

Political systems of tribes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The importance of a tribe as a political system and its reluctance to subdue to the state efforts to erase it**INTRODUCTION**

The tribe is an important political system that existed in the world mainly in the area of the Middle East. The Rwala and the Pathans are two examples of existing tribes that play a major role in the area in which they are located, proved by the fact that their tribal system coexist within the states boundary. The two tribes not only do they exit in one country but they maintain their existence within different countries. Due to their geographical location in which the two tribes live, the border zone, each country left them alone with their political system without interference from the central government. The Rwala have good relations within the countries they lived in its borders with the exception of Iraq, while the Pathans were free from state control until recently, when the US invaded Afghanistan and pressured Pakistan to take control of the tribal areas of Pakistan as they harbor Taliban. Why does the tribal political system still exist in the era of the Westphalian state system? And why are the tribes' resilient towards the state actions to take control of their area? These are the questions that this research paper is going to investigate. The research paper is divided into three parts. The first one is devoted to giving background information about the two tribes of Pathans and Rwala. The second part explores the reasons behind the strength of the tribes and the last part probes the reasons behind the reluctance of tribes towards the policies of the state to detribalize them.

Background Information about the Rawala and the Pathans

In order to understand the reasons behind the coexistence of the tribe as a political system with the current political system of the state, a basic

definition for the tribe is needed. The tribe is: “ a notional form of human social organization based on a set of smaller groups... having temporary or permanent political integration, and defined by traditions of common descent, language, culture, and ideology.”[1] The members of a tribe share many characteristics with each other that make them similar and the most important one is common descent which denotes having relation to the family of the prophet, his companions or his tribe Quraish. For a tribe to legitimize its rule and survive it must trace its genealogy to the prophet. Any connection to the prophet or his surroundings serves as the basic instrument to justify the rule of the tribe. This can be both true and fictive, for instance many Berber tribes in Northern Africa changed their names from Berber to Arabic to point to their relations to the prophet. While in the Ottomans were using such names as Ali and Hussein to justify their rule of Islamic empire to the extent that in any mosque in Turkey the name Hussein and Ali are engraved which make people to mistake the mosque for a Shiite one, which is not. Without lineage to the prophet, the tribe will lose ground and cannot legitimate its power within its population, therefore honor lies in lineage.

The tribe exists because its members insure its existence by following a particular code that serves as the base of order and law. This code might change from one tribe to another but the basic idea is that the code insures that each member of the tribe is abiding by the customs of the tribe; this is done through the participation of individuals in decision-makings that are done through consensus. For instance, the tribal code within the Rwala is very different from the Islamic law to the extent that when a case involves a man and a woman the tribal court tends to favor women, while among the

Pathans the tribal code “ Pukhtunwali” tend to be influenced by Islamic law to the extent that both the tribal law and Islamic law are two face of one coin.

The Rwala are a tribe that is divided into five sections: the Murath, the Doghman, the Ga`adza`a, the Frejje and the Kwatzbe[2] that live in the border zone of four countries: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq. While the Pathans are a tribe that live in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the border zone between the two countries, both the Pathans that live in Afghanistan and those that live in Pakistan do not recognize the physical border and regard themselves as one united tribe. For example, whenever their fellow tribes are in trouble they immediately help them as it is shown in the movie, “ the Pathans” Disappearing World, the Pakistani Pathans gathered to help their fellow Pathans in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion, and one of the Pathans justified this act as helping their brother in time of need. This sense of brotherhood is not only present among Pathans but also among the Rwala, this help is a responsibility that each person in tribe is required to fulfill for his family members, this responsibility is not obligatory. For example, a person may refuse to help his uncle and be scot-free; however his reputation is going to be tarnished.

