted. The nomads' ranks have indeed been thinned out as a result of overlapping processes of nomad enrichment (through trade and land acquisition), exposure to education, impact of war (1978-onwards) and closure of migration routes, etc.<sup>13</sup>

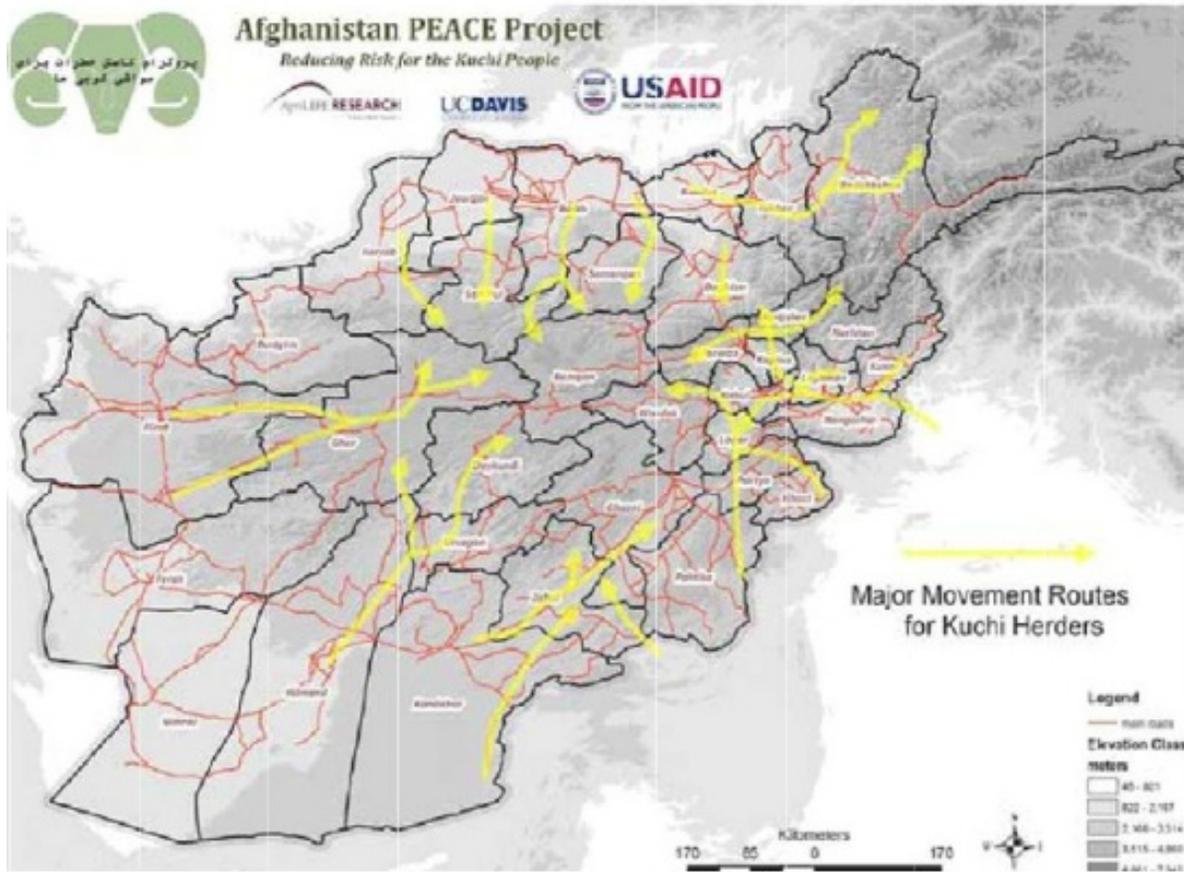
By 2001, nomads and farmers were no longer always two clearly distinguishable categories anymore. As it will become clear in the pages that follow pure nomads are a minority of the estimated nomad population of about 3 million, perhaps only a third of that. Hybrid, semi-sedentary nomad communities are a large category, which defies traditional definitions: adult males and some other members of the community keep on with their seasonal migrations, searching for good grass which will fatten their animals, but babies, the unfit, the sick, children attending school and other members of the community may stay behind in solid homes at one end of the nomads' migration route. The settled portion of the community might even engage in some agricultural activities, even if livestock remains the primary interest of the community. Among farmers, many are former nomads, who have given up on nomad life in recent years, but might retain relatively large herds, and might have close relatives still migrating seasonally with their livestock. This blurring of the distinction makes the task of analysing conflict patterns more complex, but the author decided to keep in the sample even the less clear-cut cases of nomad-farmer conflict because this "blurred" picture is the reality that policy makers and others involved in addressing the situation will actually have to face.

11 Interview with ARAZI official, Kabul, September 2017; Interview with land tenure specialist, Kabul, September 2017. See also M. Sharif and M.Y. Safar, "Land Administration and Management in Afghanistan" (Blue Mounds: Terra Institute, June 2008).

12 All eight Hazara interviewees in this project reaffirmed this feeling.

13 Fabrizio Foschini, "The Social Wandering of the Afghan Kuchis" (Berlin ; AAN, 2013); de Weijre, "National Multi Sector Assessment." In the 2005 assessment led by de Weijre, loss of livestock was cited as by far the most important reason for Kuchis deciding to settle.

Map 2: Migration routes of nomad groups, as of pre-war



Source: <http://www.afghanpeace.org/>

### 3. Conflict typology

Sources in the Nomad Directorate identify the following types of conflicts involving the nomads:

- a. Denied access to pastures;
- b. Disputes over the boundaries of special pastures of villages and public pastures for nomads;
- c. Nomads building on pastures;
- d. Farmers taking over pastures for cultivation;
- e. Farmers complaining about nomads' herds damaging crops;
- f. Conflict between different nomad communities;
- g. Conflict between nomads and government authorities.<sup>14</sup>

Land grabbing and illegal appropriation of pastures appear today the most important type of conflict involving the nomads, eclipsing older types of conflict such as disputes over boundaries and schedules.<sup>15</sup> Nomad representatives roughly agree with the list above, stressing however the importance of land grabbing as a source of conflict compared to other types of conflict.<sup>16</sup>

Below this paper will review these types of conflict, grouping them under three categories:

- Denied access to pastures (types a and f);
- Trespassing of boundaries (types b and e);
- Land grabbing and illegal occupation of land (types c and d).

Type "g" above does not fall under the scope of this study, which is focused on nomad/farmer conflict.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Hajji Khan Wazir, head of Khumari Khil Shura for Dehsabz and Qarabagh, Poza-e-Kharoti Bareekaab, October 2017.

## 4. Conflict types: farmers block nomad access

### 4.1 Behsud

The blocking of nomad migration routes by farming communities appears to have happened mostly on the southern fringes of the Hazarajat, particularly in Behsud district of Wardak Province, but also in parts of Ghazni Province. Behsud is one of the main routes of access to the pastures of central Afghanistan and by blocking it the Hazaras have prevented nomads from reaching the pastures of Hazarajat.<sup>17</sup> One reason given for blocking access was to prevent damage to crops and village pastures:

*It was in 1388 (2009/10) that nomads for the first time during the Karzai period again tried to come to the central provinces of Afghanistan with their thousands of animals. It was very hard for us because their thousands of animals pass over our agricultural lands. The fighting started in Dan Barak village of Kajab area belonging to Hesa Dowom of Behsud district. When the nomads were passing from Dan Barak village with their thousands of animals over the agricultural lands and wanted to continue their journey to Bamiyan Province, they were stopped by a farmer who did not want them to cross his land, but they fired at him and killed him. Then the fighting started between the Hazara people and nomads. [...] Because Wardak province is the gate for nomads to enter Bamiyan and Ghor provinces, but they are passing with their thousands of animals, they are passing over our lands and destroy our cultivations.<sup>18</sup>*

The conflict has deep historical origins in the use made by the nascent Afghan state in the late 19th nineteenth century of the nomads to subjugate the Hazaras.<sup>19</sup>

*The past government was a Pashtunist government and the other ethnicities, especially the Hazara community, didn't have much value for the past government till 1358, when mujahiddin groups appeared in different areas. When Yaqub Khan was the governor of Kabul, he issued an order allowing nomads to use the grasslands of the central provinces of Afghanistan. Because we were powerless, they used our grasslands and did lots of crimes against Hazaras. [...] We let the nomads do anything in our area and we kept quiet, that was the reason why there was no fighting here. The role of Habibullah Khan's government, Zahir Shah and others were like the role of Taliban.<sup>20</sup>*

Since its start in 2009, little has changed in this conflict. The Behsud conflict has two layers. The Hazara farmers of Behsud were possibly those suffering the greatest damage from the nomads' seasonal migration, because it was the main point of access with thousands and thousands of animals coming through. Damage to undemarcated and unprotected village pastures and crops was considerable and probably higher than anywhere else, as the nomads would then split along different routes.<sup>21</sup> While most nomads reject any idea of damage to crops and village pastures being caused,<sup>22</sup> even some nomad interviewees admit that the problem may exist:

*The government must collect weapons from these commanders and Hazaras and also from us and tell them to leave nomads in the mountains and tell nomads also not to encroach on the crop fields of the Hazaras, but unfortunately the government and Hazaras do not want the problem to be solved.<sup>23</sup>*

It is common to hear from Hazara farmers that in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, Hazarajat was under the control of Hazara parties and militant organisations. These from the early 1980s onwards refused to allow nomads to enter Hazarajat. That is when the first episodes of violent conflict started.

