

Literature

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VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO. PARTICIPATION OF THE HAZARAS OF AFGHANISTAN IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

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Abstract. The article dwells upon the participation of Afghan Hazara in the Syrian conflict. The author examines the reasons of migration of The Hazara to Iran and the reasons of emergence of the Hazara armed formations in Syria. Attention is

also paid to the problem of discrimination against the Hazara in Afghanistan.

The Hazara make up, according to various estimates, 10-20% of the population of Afghanistan. They are of Mongolian and Turkic origin and originally settled in the Hazarajat region of Central Afghanistan. Mostly the Hazara are Shia imamites or Ismailis. According to historians, the first Hazara in Afghanistan were warriors who were left in the country by Genghisids after the conquest of the country in 1221-1223. "Hezar" in Iranian means "thousand." Thus, we are talking about a military unit, a security garrison, which numbered a thousand soldiers.

Currently, the Hazara are present throughout the country. For centuries, the Hazara of Afghanistan have been marginalized. In the cities, they were usually servants, cleaners, porters, and were subjected to repressions by Pashtun rulers. In the middle of the 19 century, they were subjected to ethnic cleansing, organized by the Pashtun Amir Abdul Rahman. It should be noted that in neighboring Pakistan, the Hazara faced almost no discrimination until the 1990s. For example, General Musa Khan, a Hazara Shiite, was at certain time the commander-in-chief of the Pakistani army and later served as the Governor of Balochistan province. The Hazara, including women, are actively pursuing higher education.

The participation of the Hazara in the "Shia International" (foreign participants practicing the Shia faith, fighting on the side of Bashar al-Assad) became known not long ago. Before that, the activities of the Hazara were concentrated in their countries of residence: Afghanistan and Iran.

In Afghanistan in the 1990s, the Hazara were part of an alliance opposing the Taliban. In 1998, when the Taliban captured Mazar-I-Sharif, the Hazara population was attacked by the Taliban. Thousands of the Hazara men and boys were killed. The massacre was revenge for the Taliban perished during their failed attempt to capture Mazar-I-Sharif in 1997.

The political atmosphere changed after the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. Since then, the Hazara have sought to actively participate in the political life of the country. The participation of the Hazara in the elections has a significant impact on the result. Thus, the once oppressed the Hazara have become a politically active part of the population of modern Afghanistan. In January 2015, after the lower house of Parliament rejected 10 new Ministerial candidates, some of whom were the Hazara, hundreds of the Hazara took to the streets of Kabul in protest. The authorities were forced to reconsider their decision. As a result, all the candidates were elected after the second round of voting in April 2015.

Representatives of the Hazara community hold several high academic and government positions, including those in the Cabinet of the government of national unity.

Nevertheless, the Hazara often become victims of violence on both ethnic and religious grounds. At the same time, ethnicity remains the dominant dividing line in the Afghan state. The Hazara are a historically marginalized but highly mobile community that sits at the intersection of the country's complex ethnic, political and religious differences.

The Hazara in Afghanistan: between the IS and the Taliban

The Hazara often become victims of terrorist attacks. In July 2016, at least 80 Hazara people were killed and more than 200 wounded in an attack near the city of Deh Mazang. The Islamic State (IS) terrorist organization claimed responsibility for the attack. After the attack, one of the commanders of IS, Abu Omar Khosrasani, threatened more attacks on the Hazara minority. He said in an interview with Reuters that "if they (the Hazara – V. K.) do not stop leaving for Syria and not be slaves of Iran, we will definitely continue such attacks." However, there is

no evidence of direct recruitment of the Hazara directly in Afghanistan.

In March 2018, a suicide bomber attacked a police checkpoint in the Afghan capital, killing at least 10 people and wounding 18. IS militants claimed responsibility for the attack. It should be noted that the attack took place near the memorial meeting dedicated to the death of Abdul Ali Mazari, the leader of the Hazara community of Afghanistan, who was killed by the Taliban in 1995.

The Hazara are also attacked from the side of the Taliban. In late October – early November 2018, the Malistan and Jagori districts of Ghazni province and the Khaz Uruzgan district of Uruzgan province, where The Hazara live, were attacked by the Taliban. These events resulted in destruction of many houses, schools and buildings and disruption of telecommunications.

