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Safi Tribe, AKA Mohmand Safi

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Program for Culture and Conflict Studies

SAFI TRIBE
AKA: MOHMAND SAFI

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Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, CA

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PRIMARY LOCATION

The Safi live generally in the following areas: Kunar Province of Afghanistan; along the western tributaries of the Kunar River and the southern tributaries of the Pech River; Mohmand Agency of Pakistan in the hills north of the Mohmand Tribe; the valleys of Laghman, Barkot, Daminj, Alishang, and Alingar.

Mohmand Agency is geographically sub-divided into Upper Mohmand and Lower Mohmand, the lower division being the most fertile. The agency is an area of rugged mountains with barren slopes. General slope of the area is from northeast with an average height over 1,450 meters. Ilazai near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, at 2,716 meters, is the highest peak. Another important peak is Yari Sar at 1,929 meters. The most extensive part of the territory in the Mohmand Agency lies in the glens and valley that start at the Tartarra Mountain, south of the Kabul River, and the Ilazai Mountain, north of the Kabul River – the main settlements being in the valleys of Shilman, Gandab, and Pindiali. Running water is hard to find, except in Shilman and Gandab.¹

KEY TERRAIN FEATURES

Valleys: Bara, Gandab, Shilman

Plains: Bohai Dag

Mountains: Kabul Tsappar

Rivers: Kabul, Kunar, Swat, Bara

WEATHER

The climate in Mohmand Agency is hot in summer, with high temperatures around 105 degrees Fahrenheit, and cool in winter, with low temperatures around 30 degrees Fahrenheit. The summer season starts in May and lasts about four months, while the winter season starts in November and lasts through February. Rainfall is scant, most of which falls during the winter.²

RELIGION/SECT

The Safi are of the Hanafi sect of Sunni Islam, believed to be converts to Islam starting in the 17th Century.

MIGRATORY PATTERNS

The Safi Tribe is not migratory.

ALLIANCES

The Safi Tribe was divided by the Durand Line in 1893. Safis on either side of the Durand Line would likely support the other in times of crisis. Since they live alongside the Mohmand Tribe, it is also likely they would ally together against a

¹ <http://www.fata.gov.pk/subpages/mohmand.php>

² <http://www.fata.gov.pk/subpages/mohmand.php>

common threat. The Safis have also been known to ally with the Shinwari Tribe.³

FEUDS

The Massaoud and Gurbaz clans of the Safi Tribe had been feuding over the mining of the Ziarat white marble quarry in Mohmand, but in early 2008 the Pakistani Taliban intervened and brokered a settlement, in exchange for a large up-front fee and a tax on every truck leaving the quarry. Even the Pakistan Government had not been able to settle this feud. In addition, the Taliban appointed a Massaoud clan contractor to run the quarry and placed a Taliban guard to ensure tax is paid on every truckload. The division arranged by the Taliban gave a portion of the marble mining to both clans.⁴

The Safi tribe has historical animosity with the Gujars, consisting primarily of raiding villages and stealing livestock.⁵

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There is some evidence that a portion of the Safi Tribe may be “pashtunized” Pashai or Dehgan/Tajik people who were assimilated into the tribal framework.⁶

UNITY & SECURITY

Though not under a single chief, the Safis are strongly united, and each clan partners with the others.⁷

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TALIBAN/AL-QAEDA

At least two clans of the Safi Tribe, the Massaoud and Gurbaz, are cooperating with the Pakistani Taliban over the mining of the Ziarat white marble quarry.⁸

Umar Khalid, a member of the Qandharo sub-tribe of the Safi tribe, is the dominant Taliban leader in Mohmand Agency. He is in his early thirties and has been associated with the banned Harakat-ul-Mujahideen militant organization, with which he fought in the insurgency in Kashmir. After 9/11, since he had experience in Kashmir, he also fought in Afghanistan alongside Afghan Taliban against the US invasion. Umar Khalid’s stated objective is the implementation of Sharia law in

³ Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1958.