17 Interview with staff member of Grassland dept.

18 Interview with farm community elder from Lata Band Village of Kajab area in Behsud District, February 2017.

19 S.A. Mousavi, *The Hazaras Of Afghanistan* (London: Curzon, 1998); Hassan Kakar, *A Political And Diplomatic History Of Afghanistan 1863-1901* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Interview with farm community elder from Lata Band Village of Kajab Area in Behsud District, February 2017.

20 Interview with village elder, Kar-e-wani village of Sarchashma area, February 2017.

21 Interview with farm community elder of Kajab area, Hesa 2 Behsud District, Gandab Village, February 2017; Interview with village elder, Kar-e-wani village of Sarchashma area, 15 February 2017.

22 Interview with Kuchi elder of Kharokhel Tribe in Maidan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016.

23 Interview with Kuchi elder of Kharokhel Tribe in Maidan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016.

Then the empowerment of the nomads during the Taliban's Islamic Emirate (1996-2001) resulted in the latter not only regaining access to Hazarajat, but behaving in a more unrestrained way during their migrations, which the Hazaras, now defeated and disarmed, could no longer oppose. After the fall of the Emirate, according to the farmers the nomads tried to continue their rather unruly migrations, but faced a backlash by Hazara communities and organisations.

*Before the Taliban it was the mujahiddin time, and Hazara people had enough power in the central provinces of Afghanistan that the nomads couldn't come here after 1358. [...] The conflict started in the beginning of Karzai's government, because under the Taliban, nomads had lots of power and the Hazara community was powerless. During all four years of Taliban power in Afghanistan, the nomads had control of most of our agricultural lands and we were not able to stand against them. When the Karzai government was established, again the nomads thought that they had the same power as they had in the Taliban time and that they could take their thousands of animals through the villages of Behsud and Daimordad districts and go to central provinces of Afghanistan, like Bamiyan and Ghor provinces. But we [Hazaras] were not disabled or powerless like during the Taliban time and when the nomads came to our villages with thousands of animals for the first time during the Karzai government in 1386, of course when thousands of animals pass from your agriculture lands, they completely destroy the crops. We stood against the nomads, they attacked us. At that time we didn't have many weapons but fought against them anyway and many people from both sides killed. The fighting started in the beginning of Karzai's time, later we understood that the government is not willing to solve the problem so we sold our animals (cows and lambs) to buy weapons and fight against the nomads.<sup>24</sup>*

Local Hazara farmers usually deny having received help from other parts of Hazarajat and from Hazara parties and groups; they claim instead to have sold their animals in order to purchase weapons, as per the quote above.<sup>25</sup> It seems unlikely, however, that the local farmers would have been able to resist the nomads without the support of Hazara parties and former militia commanders, who reportedly mobilised hundreds of men in support of the Behsud Hazaras. Similarly, the nomads deny having received external support, but are regularly accused of having sometimes teamed up with the Taliban and sometimes with nomad strongmen, resulting in violent clashes between nomads and Hazaras with many dozens of victims each year.<sup>26</sup> Nomad sources admit at least that they receive help from their tribal shuras:<sup>27</sup>

*We Kharokhel tribe have a shura. If they do not help us then they will lose our support. Our community is helping us through money and also by sending people to us when we have conflict with another tribe, whether they are in Khost, Nangarhar, Logar, Kandahar or other places.<sup>28</sup>*

Nomad sources also admit receiving help from some non-nomad, national Pashtun politicians.<sup>29</sup> At least two interviewees admitted receiving help from a nomad strongman.<sup>30</sup> Another admitted that an insurgent organisation provided some weapons.<sup>31</sup> One admitted that at some point the Taliban helped the nomads, before abandoning them.<sup>32</sup>

The conflict in Behsud inflicted considerable economic damage to the nomads, who have not been able to use the pastures of central Hazarajat. In some cases the nomads re-routed their migrations towards other pastures in different parts of Afghanistan, in others they lost some of their livestock. The local farmers however turned out to lose as much as the nomads:<sup>33</sup>

24 Interview with village elder, Kar-e-wani village of Sarchashma area, 15 February 2017.

25 Interview with village elder, Kar-e-wani village of Sarchashma area, 15 February 2017; Interview with farm community elder from Lata Band Village of Kajab area in Behsud District, February 2017.

26 Interview with farm community elder from Lata Band Village of Kajab area in Behsud District, February 2017.

27 Interview with member of the Kuchi Council of Afghanistan, Kabul, June 2017.

28 Interview with Kuchi elder, Kharokhel tribe in Maidan Wardak Province, November 2016.

29 Interview with Kuchi elder, Kharokhel tribe in Maidan Wardak Province, November 2016; Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, in Sarchushma Area of Maidan Wardak Province, November 2016

30 Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, in Sarchushma Area of Maidan Wardak Province, November 2016; Interview with member of Kuchi Council of Afghanistan, Kabul, June 2017.

31 Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, in Sarchushma Area of Maidan Wardak Province, November 2016.

32 Interview with member of Kuchi Council of Afghanistan, Kabul, June 2017.

33 Interview with village elder, Kajab area of Hesa 2 Behsud district, Gandab village, February 2017.

*In fact with rejecting of nomads we also couldn't grow anything in our lands because every year there is fighting and every time there is fighting the agricultural lands and houses are destroyed.<sup>34</sup>*

Parties and lobbies also provided political support to the warring groups, resulting in increasing politicisation and “nationalisation” of the conflict, which also received widespread media coverage. Gradually the local causes of conflict have lost importance, being overtaken by a wider political confrontation. Says an official of the Ministry for Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL):

*This dispute is more a political dispute than a grassland problem. This problem will not be solved by the land law regarding usage of grasslands. The commission for resolving these disputes didn't come to us even once and didn't ask about the law on pastures. This is a political issue; very high-ranking officials and even foreign countries are interfering in this dispute.<sup>35</sup>*

While the conflict in Behsud has turned into the most violent spot of nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan, it is likely that if the blockade to the nomad migration routes was lifted, conflict would spread around the highlands, albeit in a diluted form. Interviewees in Malistan, for example, had not seen nomads turning up since the blockades were put in place, but indicated being ready to fight if the nomads were to arrive.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of nomad landlords being unable to reach the land they own in Hazarajat, a series of land disputes have also emerged, affecting the nomad-farmer conflict. Local farmers and allegedly some small local strongmen, usually protected by the local authorities, have seized nomad land and now have little interest in seeing the nomads recovering their access to the central highlands; they might be lending support to the Behsud and Daymirdad farmers also for this reason.<sup>37</sup> One local source in Bamiyan province confirmed that some lands, owned by nomads, were seized by Hazara commanders, whereas other lands were seized by the farmers who had been tilling them. According to the source, 80 percent of the lands owned by nomads in Bamiyan were seized or grabbed. Often the commanders continue letting the land to the same farmers who were renting it from the nomads.<sup>38</sup>

An additional reason mentioned by Hazara interviewees to explain their determination to keep the nomads out has to do with the latter's alleged links to insurgent organisations. Many Hazaras are also reportedly afraid that if the nomad were let into Hazarajat, they would bring with them the instability that affects the Pashtun belt but has spared Hazarajat so far.<sup>39</sup>

The nomads, on the other hand, fear that if they gave up on Hazarajat, they would soon be shut out of all other pastures all over the country, as every farm community would start to feel that challenging the nomads is a viable option when faced with insufficient resources.