After the attack, protests began in Kabul. The discontent of the Hazara who came to the presidential Palace in the capital was caused by the fact that the army and the police were unable to protect the Hazara areas from the Taliban offensive in Ghazni province. A suicide bomber attacked the demonstration, killing 6 people.

The Hazara refugees in Iran and the Syrian conflict

A large Hazara community exists in Iran. They began to arrive there as refugees in the 19th century. Around 1850s Afghan Shiites began to move to Iran for economic reasons. The confessional factor also had no small share. However, the modern history of Afghan immigration to Iran began in 1979. The lack of security, unemployment, and inflation forced Afghans to leave the country. In particular, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to the migration of nearly 3 million Afghans to neighboring Iran. After withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1989, approximately 1.4 million Afghans (and the Hazara among them) returned home. Later, the civil war in Afghanistan (1989–1993)

led to a new wave of forced migration to Iran. And the migrants were mostly educated middle-class people.

Currently, between 2.5 and 3 million refugees from Afghanistan live in Iran. In 2014, Iran formed the Liwa Fatimiyun unit (Fatima followers Brigade) out of Afghan Hazara refugees. The brigade is named after the youngest daughter of the prophet Muhammad. The organizer of Liwa Fatimiyun, Ali-Reza Tawassoli, was a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war and a confidant of the commander of the Iranian special forces al-Qods, Qasem Suleimani. It is believed that the number of his brigade is from 12 000 to 20 000 people. The recruitment of fighters takes place in Afghan refugee camps in Eastern Iran. It is widely believed that the group is trained and armed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The Fatimiyun Brigade throughout the period of its involvement in the Syrian conflict participated in the fiercest battles. This resulted in high casualties: at least 700 Afghans from the unit were killed in Aleppo and Deraa alone. On February 3, 2016, Syrian government forces broke through the blockade of the Shiite-populated towns of Nubel and az-Zahra (North of Aleppo province). In the forefront of the attack there were Hezbollah and foreign Shia formations, including the Hazara Fatimiyun Brigade.

Subsequently, Liwa Zainabiyun, a Brigade of followers of Zainab, named after Zainab bint Ali, granddaughter of the prophet Muhammad, was detached from the Fatimiyun. Zainabiyun was formed from volunteers of the citizens of Pakistan. Since 2013, they have served in Fatimiyun together with the Afghans, but as the number of Pakistani volunteers increased, it was decided to create a separate formation.

In addition to the Hazara refugees who arrived in Iran, Fatimiyun Brigade consists of the the Hazara who lived in Syria before the political crisis. Most of them settled near The Sayeda Zainab mosque, a famous Shia shrine located south of Damascus. But, once the war began, the Hazara, like many of Syria's Shiites, fell victims to attacks because of their religious affiliation.

In April 2013, officials in Afghanistan announced that they would look into reports of the Afghan citizens fighting alongside B. Assad. In May 2014, Kabul urged Tehran not to involve the Afghan citizens living in Iran in the fighting in Syria. It was also stated that if there is evidence of direct recruitment of Afghans, Kabul will file a complaint with the UN High Commissioner for refugees.

Nevertheless, Tehran denies using foreign fighters. At the same time, Iranian officials call the Afghans "volunteers." According to observers, Afghan officials have good reasons to object to the participation of Afghan citizens in the Middle East war. This not only makes Afghanistan's close but strained relationship with Iran, a more powerful neighbor and trading partner more complicated, but could also trigger a wave of inter-confessional conflicts within Afghanistan.

The problem of the Hazara in interregional relations

Given the cultural and linguistic ties between Afghanistan and Iran, it is not surprising that Iran has an influence on Afghanistan. Iran aims to be a strong player in the Middle East. Iran's influence on events in Afghanistan includes overt support for the Afghan government; economic and cultural ties with the Afghan population, especially the Shia minority; and covert support, including provision of weapons and training to various insurgents and politicians whom Kabul views as oppositional.