The Political Importance of the Tribe

The political importance of the tribe lies in the way of life of tribal people which values consensus, solidarity, reputation and revenge. There is no person with utmost authority in the tribe nor is power hereditary. Each tribe has a chief but this chief cannot oblige his tribe to do certain actions without going through consensus, as every person in the tribe has a right to express

an opinion over matter that concerns the tribe. This need for consensus among tribal people makes it hard for any state to control the tribe or influence it, because when the tribes perceive its chief as being a government agent or accepting bribes from government his reputation will be unsavory and will the population will elect a new chief; and even when tribes are being outstripped of their heads, they still remain intact.

Reputation is in an important aspect of tribal people because chiefs cannot coerce or compel his population; however the only political force available to him is to influence decision making. And in order for a chief to influence his population he needs four factors: “ good information, the ability to give good advice, a reputation for sound counsel and an audience to influence,”[3] the sources of reputation for the Rwala come from Lineage, honor, raiding, generosity, bravery, hospitality. Besides, the fact of having a consensus in which every individual’s opinion is valued which makes it hard to reach a unified view about any matter, to the extent that the tribe is being under the tyranny of the minority. The consensus involves major issues such as helping those who are at war or a very small matter such as a domestic scuffle between a father and his son. In the movie, the Jirga, the body responsible for making consensus among the Pathans, gather to make his opinion about the father that complained about his son not paying him enough. The result of the consensus was interesting because even though the son did not like the decision, in the end he subdue to the decision of the Jirga by kissing the white bribe of his father. The Islamic influence helps to explain the decision made by the Jirga as parents are giving special status in Islamic law.

The absence of a central power in the tribal structure makes it hard to control the tribe because “ no individual has political power, no group has political power and no family has political power; power is restricted to the workings of public opinion. Even public opinion has no formal coercive power; co-operation can be withdrawn and that is all.”[4] The tribal population does have loyalties to their tribe but not to the state, because the state is a resented system by the both Pathans and Rwala for one reason: it interferes in their lifestyle and tribal people do not like to be interfered with. Even when the tribal population exerts loyalty to a particular state it does so with the idea of paying tribute to the ruling family and not to the state itself. For instance, the Rwala members who are in the soil of Saudi Arabia pledge their loyalty outside the tribe to the family of Al Saud and not the state of Saudi Arabia.[5]

Solidarity is another aspect that explains the strength of the tribe. Each member of the tribe is responsible for his family members and the tribe is responsible for its members. This solidarity does not only involve crucial issues but also mundane and quotidian ones like re-sewing a tents, as it is stated by William Lancaster: “ resewing a tent is a good example of how co-operation is achieved...it would be a formidable task for one or two people, but it is always a co-operative effort.”[6] This presence of solidarity does not mean that tribal people do not have problems or that they do not create troubles between themselves, problems and disagreements exist within tribes. However, the ways problems are resolved differ in a way that they are resolved but not to the extent of requiring interference outside the tribe. Because the tribe needs always to show strength and that its members are

not divided, as it is pointed by William Lancaster “ The struggle between the two brothers for the smuggling franchise was resolved, on the surface at least, by the need to present a united face towards intervention.”[7]

Revenge is an important characteristic of the tribe; this vindictiveness is allowed when a person from the tribe is killed. Therefore his family members have the duty to take his revenge not necessarily by killing the culprit but by killing any member of the family or the tribe of the culprit. Nobody can stop revenge or prevent the killing from taking place, unless the family of the bereaved accepted a financial retribution for the death of her family member.[8] The revenge process involves a cycle that is hard to stop without blood to the extent that the reason behind the feud might be forgotten. As it is pointed out by William Lancaster: “ the Mu`abhil have been involved in a single feud for fifteen twenty years. It started with a row over a camel or a sheep, no one can remember ... A Mu`abhil killed a Sabih. A settlement was arranged and the Mu`abhil paid about forty-five camels in compensation.”[9] However, the problem did not completely end because the dead man left a son who was 4-year old at the time of the compensation deal and when he grew up he demanded for his share that the Mu`abhil refused to pay due to the rising prices of camel. Revenge is best understood that none of the tribes' member's blood is cheap and that killing its population will involve a long fight before being it resolved. The tribes are reluctant to follow the bureaucracy of the state by going to civil courts to get their right as it will take time and probably the ruling will not be something they expected. Therefore, they prefer to take revenge instead. This is another reason which makes the state unattractive to the tribal population.