*We will fight with them because if we do not do this and they will not give permission to us here, tomorrow in the north people will also not give permission to us and next time in the south people will not give permission to us.<sup>40</sup>*

Hazara community elders sometimes say that they would allow nomad access to the pastures on certain conditions, such as, for example, if they moved their livestock by truck. Using trucks to move the animals around is not unheard of among the nomads, but not all nomads would be able to rent trucks for that purpose.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Interview with village elder, Kar-e-wani village of Sarchashma area, February 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with staff member of Grassland Department of Agriculture Ministry, 2 January 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Three Hazara farmers were interviewed in Malistan and all expressed similar views.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with member of Kuchi Council of Afghanistan, Kabul, June 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Jalal khil tribe, Maidan Wardak Province, June 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Baharam Khil tribe, Logar, June 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with village elder, Panjab district of Bamiyan Province, July 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with village elder, Panjab district of Bamiyan Province, July 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Kuchi elder, Behsud Awal of Maidan Wardak Province, November 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with village elder from Kar-e-wani Village of Sarchashma Area, Kar-e-wani Village, Daimordad District, February 2017.

## 4.2 Malistan

The case of Malistan is somewhat more difficult to assess than that of Behsud. The Mullah Khel nomads claim that from 2008 onwards they have not been able to access pastures in Malistan and upstream districts such as Nawur and Jaghori. However, local Hazara elders claim that there is no ongoing conflict between them and the nomads and that the nomads have not tried to access the area after 2001.<sup>42</sup> The nomads claim that:

*Still the people of Hazarajat do not have any problems with us; we go to them and they come to us and tell us that “We do not have any problems with you, it is the powerful people. They bring pressure on us to not give permission to nomads.” The common people do not have any problems with us, it is the powerful people and the mafia who are creating problems for us.*<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, and in line with what is mentioned in the *Behsud* section above about Hazara fear of destabilisation, according to nomad sources the Hazaras were discriminating among tribes in granting access. While some nomad tribes such as Nasar, Dawlatzai and Ismail Khel have been allowed to reach the pastures, the Mullah Khel tribe was not, on allegations of links to Taliban and Daesh. Although the area was quiet as of spring 2017, one Mullah Khel source claimed that “If our this problem is not solved, we are ready to use any kind of violence.” The source threatened to link with insurgents if negotiations over access did not progress.<sup>44</sup>

Like in Behsud, the nomads insist they need access to the pastures of Hazarajat in order to feed their large herds. A nomad source explained that “If Hazaras do not give permission to us then we need to use violence, because we do not have another way. There is good grass in Hazarajat.”<sup>45</sup>

Even if the Hazara interviewees denied an on-going conflict with the nomads, they explained this by arguing that the access route was sealed. Simply, the nomads were not challenging the blockade. According to the Hazara elders, the blockade was justified by the fact that there was never a mythical age when Hazaras were happy to have the nomads use the pastures of Hazarajat.<sup>46</sup>

## 4.3 Outside Hazarajat

Outside Hazarajat, examples of farming communities blocking the access of nomads are rare, due to the lack of areas of homogeneous farming populations with the shared interest of keeping the nomads out. However, in our sample we have another example of farmers blocking nomad access to pastures, which is the Kalam Guzar area of Kunduz Province. Here Kharoti, Akakhel and Andar farmers tried to exclude Uzbek nomads from reaching the pastures they had been using until 2013. The farmers claimed to be needing the pastures for their own animals. Here too the usual pattern of each side appealing to Uzbek or Pashtun politicians and strongmen for help and support was repeated.<sup>47</sup> The Pashtun farmers also complained of the nomads damaging their harvest, polluting their drinking water and of aiming to establish settlements there.<sup>48</sup>

Some other cases of farmers blocking nomad access were byproducts of nomad-farmer conflict of other nature, typically conflicts over the conversion of pastures to agricultural and settled land (see below). After the nomads were seen as intent on settling in a particular area, farmers in some cases blocked their access regardless, preventing them even from grazing. The research team found cases of this type in Khaki Jabbar, very close to Kabul city:

42 Interview with village elder, Bokhra village of Malistan district, March 2017.

43 Interview with Kuchi elder, Mullah Khel Kuchi tribe, April 2017.

44 Interview with Kuchi elder, Mullah Khel tribe, Ghazni province, April 2017.

45 Interview with Kuchi elder, Sulaimankhel tribe, March 2017.

46 Interview with village elder, Deda Qaro village, Malistan, March 2017.

47 Interview with Nomad elder, Uzbek Baig tribe in Kalam Guzar Area, April 2017.

48 Interview with Kuchi elder, Andar tribe, Imam Sahib District of Kunduz Province, April 2017; Interview with village elder, Kol Akakhel area, Imam Sahib, April 2017.

*Before, we were growing lalmi [rainfed wheat] in Charbazgi but now we do not grow it, which has caused us a financial loss. Moreover, we selected around 100 people who control this area and do not give permission to nomads to come to this area. These people are also not working due to this conflict. [...] After this we do not want to give permission to nomads even if they only want to bring their animals for grass. They want to deceive us: first of all they are saying that they only bring animals for grazing here, but later they claim that this area belongs to them. If we give a place to them they will set up tents there and capture land from us.<sup>49</sup>*

*Now the problem solved between [nomad powerbroker] and Khaki Jabbar people why Khaki Jabbar people do not give us permission to us and our animals? So we can say behind these people there are mafia and powerful people. Now government is also supporting them, why they do not give permission to nomads? These deserts do not belong to them, these deserts belong to the government? [...] They build towns and there are more than 20,000 houses. This town is the causes of problems between us and Khaki Jabbari people; they are saying that they will also build such town in Charbazgi desert. We do not build town and houses in Charbazgi, we only bring animals for grazing, this is cruelty that they are doing to the nomads because they have problems with [nomad powerbroker] and they do not give permission to any nomad.<sup>50</sup>*

*[Nomad powerbroker] captured Kuchi Abad and he also wanted to seize Charbazgi of Khaki Jabbar, after that the people of Khaki Jabbar stopped us [nomads] from getting there. They are suspecting us of wanting to seize this area, but it is not true. We only want to bring animals to pastures.<sup>51</sup>*

In Khost there was also a case of nomads being denied access as a result of a conflict between a nomad community and a settler community.

*Our Dawlatzai community do not have conflict with Khosti people; Niazi nomads have conflict with Khosti people. But Khostis also did not give permission to us to feed our animals in these pastures. When the conflict started between Niazi and Khosti, people were killed on both sides. Then Khosti people also refused permission for us to take our animals to these pastures in Derai after 2003. We told the Khosti people that their conflict is with Niazi nomads, and that we only want to feed our animals in these areas. In 2005 they attacked us and hit our people; one person was killed and two others were injured on our side, They also stole 200 animals from us. One year ago our conflict was settled with Khosti people. [...] Previously, if our Dawlatzais were going anywhere like Lakand, Chino, Shamal Khwar, Derai and other places, there were no problems, but when Niazi wanted to grow wheat, corn and other things in these areas and build houses there then the conflict took place.<sup>52</sup>*

Another example of farmers blocking nomad access was found in Farah around the villages of Koh Danak, Qalay Ghulam Sakhi, Karezak and Shorabad Qalay, where Alokozay farmers tried to stop Baluchi nomads from reaching the local pastures.<sup>53</sup>

Cases of denied access to pastures were reported in various other locations by interviewees, even if the survey did not cover those areas:

*Similarly the people of Sarobi do not give permission to us and our animals in the mountains. We also faced a lot of problems in the northern provinces; our animals were killed and they even refused to accept our sick people in the hospitals. [...] Nomads should get their Tazkira anywhere, but in the north Tazkiras are not issued to us.<sup>54</sup>*

*We do not have problems only in Farah Province; we have problems in a lot of areas such as in Midan Wardak Province, Ghazni Province, and in the north of Afghanistan, but the Afghan government did not solve our problems. This is the reason that we must get support from other organisations who are Taliban.<sup>55</sup>*

49 Interview with village elder, Malang village, February 2017.

50 Interview with Kuchi elder, Akbar Khel tribe, March 2017.

51 Interview with Kuchi elder, Babar tribe, Azra District, Logar, January 2017.

52 Interview with Kuchi elder, Dawlatzai tribe, Derai of Khost province, April 2017.

53 Interview with Kuchi elder, Baluchi, Farah, June 2017.

54 Interview with Kuchi elder, Akbar Khel tribe, March 2017.

55 Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, Farah Province, June 2017.