Afghanistan's relations with Iran have not been stable for many years. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Iran supported the cause of the Afghan resistance and provided financial and military assistance to rebel leaders who promised to support the Iranian model of the Islamic revolution. After the emergence of the Taliban and their brutal treatment of the Shia minority in Afghanistan, Iran has stepped up aid to Taliban opponents. Relations with the Taliban deteriorated further in 1998 after Taliban forces seized the Iranian Consulate in

Mazar-I-Sharif and executed Iranian diplomats. In the early 2000s, relations between the countries were tense. The main problem of bilateral relations is Iran's long-standing claim to share the water resources of the river Helmand, which irrigates the southern agricultural region of Afghanistan, and then its waters flow into Iran. Other concerns are the continued presence of Afghan refugees in Iran and Iran's concerns about the Shia minority in Afghanistan. Since 2005 the government of Hamid Karzai felt significant pressure from the West to abandon close relations with Iran, which, in its turn, tried to establish friendly relations.

Iran continues to provide assistance, including arms supplies and military training to some rebel groups. Since 2007, coalition and Afghan forces have intercepted several Iranian arms shipments. Tehran's relationship with the rebels, while not ideologically sound, is consistent with Iran's short- and medium-term goal of undermining coalition efforts and the international military presence in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's relations with Iran deteriorated in 2007 as a result of the forced repatriation of more than 360,000 illegal Afghans from Iran, as well as the discovery of evidence of Iran providing weapons, technology and training to the Taliban. Nevertheless, Iran has provided Afghanistan with extensive development and cultural assistance, economic support and cooperation in the fight against drugs. In particular, Tehran actively promotes the achievements of Persian culture throughout Afghanistan. Tolo TV Live Online-Afghanistan, a popular private television station that accounts for nearly 90% of the Afghan market, showcases television and film productions made in the neighboring country. Iranian missions in Afghanistan constantly invite Afghan journalists to their events, participate in local exhibitions, distribute free literature translated into Farsi specifically for Iranian-speaking residents of Afghanistan.

The participation of the Afghan Hazara in the Syrian conflict drew the attention of Saudi Arabia, which from the very beginning sought the overthrow of the Assad regime. In addition,

after the clerical regime came to power in Iran and Tehran became an enemy of the Saudis, the Kingdom became the main ally of the United States in the region. In its turn, Riyadh maintains close ties with Afghan Sunni political and religious leaders. Perhaps the Saudis appreciated the fact that at one time the Afghan government officially sided with the Saudis in their war in Yemen.

Naturally, Saudi Arabia is interested in reducing Iran's influence in the region. The Saudis believe that radical Sunni movements such as the Taliban represent a natural obstacle to the spread of revolutionary Shia doctrine in the region, and thus invest heavily in radical madrassas in Pakistan, where a significant number of Afghan and Pakistani youth receive religious education.

It will also be recalled that Saudi Arabia was among the countries that officially recognized the Taliban regime in 1996.

After taking the official oath (24.09.2014), Ashraf Ghani, the President of Afghanistan, established particularly close relations with Saudi Arabia, seeking the Kingdom's intervention and support in the process of settling relations with the Taliban. Saudi Arabia and several member countries of the cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf have some influence on the leaders of the movement. It is obvious that without pressure from Saudi Arabia, the Taliban will not enter into a peaceful dialogue with the Kabul government.

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The distinctive ethnic and cultural identity of the Hazara and the experience of centuries of persecution have shielded them from radical sectarianism supported by Iran. Unlike the Shiites in Lebanon and Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen, the Hazara have escaped the influence of Shia radicalism. In the 1990s, the Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari refused to play the confessional card in Afghan politics. After the assassination of the leader by the Taliban in 1995, his successors followed the path he had chosen.

In the spring of 2019, Iran's top leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei thanked Afghan fighters who fought in the Iranian Fatimiyun Division in Syria. According to the Afghan TV channel Tolo TV Live Online-Afghanistan, meeting with the families of Afghans killed in Syria, the Iranian spiritual leader noted the high morale and endurance of Afghan fighters. In response, the Afghan Foreign Ministry condemned Iran for sending Afghan refugees to war in Syria.

Despite the paucity of information about the situation of the Hazara in Afghanistan and Iran, it is clear that this small nation (there are only about 5 million in both countries) is going through a difficult period of self-awareness. The very fact of their participation in the civil war in Syria shows that fighting for peace and the rights of another people, the Hazara dream of a radical change in their fate. There is a reason to believe that the experience of Syrians defending their right to life according to their laws, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation, will be taken into account in other countries of the Middle East.

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OLGA BIBIKOVA. RESTRUCTURING IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

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Abstract. Saudi Arabia has announced a program of reforms aimed at abandoning oil production as the only source of income