The Reasons behind the Failure of the State in Subduing Tribes

One of the reasons behind the reluctance of tribes to be urbanized and fall under the rule of the state lies in its distrust of interference. While the Rwala and Pathan both welcome new ideas they, however, dislike any change exerted by force. According to William Lancaster “ changed imposed from outside is another matter and they will resist it bitterly, not because its imposition does not allow them to react and partake in accordance with other factors.”[10] The same thing goes for the Pathans, the United States of America is influencing Pakistan to get hold of the areas where Pathans live. However, the Pathans are not willing to subdue because they do not like any change to be imposed on them from the outside.[11]

The two tribes of Rwala and Pathans both live in very sensitive areas to the extent that countries do not try to impose state rule their areas and allow them have their tribal law, not because both Jordan and Pakistan (before the US-Afghan war) are not able to destroy them but because simply suppressing them is not worth it; it would just bring more troubles than benefits. Furthermore, both tribes have relations with the states they live in. For instance, the Rwala maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia through marriage relations to the family of Al Saud while in Syria they are representatives in the parliament, therefore serving the interest of their tribe. Regarding the Pathans, the current president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai is Pathan from the Durrani section.

The economic autonomy of the tribal people is also one of the reasons that give a state a hard time when dealing with tribes. Especially as the means used by tribes are not illegal. For instance, the livelihood of many Rwala

Population lies on smuggling which works well for the tribe as it is situated in a border area. Although this smuggling is much resented by states such as Jordan, it is tolerated for two reasons. First, the state gives certain autonomy as long as they patrol the border. Second, even smuggling can be beneficial to countries such Iraq during the Gulf War where the embargo prevented its population from getting its basic needs such as tires, while Saudi Arabia gets fruits from Styria in return for cars.

As it is discussed above revenge is an important aspect that defines a tribe, it is one of the most misunderstood terms about the tribes, because revenge does not necessitate the killing the person who committed the murder. But killing anybody from his family, tribe or country is sufficient to quench the need for revenge. When Americans bomb areas in Waziristan and Swat Valley and kill many people, the Pathans feel the need to take revenge for the killings of their family members by killing any American soldier that they come across, and this revenge cycle is hard to stop as long as any person dead requires a revenge, save in case the family accepts a financial retribution.

Other options of detribalizing the tribes lies on either urbanizing them or make them kill each other but then the questions rise of whether it is worth it and who will patrol the border in case of the border zone between Jordan, Syria , Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The British tried to introduce education in the Pathan tribal areas but they failed and so did the Pakistani government which succeeded in just including Pakistani national anthems in schools. However, the Pathans were keen on not letting the central government make them dependent on their education and health system. The Pathans revere

the Islamic law which is the cornerstone of Pukhtunwali and want to maintain their autonomy health by basing it on the prophet`s medicine practices through herb and Koran.

Conclusion

The tribe is a political system that has survived within the epoch of the nation -state. The social equality and the political importance that the tribe gives to its individual make the tribe a powerful entity that proved to be hard for states to erase. Tribal people are proud of their tribe due to their lineage to the prophet and cherish the qualities of solidarity, reputation, hospitality, and honor in addition to revenge. The failure of understanding the tribal traits makes it hard to suppress them let alone communicate with them. For instance, the reason why the Taliban refused to turn in Osama Bin Laden to the US is rooted in the fact that he was a guest, therefore turning him in is a transgression of one of the components of their Pukhtunwali: hospitality. And going further to suppressing them through military actions will just exacerbate matters as the American do not understand how revenge is dealt with, which would make any person with an American military uniform a revenge target.

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