In summary, blocking nomad access to pastures seems to be becoming an increasingly common strategy among settler communities, perhaps inspired by the original case of Behsud. Those nomads who argue that giving up on the Hazarajat pastures would encourage other communities as well to block nomad access might well have a point.

#### 4.4 Nomads block other nomads' access

A particular case of nomads facing limitations to their access to pastures is when, forced to change routes after being prevented from reaching the pastures of Hazarajat, they enter in competition with other nomads over the pastures. This is the case of pastures near the provincial capital of Farah, where the Baluchi nomads who used to spend the winter there suddenly faced the competition of (Pashtun) Nasar nomads from Zabul Province. In this case the Baluchis had been obstructed in their intent to bring their herds to Hazarajat by the Nasar in 2007; when the Nasar, no longer able to access Hazarajat themselves, tried to bring their livestock to Farah, it was the turn of the Baluchis to deny them access.<sup>56</sup>

A Nasar elder provided this version of events:

*Our conflict took place with Baluchi nomads in 2015 when they stopped us in Khar Malok Desert. They did not give permission to us to go to these areas. We told to them that we are also nomads and you are also nomads. You should take your animals grazing on these pastures and we will also do the same. These Baluch nomads told us that they made an agreement with Nurzai and Alakozay tribes and as a result, they are using these areas as pastures and do not give us permission . We [Nasar nomads] told the Baluchi nomads that 'you did this agreement that you will carry your animals to Nurzai agricultural fields when there are no crops, but the agreement does not exclude the Nasars from taking their livestock there as well'. These lands do not belong to them. They prevented us and a few times fighting took place between us and them.<sup>57</sup>*

While the Nasar nomads allege that the Baluchis receive support from smugglers and Quetta Shura Taliban, a Baluchi nomad admitted having sought support from various parties but without much success.<sup>58</sup>

*First of all we are trying to have the government solve our conflict; if the government does not resolve our conflict then we are need to go to the local people. If the local people do not resolve our conflict, then in this case we will go to Taliban to resolve our conflict. If the Taliban will not help us to resolve our conflict then we will go to Daesh to help us and resolve our conflict, because nowadays Daesh is also present in Afghanistan. Basically, we want to resolve our conflict and if any individual, groups, or organisations solve our conflict for us it is not important which group resolves our conflict for us.<sup>59</sup>*

A Nasar elder also admitted having sought and obtained support from Hizb-i Islami commanders, from the Rasool Shura of the Taliban and from one of the nomad strongmen.<sup>60</sup>

Nomad vs nomad conflict suggests that scarcity of resources is indeed a major driver of conflict, as opposed to any friction between different lifestyles. The dynamic in place, with different nomad communities appealing to external support from parties, insurgent groups and powerbrokers, closely resembles those described above in the case of nomad-farmer conflict.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Brahui tribal elder in Farah Province, June 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, Farah Province, June 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Brahui tribal elder in Farah Province, June 2017; Interview with Brahui tribal elder in Farah Province, June 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Brahui tribal elder in Farah Province, June 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, Farah Province, June 2017.

## 5. Conflict types: Trespassing of boundaries

At the MAIL, government officials seem to consider the Pasture Law of 1971 as the basis for their operations. According to an official, “according to the law of the grasslands, the grasslands belong to the state and every citizen of Afghanistan who has animals can use the grassland.”<sup>61</sup> In principle, Afghanistan’s Pasture Law has always distinguished between private, community and public pastures, with nomad access limited to the latter. In practice, the distinction has always been fuzzy: the limit of each village’s special pastures is determined by the distance at which a voice shouting from the village can be heard. This imprecise definition and the lack of demarcation between agricultural fields, village pastures and public pastures makes the emergence of conflicts easy.<sup>62</sup> The 1970 Pasture Law was not only imprecise, but was also so weakly implemented that many farmers do not even know that it actually gives them the right to the exclusive use of village pastures:

*Regarding the grassland, our people do not agree to give their grassland to the nomads. They say that the grasslands are the limits or frontage of their villages and the government does not have the right to give them to anyone. According to Jafari law and to Hanafi law every village has its own borders or frontage and these limits or frontage are grasslands.*<sup>63</sup>

Even when there is awareness of the law, it is clear that there is no agreement between farmers and nomads on how this should be interpreted:

*There is a difference between private grassland and public grassland. From the public grassland everyone can take advantage of it whether they are Pashtun nomads, Uzbek nomads, Tajik nomads or others, but of the private land no one can take advantage. Therefore, it is private grassland; they do not grow things in it and they leave it for pasture. No it is not, there is no agreement with the farmers on these grasslands.*<sup>64</sup>

The discussion about a more precise definition of village and public pastures has been going on for many years; the 2011-12 draft of the new pasture law reportedly did not mention village pasture anymore. This development was seen as a result of nomad lobbying the authorities.<sup>65</sup> The current (2017) version of the law introduces again village pastures, whose extent is to be defined by ad hoc regulations (probably up to 3 km from the village).<sup>66</sup>

Although the lack of demarcation and the poorly defined boundary between public and village pastures was never mentioned as a major source of conflict, it came out as a source of constant friction between nomads and farmers.<sup>67</sup> The total absence of policing in rural areas like this results in relatively minor incidents escalating rapidly into violence. In one incident recounted by an interviewee, in 2003 the nomads killed the son of a local landholder who was complaining about them planting wheat on his land. The nomads claim to own that land, which they bought in the past. Afterwards, the colonel stormed the nomad settlement, killing seven. The blood feud which started in this way is still going on and resists all attempts by the elders of the two communities to end it, even if the elders agreed that the nomads would withdraw from the occupied land.<sup>68</sup> The conflict spread as the local villagers started attacking nomads indiscriminately, not just the Niazi.<sup>69</sup>

61 Interview with staff of Grassland Dept.

62 Sharif and Safar, “Land Administration and Management.”

63 Interview with member of Commission for Resolving Disputes between Kochi and Hazara Commission, 1 December 2016.

64 Interview with Uzbek Baig tribe Kuchi elder, Kalam Guzar area, April 2017.

65 Liz Alden Wily, “The Battle over Pastures: The Hidden War in Afghanistan,” *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*: 133, June 2013.

66 Interview with ARAZI official, September 2017.

67 Interview with elder of Alakozay tribe, Koh Dana area, June 2017.

68 Interview with village elder of Perai tribe in Shamal area of Derai of Khost Province, April 2017; Interview with elder of the Marak-khel tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 7 April 2017; Interview with elder of the Teron tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 6 April 2017.

69 Interview with Kuchi elder of Dawlatzai tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 9 April 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Niazi tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 8 April 2017.

Another bone of contention deriving from unclear or poorly implemented law and regulations is the matter of the nomads' migration schedule:

*They should graze in the pastures and then should also come to our land but only after we harvest. By contrast, if these nomads come to our lands when we are harvesting for sure a conflict will take place, we would be using any kind of power.<sup>70</sup>*

Some farmers claim that nomad migrations became considerably more disorganised than before the war, resulting in greater damage to the crops and to the village pastures:

*For our district the schedule was that when the nomads were coming at the end of April every year, first they had to wait until the Hazara farmers in every district cut and collected their grass from the hills and mountains, storing it for the winter; then the nomads could come with their animals and let their animals loose on those mountains and hills. The plan was first the nomads coming to Behsud district and staying in Behsud for 10 or 15 days and using the remaining grassland in the mountains until that time when farmers in Nawur district would finish their harvest, and store grass for winter. Then the nomads would enter Nawur district and stay there for 10 or 15 days and use the remaining grass in the hills and mountains until the Malistan farmers finished their harvesting and cutting their grasses and let the nomads take their animals there.<sup>71</sup>*

These views are supported by at least some government officials.