⁴ New York Times, “Pakistan marble helps Taliban stay in business” by Pir Zubair Shah and Jane Perlez, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/world/asia/14iht-14taliban.14463354.htm>

⁵ Louis Dupree, “Tribal Warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Reflection of the Segmentary Lineage System,” in

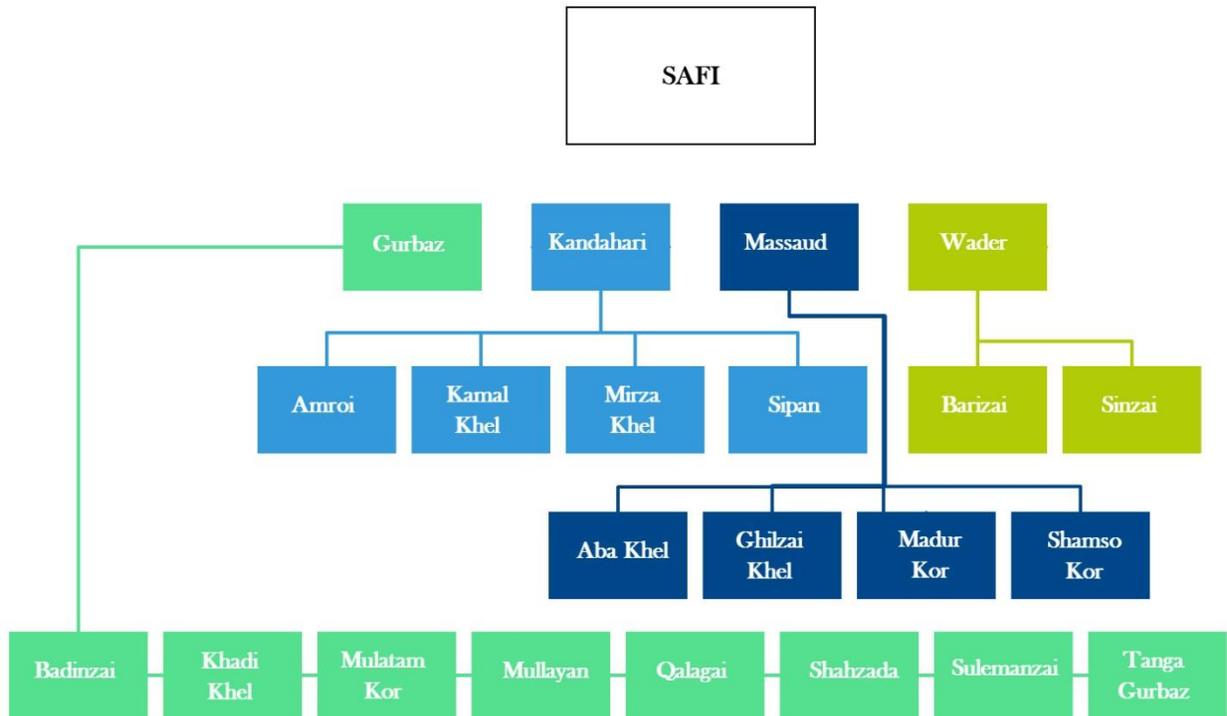
Islam and Tribal Societies: From the Atlas to the Indus, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed and David M. Hart (London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 273-275.

⁶ Asgar Christensen, *Afghanistan Journal*, Vol 7, 1980, “The Pashtuns of Kunar: tribe, class and community organization,” pp. 79-92.

⁷ Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1958.

⁸ New York Times, “Pakistan marble helps Taliban stay in business,” by Pir Zubair Shah and Jane Perlez, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/world/asia/14iht-14taliban.14463354.html>

Pakistan at any cost. He represents Mohmand Agency within the Tehrik-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP).⁹ He was known to be a close ally of the now deceased Baitullah Mehsud.¹⁰



⁹ Imtiaz Ali, "The Emerging Militancy in Pakistan's Mohmand Agency," *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2008), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4681&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=167&no_cache=1

¹⁰ Ronald Sandee, "Developments in the Jihadi Resurgence in Pakistan: January 2008," *Nine Eleven/Finding Answers Foundation*, March 5, 2008, <http://www.nefafoundation.org>