



THE TALIBAN'S ETHNIC CLEANSING OF THE HAZARAS

Posted on November 1, 2021 by Gabriel Vilanova



After the handover of Afghanistan to the Taliban, the world media specifically turned their attention to Afghanistan. The number of reports, comments, and analyses on Afghanistan skyrocketed. The reports, however, were mostly coming from the major cities of Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar. On their first days, Taliban leaders sought to reassure Afghans that they had changed from their previous harsh rule of the country in the late 1990s. Gradually, as was anticipated, the media turned away its attention from Afghanistan and the Taliban continued doing what they did in the 1990s.

Recently, Amnesty International reported that Taliban forces unlawfully killed 13 ethnic Hazaras in Daikundi province. Of the victims, eleven were members of the Afghan national security forces and two were civilians, including a 17-year-old girl. The killing of these 13 people is a very tiny bit of what the Taliban is doing in remote districts and villages; but the report by the Amnesty International took the organization around three weeks to prepare.

Now that the media has moved on from Afghanistan, and the public in other countries is gradually forgetting about it, the question is – what is really happening in Afghanistan? For now, an absolute economic collapse and human crisis is soon to affect the majority of the population, particularly those in the rural areas whose properties and food are being looted by the Taliban at a time when the Islamist group finds it difficult to keep the economy moving.

Organizations such as UNICEF and the World Health Organizations are sending some aid to the country, but the aid is like a drop in the ocean compared to what the population needs. There is a real disaster unfolding and could easily cause the country and the whole region to destabilize even more. On top of this, as the Taliban have no money and can't even pay their fighters, they loot properties of the Hazara villagers in Daikundi province and the Nawmish district of Helmand province, for example, and force the inhabitants to leave their houses, lands and everything they possess.

Poverty and hunger are the common problems affecting most of the population of the country, regardless of their ethnicity; but for the Hazaras things are much more difficult. In addition to the widespread poverty and the upcoming harsh winter, which is very likely to take hundreds of lives, the Taliban and ISIS both have been attacking the Hazaras. The Taliban have carried out forced displacement of the Hazaras from their lands, and ISIS have been directly killing them. The latest cases are the terrorist attacks on the Shiite Hazara mosque in Kunduz, and the attack on the Shiite mosque in Kandahar where more than 200 people including children were killed.

To those familiar with the Taliban, it is well known that killing is the Taliban's main specialty. In the last two and a half decades, the group has killed thousands of national and international forces, have planted roadside bombs, used hundreds of suicide bombers and took the lives of thousands of civilians. The Taliban fighters are used to fighting, destroying the built environment, and looting. For the most part, the Taliban fighters have been trained to do non-stop jihad. Without jihad and fighting, the Islamist fighters lose their sense of identity and become meaningless.

After 20 years, the Taliban's primary enemies, the American and NATO troops are gone; but that does not mean the Taliban's thirst for jihad is quenched. The Taliban's passion for killing in the path of Allah is always there and the group has not remained idle. The evidence shows the Taliban has turned its focus on an internal enemy who, as the Taliban believes, has been helping Americans and NATO in spreading democracy. That enemy is the defenseless Hazaras, an ethnic group with Mongol origins, Persian language and Shiite faith, all of which is different from the Taliban's Aryan roots, their Pashtu language and Sunni faith.

The Taliban's violence against the Hazaras follows a similar pattern to the way the Afghan state persecuted the Jews of Afghanistan. In the 1940s, the Pashtuns, the most powerful ethnic group, were influenced by the Nazi Germany. As the Pashtuns also dominated the state, they forcibly put the Jews into slums in Kabul and prohibited them from doing any job outside their ghettos. Hundreds lost their lives as a result of absolute impoverishment, but some survived and managed to reach Israel by the 1950s.

The persecution of the Hazaras began when the British brought Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, the Pashtun king, in power in the 1880s, when Amir gathered fatwas from the Sunni mullahs against the Shiite Hazaras, who wanted to keep their de facto independence in Hazarajat. The result of Amir's campaign was genocide, mass displacement and enslavement of the Hazaras in the hands of Pashtuns. Since then the Hazaras have always been dehumanized and considered as sub-humans. Until 1920, selling of Hazaras as slaves was legal.

In the last 20 years of the international presence in Afghanistan, despite marginalization and discrimination imposed by the Afghan state, the Hazaras tried to build a future through education and peaceful means of engagement in political power; but now with the withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan, the ethnic and religious minority faces a serious threat to their survival.

While the Taliban are committing atrocities, the UN, one of whose missions is to maintain peace and prevent crimes such as genocide, is silent on what is happening to the Hazaras. No organization better than UN knows that Hazaras were and still are at great risk; but all it has done during the last 20 years is to disarm the Hazaras and then leave them alone in the hands of the terrorists.

In the last 20 years, most Hazara provinces were excluded from development programs financed by NATO and the US. Of all the 34 provinces where Provincial Reconstruction Teams have spent millions, the only Hazara province that benefitted from development project was Bamiyan, where the New Zealand PRT was based. One reason for the exclusion of Hazara provinces was that, based on the counter-insurgency or the so-called "COIN Theory," the main purpose of the international operation in Afghanistan was to clear the areas of the Taliban, install new ruling, and gain legitimacy among the locals through development programs. And as there was no Taliban in the Hazara majority areas, there was no conflict and neither any development project.

Part of the reason for excluding the Hazara majority provinces from development programs was the dangerous picture that Pashtun influenced think tanks painted of the Hazaras. Hazaras were exaggeratedly introduced as pro-Iran, an actor in the region whose influence was neither favored by the US nor NATO. Whatever the reason, the Hazara majority provinces were economically marginalized, and that led to further impoverishment of the Hazaras. The collapse of the Afghan government and the Afghan army gave the Taliban access to huge amounts of American military equipment, mainly meant for the Afghan army. Now the Taliban commandos use that American equipment to force Hazaras to leave their lands.

One question that is asked is why the Hazaras are being targeted. To the Hazaras themselves, it is not very clear why the Islamist groups, such as, the Taliban and most governments of Afghanistan have hated the Hazaras. In other words, Hazaras are not able to make sense of their experience in Afghanistan.

However, there are a number of realities that need to be taken into account. In Afghanistan, Sikh, Hindu and Jewish communities have gone extinct. In the last 20 years, Christian converts had to live in hiding, and in some cases were put in high-security prisons. The Taliban's war against women and girls is well known. The Taliban's hatred towards the Hazaras could be for similar reasons; that Pashtun dominated governments and terrorist groups hate all those who are different. As a result of widespread hatred against the Hazaras, thousands of Hazara lives have been taken and their lands grabbed. The Hazaras

have not disappeared completely because they are millions. But if nothing is done, thousands will have to die, either directly by the Taliban and ISIS, or because of hunger.

When it comes to Hazaras, there is something very important, but generally not stated – and that is the fact that the Hazara genocide in the 1890s by the Pashtun King Amir Abdul Rahman Khan was made possible because of British support. In fact, had Abdul Rahman not been brought to power by the British, the unification of Afghanistan at the cost of Hazara lives would not have happened in the first place. The British historians probably know this very well, but choose not to include that in their books. The British had a role in the genocide of the Hazaras; but as this ethnic group does not have any strong organization nor any lobbying power in the West, and their story is usually told by the most powerful ethnic group of the country, the Pashtuns, the British find it easy to get away with their role in the genocide of the Hazaras.

Gabriel Vilanova is an Afghan scholar, writer and journalist.

The [*featured image*](#) shows the work of a Hazara artist, who wishes to remain anonymous.