*...we had the head of lands at the provincial level and a manager of lands at the district level that was familiar with the rights of everyone; he was leading the pastures, forest, agriculture lands and nobody could interfere with another person's right. [...] We have a Sarkhil [head of a group of nomads] for each group or tribe. The Sarkhil is responsible for leading the group in terms of migration, these Sarkhil are elected by the nomad community and after bringing all the fingerprint and copy of National ID of at least 200 families of his tribal then we give register his name as Sarkhil of that group or tribal and give him an ID card and stamp. He is the contact person or connector between the government and nomads and he is responsible for the group or tribe for migration and everything. We just contact him for any case or he contacts us or our provincial directorates if needed. So this shows that there are clear procedures and schedules for the migration of the nomads from one place to another.<sup>72</sup>*

Not everybody agrees that such a schedule was effectively in place before the war, however.<sup>73</sup> Even some Hazaras say that, in fact, the schedule was never implemented.<sup>74</sup>

*Before the revolution, Yaqub Khan, who was the governor of Kabul Province, granted to the nomads access to the grasslands of central Afghanistan (mostly Hazara areas), according to a timetable or schedule. It means that until the villagers on the nomads' route harvested their grass, the nomads should not come to that village and use the remaining grass for their animals. It means that first it was our right to harvest the grass and save it in the warehouse for our animals in the coming winter and then the remaining grass left in the field was for the nomads' animals. But unfortunately, the nomads were coming earlier and using our grass before we could cut it off. When we shouted at them to not use the grass because we haven't harvested it yet, they didn't listen to us and showed us their weapons instead.<sup>75</sup>*

The degree to which schedules were indeed implemented might, of course, have varied from location to location.

70 Interview with village elder, Nurzai tribe, Nangab Village of Farah Province, June 2017.

71 Interview with Hazara elder of Bokhra Village of Malistan District, 14 March 2017.

72 Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

73 Interview with member of Kuchi Commission, Kabul, 1 June 2017; Interview with Shahmahmood Miakhel, USIP, Kabul, 20 September 2017.

74 Interview with village elder, Panjab district of Bamiyan Province, July 2017.

75 Interview with village elder, Bokhra village, Malistan district, March 2017.

## 6. Conflict types: land grabbing and illegal land occupation

### 6.1 Who is the villain?

Taking the sample as a whole, the other most common cause of nomad-farmer conflict turned out to be land grabbing (seizure of state land for business purposes) and land occupation (seizure of land for personal use). The tales told by farmers in the case studies of Deh Sabz, Khak Jabbar, Azra and Khost always refer to a pre-war time, when the nomads were just taking their herds to the public pastures in the mountains and did not interfere with the farmers. Then things changed after 2001. According to the elder of a settler community in Deh Sabz:

*Before, nomads were coming here for a limited period and they were bringing animals here to feed, and then they went to northern provinces, but now nomads are capturing our land and properties. They are building houses on our land, because these lands are near Kabul.*<sup>76</sup>

A similar tale is told by farmers in Khaki Jabbar:

*Previously, the nomads were only making tents on these areas and they were bringing animals for grazing, but now the nomads are coming here and they want to capture our areas and build houses on our areas; then the conflict took place.*<sup>77</sup>

The nomads, on the other hand, deny that the lands where they tried to settle belonged to the farmers:

*These are our grandfathers' lands, they claim that these land belongs to them. We do not give permission to them to take these lands from us. [...] They said nomads must live in the mountains, not in such areas like towns. They are damaging our houses, tents, and other things.*<sup>78</sup>

In reality, what seems to be happening is that in Deh Sabz, at least farmer and nomad communities both aim at taking control over portions of the old pastures, and end up competing for them:

*Our conflict with Tajiks started six years ago. Tajiks do not want us to live here. They are telling us that this is not our area, the government gave us land in Bari Kaw so we should live there. But we do not care about them because this is our pasture area. [...] Now land prices are also very high so they captured all other areas and made towns on them. Now the other areas are full and they also want to capture our pastures as well. This is the reason why the conflicts started and fighting took place from both sides.*<sup>79</sup>

Some groups of nomads seem intent on taking control of many of their old pastures for the purpose of settling there, as one of the admitted to the interviewer:

*Our nomads have problems in many areas, first of all when we were capturing this area of Kuchi Abad where we have fought with Botkhakis, this was our pasture area and now we made a town on this area. We also fought with Chenar village people, the same as we fought with Khaki Jabbar people in Charbazgi area of Khaki Jabbar. We also have conflict with Guspandara people, as these are our pasture areas and our grandfathers were coming here. These conflicts started in 2007 with Botkhakiyan when we were building houses on these areas. In 2009 our conflict started with Chinar Village. We wanted to capture those areas also. In 2013 our conflict started with Guspandara people and Malangi. In 2015 we had a conflict with Khaki Jabbar people in Charbazgi because that is our grandfathers' area. In some areas our conflicts ended and in some areas our conflict is still in progress. [...] These are the deserts of our grandfathers.*<sup>80</sup>

76 Interview with village elder, Deh Sabz of Kabul Province, January 2017.

77 Interview with village elder of Chakari Village, Khaki Jabbar District of Kabul Province, February 2017.

78 Interview with Kuchi elder, Tarakhel tribe, Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, 13 January, 2017.

79 Interview with Kuchi elder, Taghar Kuchi tribe, Deh Sabz district of Kabul Province, January 2017.

80 Interview with Kuchi elder, Kuchi Abad of Botkhak, Kabul, March 2017.

Both sides accuse each other of being sponsored by some of Afghanistan's "mafias" and sometimes also by one or another insurgent faction.<sup>81</sup>

*Our conflict started with nomads when they decided to capture our areas and capture our fields; they also had the mafia behind them, like when they captured Botkhak. They also wanted to capture Deh Sabz so we stopped them. This was the reason that our conflict started with the nomads.*<sup>82</sup>

*The Tarakhel tribe encourages us to fight with the opposite community. But behind the opposite community there are powerful people and mafias and commanders].*<sup>83</sup>

*[Specific people] wanted to sell these areas as they sold Puli Charkhi, then our conflict started with them and we stopped them. Nothing happened because of these conflicts, only we armed our people.*<sup>84</sup>

In the area of Derai (Khost), farmers and nomads started fighting as early as 2003. The farmers resisted attempts by the nomads to settle in the area:

*These nomads bought a little land in the time of Zahir Shah and Daud Khan in the Derai area, then they were coming with animals and fed them in the pastures, then they went to Pakistan. In the Taliban's time they found money and built houses in their areas, they also brought other Niazis from Nangarhar, Paktia and other places. They attacked our lands, and brought animals to our agriculture fields and we told them not to bring animals there, but they did not accept it. They also started build houses in our areas [...]. We prevented them, we told them not to start construction here or grow things, then nomads hit one of ours with a knife and he was seriously injured. Then fighting started, a few people were killed by them. Nomads have also have problems with Sabari and in the fighting more than 60 people causalities took place between both sides.*<sup>85</sup>

*Nomads were working in their own areas before, but now they claim 50-100 hectares of other land and crossed the road and came to this side of the road. So the Colonel's family of Perai tribe stopped them but nomads resisted and they said it is our own land and these are our pastures and we want to grow wheat here now. But the Khosti Colonel's family did not give permission to them, so the fighting started.*<sup>86</sup>

The Niazi nomads had to leave their houses and land, until some returned in 2015. They agreed to let land and houses at favourable rates to the neighbouring Mangal tribe.<sup>87</sup>

Settlers and nomads therefore, while casting each other as the villains, are often trying to do exactly the same: appropriate a portion of pastures for agricultural or urban development. Because government schemes to make land available for development are so rare, the hard-pressed communities have little option but to act illegally, or to collaborate with the land grabbers. In the process, friction is also generated with other communities who are not involved in any land occupation or grabbing scheme but simply see their pastures disappear.

One nomad representative admitted the role played by nomad strongmen in land grabbing alongside other powerbrokers; he insisted in stressing that often nomads are among the victims of the nomad strongmen, as they lose access to pastures.<sup>88</sup>

81 Interview with village elder, Chakari Village of Khaki Jabbar District, Kabul Province, February 2017; Interview with village elder, Malang village, February 2017.

82 Interview with village elder, Khuaja Chasht Area, Deh Sabz district of Kabul, January 2017.

83 Interview with Kuchi elder, Babkarkhel tribe, Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, January 2017.

84 Interview with Kuchi elder, Baghgi community, Khaki Jabbar District of Kabul, March 2017.

85 Interview with village elder, Teron tribe, Khost, Derai, April 2017.

86 Interview with village elder, Perai tribe, Shamal area of Derai of Khost province, April 2017.

87 Interview with Kuchi elder, Niazi tribe, Derai of Khost Province, April 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Niazi tribe in Derai of Khost Province, April 2017.

88 Interview with Hajji Khan Wazir, head of the Khumari Khil Shura, Dehsabz and Qarabagh, Poza-e-Kharoti Bareekaab, October 2017.

## 6.2 Land occupation or land grabbing?

When pushed, both farmers and nomads admit that they have accepted, or sought support from external parties, including strongmen, Kabul politicians, and tribal and local shuras.<sup>89</sup> One nomad source admitted to having received weapons from the Taliban:

*Thanks to the Taliban, they are armed nomads because everyone was abusing the nomads and now nomads can defend themselves. [...] The Taliban helped us with weapons and other things and we want more help from them. If the government does not listen to us we do not have another way, we will take support from Taliban.*<sup>90</sup>

In the case of Derai, too, accusations of powerful individuals sponsoring the rival communities abound.<sup>91</sup> According to an elder of one of the farming communities, Serajuddin Haqqani sent the farmers a letter, asking them to leave the nomads and especially the Niazis alone.<sup>92</sup>

The fact that communities involved in a conflict might receive external support does not automatically imply that external sponsors are driving the conflict. Particularly in the case of the areas surrounding big cities, however, the allegations are exactly that land grabbers use the communities as their “army” to capture land for their own business interest. The role of the land grabbers clearly deserves further study. In order to assess not only their impact on conflict, but also how they have been reshaping the structure of nomad societies (see also *Underlying causes* below).

## 6.3 Settled nomads vs nomads who want to settle down

In Azra (Logar), Surkhaw desert is contested between nomads and former nomads who settled in the pastures they had been using earlier:

*Our conflict started with nomads three years ago in the Padkhwab-e-Shaneh area and the head of these nomads wanted to capture this area and build houses here. We did not give permission to them. Earlier, they brought animals here for grazing and then they were going to the northern provinces, but three years ago we saw that they started building houses here, and then conflicts started between us and them. They are the Naimkhel, Babar, Sultan Khel tribes. They came from different areas and they want to capture our agricultural areas and we have the legal documents of all these areas. This conflict started in 2013 and it is still ongoing; it has not yet been resolved.*<sup>93</sup>

Four nomad communities settled in the area years ago and agreed among themselves how to share the pastures and turn them into villages and agricultural lands:

*It is more than 2000 hectares of land and all villages and tribes have parts in it such as Esakhel, Adrimzai, Afzal Khel and Stanikzai. All of these tribes have rights on this land. As it is the pastures of nomads, it is also our pastures because before we were also nomads and we carried animals there but now we stopped nomadic life.*<sup>94</sup>

When other nomad communities such as Babar, Sultankhel and Salamkhel tried to settle in the same area as well, the settled nomad communities decided to keep them out:<sup>95</sup>

89 Interview with village elder, Deh Sabz of Kabul Province, January 2017; Interview with village elder of Khuaja Chasht Area, Deh Sabz district of Kabul, January 2017; Interview with village elder, Pay Menar village of Deh Sabz District, Kabul Province, January 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Tarakhel tribe, Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, January 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Taghar tribe, Deh Sabz district of Kabul Province, January 2017; Interview with Village elder, Baghgi community, Khaki Jabbar District of Kabul, March 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Akbar Khel tribe, March 2017.

90 Interview with Kuchi elder, Akbar Khel tribe, March 2017.

91 Interview with elder of Marak-khel tribe, Derai of Khost Province, April 2017.

92 Interview with village elder, Teron tribe, Khost Province (Derai), April 2017.

93 Interview with village elder, Elyas Khan Area, Logar Province, December 2016.

94 Interview with village elder, Esakhel Community in Poli Kandahar village, December 2016.

95 Interview with elder of Sultan Khel tribe in Logar Province, November 2016.

*We do not give permission to nomads if they want to graze our land or build houses on it because we want to make this land ready for cultivation. We want to make water pumps in these deserts and grow things here because the number of our people are increasing day by day. We also want to build houses in these areas. We do not want to give permission to nomads anymore. It is not necessary that these areas should be pastures forever for the nomads to live there. [...] Our community conflict is with Babar nomads. These nomads came here and they installed tents on our land and they captured our land and they claim that this land belongs to us. Salamkhel nomads also came from Rood village of Paktia province. They also captured our land and they are saying that your grandfathers sold this land on us. These conflicts started two and a half years ago. [...] Our land is very good. It has good breezes and normal winds, and it is very flat area. For their animals it is very good area because there is a lot of grass. This area is also near the city.<sup>96</sup>*

The nomads by contrast complained that as the other communities settled, they lost access to their traditional pastures. The agreement among the four communities to settle in the pastures was not negotiated with the other nomad communities. The conflict developed gradually between 2011 and 2014.<sup>97</sup> The nomads complain about having been left out:

*We have a conflict with farmers in Khalil Abad area, near to Kolangar of Poli Alami of Logar Province. Our conflicts are with Stanikzai tribe and they captured our pastures areas here. These conflict started between them and us three years ago and has not yet ended. They want to create towns here and capture our pastures but we will not give permission to them.<sup>98</sup>*

The opposition between settled communities and other communities that wanted to settle in the same area gave rise to a conflict that inevitably disrupted the farmers' work as well:

*The lands and pastures that we have disputed with nomads, a lot of changes took place there in the recent years. It means in Padkhwab-e-Shaneh Desert, we cultivated a lot of things and there is a lot of agricultural land. We cultivated wheat and other things in the past but for the last three years it has all stopped because of the violence. Also a lot of houses were built in these areas and our agriculture lands converted to homes and houses.<sup>99</sup>*

Like in all other conflict cases reviewed so far, even in Azra, the rival communities have been appealing for external support by strongmen, politicians, and government officials with at least some degree of success, as they admit themselves. Again, it is often alleged that politicians and strongmen encourage the communities to occupy land, possibly in order to share into any economic benefit.<sup>100</sup> As usual, allegations of either side receiving support from groups of insurgents also flourish.<sup>101</sup> There seems to be some substance to the allegations: at least one farmer elder admitted receiving support from Hizb-i Islami, as well as from at least two nomad strongmen.<sup>102</sup>

Like in the case of nomad vs nomad conflict discussed in the section dedicated to blocked access to pastures, conflict between nomads and former nomads again seems to suggest that resource scarcity is becoming more and more a source of conflict, overshadowing older, underlying sources of friction.

96 Interview with village elder, Adramzai community in Awbazak village, December 2016.

97 Interview with Kuchi elder, Babar tribe, November 2016.

98 Interview with elder of Naeemkhel community, Khalil Abad area of Logar Province, November 16.

99 Interview with village elder in Elyas Khan Area in Logar Province, December 2016.

100 Interview with elder of Sultan Khel tribe in Logar Province, November 2016; Interview with village elder, Adramzai community in Awbazak village, December 2016; Interview with elder of Naeemkhel community in Khalil Abad area of Logar Province, November 2016.

101 Interview with village elder in Elyas Khan area in Logar Province, December 2016.

102 Interview with Kuchi elder of Babar tribe, November 2016.

## 7. Underlying causes of conflict

In part, the conflict between nomads and sedentarists is just discussed above the result of property and usage rights being enforced weakly or not at all by the authorities, and of what Wily described as the “opaque” status of rangelands.<sup>103</sup> Pastureland is thus seen by nomads and farmers sometimes as “theirs” (as opposed to the state’s) and they have been settling there illegally in a number of locations, kicking off conflicts. It is common to have two sides in a dispute both argue that they legally own the land. There is also a problem of illegal sales of land by government officials, but it is remarkable that some of these disputes might have been going on for years without the rightful owner being identified.<sup>104</sup> It is also obvious that the ongoing conflict discourages nomad access in certain areas more affected by violence, mines, etc., forcing them to concentrate their attention on a limited number of safer pastures.<sup>105</sup>

Growing demographic pressure is an obvious source of nomad-farmer conflict and is often mentioned by interviewees and confirmed by officials:<sup>106</sup>

*Year after year the population and people of our community is increasing. The places where nomads were taking their animals for grazing, now our community people build houses there or are growing crops there.*<sup>107</sup>

*There are different reasons why the conflict did not start before and it started at particular time. The first reason is that the population has increased and those deserts where nomads used to take animals for grazing, now people are building there and growing crops there.*<sup>108</sup>

Irrigated land is estimated today at 2.3 million hectares, down from 3.4 million before the war (and population has doubled in the meanwhile).<sup>109</sup> The declining number of animals in Afghanistan (see *Nomads and Farmers in Afghanistan* above) should in reality translate in lower pressure on the pastures as well, suggesting that if the conflict was somehow terminated, the current level of nomadic migrations could be managed relatively successfully.

Clearly another deep cause underpinning the rise in conflicts over pastureland is the expansion of urban and peri-urban settlements. This trend has, in some cases, pushed up the value of grassland previously used by the nomads, causing local villagers, returnees from Pakistan and powerbrokers to try and seize control over pastureland for the purpose of building on it or of selling it.<sup>110</sup> It does not help that the authorities play little or no role in trying to channel urban expansion towards dry areas, as opposed to pastures and agricultural land.<sup>111</sup>

*In the last 15 years a lot of changes took place. For example in the past our population was smaller and there were also no fighting in other provinces, so there were free areas for nomads to bring animals for grazing, but now the population has increased a lot and a lot of people also came to Kabul from other provinces due to fighting there. Now those pastures are also becoming towns and houses and now nomads also want to find places for them to live and they know the worth of land. This is the reason why the relationship of nomads and farmers and settlers everywhere has gotten worse. [...] Before, the attention of nomads was to their animals but now nomads see the world and they want to change from nomadic life to city life. They want to have houses, land, other businesses. They are tired of their old life, it was difficult for them.*<sup>112</sup>

103 Liz Alden Wily, “The Battle over Pastures.”

104 Interview with elder of Adramzai community in Awbazak Village, 20 December 2016.

105 Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

106 Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

107 Interview with village elder, Nurzai tribe, Nangab Village of Farah Province, June 2017.

108 Interview with Baluchi nomad elder, Farah Province, June 2017.

109 Interview with Eng. Mirkhail, water specialist, MRRD, Kabul, 9 October 2017.

110 Interview with Baluchi nomad elder, Farah Province, June 2017; Interview with Dr. Esmatullah Khoshal, Adviser to the Director General of Independent General Directorate of Kuchi, October 2017.

111 Interview with Hajji Khan Wazir, head of the Khumari Khil Shura for Dehsabz and Qarabagh, Poza-e-Kharoti Bareekaab, October 2017.

112 Interview with village elder, Deh Sabz of Kabul Province, January 2017.

The quote above hints at how areas neighbouring big cities were inevitably affected to a greater extent, such as Deh Sabz. The same applies to Khaki Jabbar (Kabul Province):

*In the last 15 years a lot of changes took place in our village. Reconstruction took place, our population increased and the road connecting Kabul City to our village was rebuilt. Yes, these changes affected our relations with the nomads. Before, we did not use Charbazgi desert, but now we need to use it, so this is the cause of conflict between nomads and our community. [...] Before, we did not grow things in these disputed areas, but now we are cultivating lalmi [rain-fed wheat crops].<sup>113</sup>*

In Azra, too, the potential for conflict increased dramatically as the price of land rose:<sup>114</sup>

*Our conflict started in Khalilabad because when the Stanikzai tribe captured our pastures in Khalilabad, this conflict did not start before that because the value of land was not high. But now when the land becomes expensive these powerful people captured all the areas and they also want our pastures as well. Another reason is also growth of the population because a lot of people came back from Pakistan, [including one] who is a member of Parliament and [someone else] is giving them three besfa of land to every family and take money from them.<sup>115</sup>*

*This is very expensive land and Khosti people want to intimidate us and take this land from us. One hectare of land is worth \$100,000.<sup>116</sup>*

Rising land prices and demand for housing are the result of the growth on the Afghan economy in 2002-14. They in turn created business opportunities, which a particular category of entrepreneurs (land grabbers) has been quick to exploit.<sup>117</sup> But the demand is real, has not been created artificially by the land grabbers and has to be met somehow. Among else, failure to create space for the cities to grow would choke off any future economic growth.

This is a type of conflict over shrinking resources to be divided among an ever increasing population, which would be difficult to avoid even if the communities were empowered to decide among themselves how to exploit the pastures. The classical type of conflict between nomads and settlers, over the undemarcated boundaries, remains an issue but is not the most pressing one any more. The land grabbers have large resources, many men and weapons, and tend to export the conflict from area to area.

With reduced access to the shrinking pastures, the nomads either end up in the cities or grab whatever piece of land they find. As nomadic life becomes difficult to practice, some of them have no easily viable option to settle down somewhere, except as cheap labour in the cities. Those who can are keen to avoid that fate, and try to seize some land. Inevitably their land occupation causes resistance in some areas:

*In some areas there are problems, but in some areas there are no problems. Some people think “nomads are from Afghanistan, leave them,” but other people think that “they do not have the right to live here, they must live in the mountains.”<sup>118</sup>*

Few nomads have the resources to buy land, so one of the options they have is to occupy pastureland where they can. Both nomad and farmer interviewees confirm that this is happening, for example:

*Before, nomads were living a nomadic life and they were going from one place to another. They stopped that life; they are capturing the whole land of Afghanistan, if it is in north, south, east and west. Now they want to settle; therefore, they need land and they are occupying land.<sup>119</sup>*

113 Interview with village elder, Malang village, February 2017.

114 Interview with village elder, Perai tribe, Shamal area of Derai, Khost Province, April 2017.

115 Interview with elder, Naeemkhel tribe, Khalil Abad area of Logar Province, November 2016.

116 Interview with Kuchi elder, Niazi tribe, Derai of Khost province, April 2017.

117 Interview with village elder, Kol Akakhel area of Imam Sahib, Kunduz Province, April 2017.

118 Interview with Kuchi elder of Tarakhel Tribe for Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, 13 January 2017.

119 Interview with village elder, Malang Village, February 2017.

*Before, we were going to northern provinces, but now they stop us from going to those areas and those pasture areas where we built our houses. These people do not give us permission, then they brought bulldozers and demolished our houses. In one house two children were also killed. A lot of fighting took place between these Tajik and our Tarakhels.<sup>120</sup>*

As a result of competition for the exploitation of pastureland, communities that never before objected to nomads accessing the pastures turned against them:

*Before, nomads were coming for a short time and then they were going back, they did not want to capture our land so the conflict did not take place. But now nomads come here and they capture our land, they build houses on it.<sup>121</sup>*

The decline of irrigation and repeated draughts combined with pasture erosion as a result of urban expansion and of pasture appropriation by farmers. The nomads started taking their animals to the village's pastures and agricultural land. Finally, nomad groups, unable to access pastures in the Central Highlands and elsewhere because of the blockades, turned towards other pastures, increasing demographic pressure even on areas previously unaffected by conflict.<sup>122</sup>

The shifting balance of power between communities is another factor contributing to rising levels of conflict. Says an Andar Pashtun in Imam Sahib (Kunduz):

*Before, our grandfathers and fathers were living well with the Uzbeks and there were no problems. When the revolution started, some people found weapons and became powerful. Then it became the cause of these conflicts. Before, Uzbeks were not taking our land; when they become powerful then they started encroaching on it.<sup>123</sup>*

*The governments before the wars were great, in that time Hazaras could only be soldiers, not officers. Under the previous government nomads were going anywhere, there were no problems for us. The current government is not good. They restrain nomads but allow Hazaras to use all their power.<sup>124</sup>*

Is there substance to the almost universally repeated allegation that strongmen and “mafias” are the ultimate driving force behind much nomad-farmer conflict? Certainly, without some kind of support by such actors, nomad and farmer communities would find it much harder getting involved in sustained conflict. “Before when these commanders and mafia were not present, there were no such conflicts and no one was capturing our land.”<sup>125</sup>

120 Interview with Kuchi elder of Tarakhel tribe in Dehsaz District of Kabul Province, January 2017.

121 Interview with village elder of Pay Menar Village, Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, January 2017.

122 Interview with Kuchi elder, Nasar tribe, Farah Province, June 2017; Interview with village elder, Nangab Village of Farah Province, June 2017.

123 Interview with elder, Andar tribe, Imam Sahib District of Kunduz Province, April 2017.

124 Interview with Kuchi elder, Mullah Khel tribe, Ghazni Province, April 2017.

125 Interview with elder, Andar tribe, Imam Sahib District of Kunduz Province, April 2017.

## 8. Conclusion

The survey, although limited, showed that there are two main types of conflicts between nomads and farmers in Afghanistan today: farmers blocking access to pastures and competition between farmers and nomad communities over appropriating pasture land. Other forms of conflict, such as friction over the violation of undemarcated boundaries, seems to be relatively marginal today when cases of friction are taken separately, although taken together they might be one of the main reasons why sometimes farmer block nomad access. Increasingly, the violation of boundaries is turning into the sparkle that might turn other underlying sources of tension into open, long-lasting and violent conflicts. It might make sense, therefore, to focus analysis on the underlying sources of tension, of which conflict over land appears to be the most important one.

Most policy recommendations coming out of this project will be highlighted in forthcoming papers, as the next stage of follow up research unfolds. However, it is already clear that government immobilism in confronting the issue of reforming the approach towards state land is unsustainable. Growing conflict over the transformation of the pastures into private land is a sign that the development of some framework for the transformation of part of the pastures into urban development areas or agricultural land cannot be postponed indefinitely. Government and parliament inactivity on this front laid the conditions for large scale grabbing and appropriation of state land. Afghanistan's main cities had to grow somehow, given the extreme demographic pressure they were under, and the number of households grew considerably during 1978-2001. As the government failed to meet demand, a new category of entrepreneurs operating illegally rose to exploit the situation - the land grabbers.

The more the conflict turns towards who can control the process of transformation of the pastures into private land, the more it becomes intractable and violent. There are now major economic interests at stake, and the livelihoods of many households is at stake, so that conflict might escalate easily:

*We will use these conflict pastures, and we will not give permission to those who create problems for us. in Kuchi Abad we made houses and we also want to make houses in Khaki Jabbar, Charbazgi. If [name removed] and [name removed] will not give permission to us, we will not give permission to them to enter Kabul and we will close road to them. If anyone will stand against us, we will fight with them and we do not have another way.<sup>126</sup>*

*Here negotiations did not work [...]. We sent a few elders to him, then [name removed] put them in the jail and told to them you Tajiks came here. [name removed] does not accept government. Even if the head of district (Nahia) is appointed, he is appointed by the choice of [name removed]. [name removed] is not listening to people. We want to solve the problem through negotiations, but they do not listen to us. So we must show power to them.<sup>127</sup>*

As a result what might originally have been genuine farmer/nomad conflict has been mutating into and merging with other types of conflict. Some of the interviews carried out by the research team show clearly a tendency towards the ethnicisation of the conflict:

*Qala Haji Mohammad Afzal Khan Village, they are Pashtuns and they help the Kuchis, Zareen Qala are also Pashtun and they are also helping with Kuchis to capture our land and divide it between Kuchis and themselves.<sup>128</sup>*

*Here the competition is between Pashtuns and Uzbeks so here all the villages of Pashtuns and Uzbeks are involved in this conflict.<sup>129</sup>*

126 Interview with Kuchi elder, Kuchi Abad of Botkhak, Kabul, March 2017.

127 Interview with village elder, Khuaja Chasht Area of Deh Sabz district, Kabul, January 2017.

128 Interview with Tajik village elder, Pay Menar village of Deh Sabz District, Kabul province, January 2017.

129 Interview with village elder, Kol Akakhel Area, Imam Sahib, April 2017.

One Pashtun farmer discussed how a politician linked to the community tried to convince the Kuchi strongmen behind the land grabbing in the area to leave them alone, by arguing that they were Pashtuns too and not Tajiks!<sup>130</sup> A Kuchi interviewee mentioned having been approached by a variety of Pashtun tribal shuras and politicians, all promising support, and commented: ‘this is the game of Pashtu and Dari. You must not show yourself weak.’<sup>131</sup>

In environments that are ethnically homogenous, there are signs of tribalisation. In Khost for example, the local population is Karlanris in terms of tribal genealogy, while the Kuchis spending the winter there are Ghilzais. Say one Niazi Kuchi: ‘They are saying that you must not come here because you are Ghilzais.’<sup>132</sup>

*Other villages are also involved in this conflict with Kuchis such as Matoonwal, Perai and Teron. The same in Niazi there are other tribes, which involved in these conflicts. They are such as Esa khel, Nasar and Dawlatzai. They are also helping with Niazi. This is a big conflict that is between Ghilzai and Karla.*<sup>133</sup>

It is clear that nomad-farmer conflict is escalating into something wider and, therefore, there is another rationale for intervening in it. Policy makers have been reluctant to confront the issue head on because of its complex character, limited state capacity and other priorities, such as the on-going insurgency. But the longer an intervention of some kind is postponed, the deeper and more intractable the conflict becomes.

The spread and intensification of nomad-farmer conflict is of course bad in itself, not only because it causes every year the loss of tens of lives, but also because of the economic damage:

*[They] brought Bulldozers and damaged our houses, in one house two children were also killed. A lot of fighting took place between these Tajik and our Tarakhels.*<sup>134</sup>

*Due to these conflicts we lost our animals and we faced with financial loses. For example before I had 300 animals but now I have 200 animals. This is a big loss for me.*<sup>135</sup>

From the perspective of the Kabul government, it is even more worrying that virtually all the interviewees harshly criticised the inability of the authorities to resolve these types of conflicts.

*The governments which were before the war, they were governments in reality but the current governments are not government in reality. [...] The current governments cannot play any role in the resolutions of conflicts and problems. In the previous governments if there were any conflicts and problems, those governments can solve those conflicts and problems very soon.*<sup>136</sup>

*The government is weak and the government has land grabbers who are government officials. [...] If the government was helping with us, we would not go to tribal shuras to resolve our conflict. We would go to government. in Kundoz province if any one has problem, they are going to Taliban to resolve it.*<sup>137</sup>

130 Interview with village Elder, Baghgi community, Khaki Jabbar District of Kabul, March 2017.

131 Interview with Kuchi elder, Taghar tribe, Deh Sabz district of Kabul Province, January 2017.

132 Interview with Kuchi Elder, Niazi tribe, Derai of Khost province, April 2017.

133 Interview with village elder, Matoonwal tribe, Derai of Khost Province, April 2017.

134 Interview with Kuchi Elder, Tarakhel tribe, Deh Sabz District, Kabul Province, January 2017.

135 Interview with Baluchi nomad elder, Farah Province, June 2017.

136 Interview with Kuchi Elder, Nasar tribe, Farah Province, June 2017.

137 Interview with Uzbek nomad elder, Uzbek Baig tribe, Kalam Guzar Area, April 2017.

*The government is not able to implement its decisions and it does not have the ability to support the right of our community. The courts decided three times the decision for our side so why the government cannot implement it. These people are very powerful and the government can not take action against them. Now only Taliban are left to decide for us but taliban are also demanding money from us. We are in confusion to go to which side. Only Daesh is left.*<sup>138</sup>

*Now when there is problem, people go to tribal shuras or Taliban not to government.*<sup>139</sup>

Clearly, the inability or unwillingness of the Kabul authorities to resolve nomad-farmer conflict is contributing to erode the legitimacy of the government. There should clearly be a greater sense of urgency in addressing this issue. If settling every single conflict between nomads and farmers would be a tall order, at least the government should confront the issue of what do with the pastures and how to make land available for urban expansion, weakening some key drivers of illegal land grabbing.

Many interviewees, especially nomads, requested greater state intervention in these conflicts. However, among state officials there is widespread feeling that the Afghan state does not presently have the capacity to contribute towards resolving these conflicts. The Afghan government and donors should explore new ways of dealing with the conflict that bypass the issue of weak state capacity. For example, could nomad communities be offered incentives to change their ways at least to the extent of abandoning long range migrations? There are many technical issues involved in such approaches, that need to be discussed in detail.

As far as the AREU project is concerned, the findings of this paper reinforce what already argued in the Briefing Paper which preceded it:

- The issue of Kuchi settlement (partial or full) deserves more attention and it is turning itself into a source of conflict;
- Nomad-farmer conflict tends to get increasingly politicised and ethnicised, with the implicit risk of catalysing further conflict potential;
- Competition over pasture land intensifies for a number of unrelated reasons, some of which at least could be addressed;
- The absence of the state is very much felt by the parties in conflict, although there is no consensus on what role it could or should play;
- The growing role played by Kuchi strongmen highlights how Kuchi society has been changing.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with elder of Andar tribe, Imam Sahib District of Kunduz Province, April 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with village elder, Kol Akakhel Area of Imam Sahib, April 2017.

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