

# Recent Developments in Kabul's Shar-e-Naw and Central Bazaar Districts

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## Summary

This paper focuses on recent infrastructural and functional changes in two central areas of Kabul, namely, Shar-e-Naw and the bazaar area. While the latter got the impetus for its reconstruction from the fact that it was one of Kabul's most severely destroyed areas, the opposite holds true for Shar-e-Naw which recently suffered from a more functional change due to the fact that there was hardly any destruction in this area. As a result of a growing urban economy and population in combination with a multitude of international activities connected with the so-called reconstruction of Afghanistan, Kabul is characterized by quite important functional changes in certain areas. The recent reconstruction of Kabul is dominated by challenges and opportunities, among which we can identify two major processes as changing the face of Kabul significantly. One is the growing influence of international organizations as a dominant factor in reshaping the city in certain parts and the second focus is the changing functions of Kabul's central bazaar as a result of it becoming more and more a playfield of local forces struggling for influence and power in Kabul.

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## 1 Shar-e-Naw being re-shaped by international organizations

The political pre-considerations for the reconstruction of Afghanistan included the implementation of a multitude of programmes of national security and development at the same time. The National Development Plan (NDP) results in a huge number of international development agencies being concentrated in Kabul (Dittmann 2004). There is an uncharted jungle of national and international organizations. Overlapping interests amongst them cause sometimes severe competition which is further been fuelled by the fact that most aid institutions gather in Kabul due to security reasons. This struggle for development related resources is proving to be a serious obstacle for development.

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The recent establishment of a great number of international, national and non-governmental aid organizations in Kabul reflects the general and worldwide trend of the last two decades. With concentration on Kabul, 822 foreign NGOs came into operation in Afghanistan in 2006 (Lebanon end of the 1980s: 12; Rwanda mid 1990s: 160). This flood of activities and this invasion of disaster and development experts is considered by the inhabitants of Kabul to be a direct consequence of the abolition of the Taliban regime.

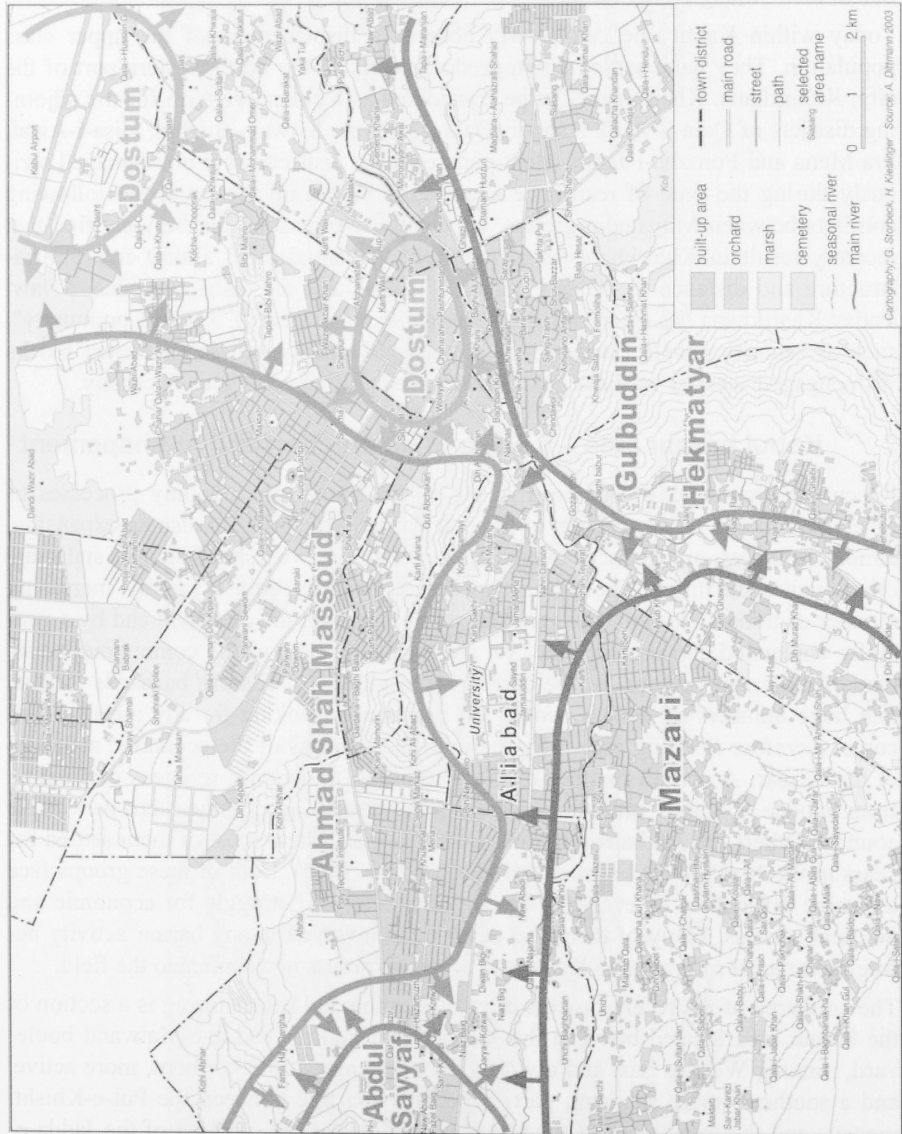
For the people of Kabul, especially in Shar-e-Naw (the "New City"), this development provides immediate, but not only positive consequences, because of the increasing prices for rent and real estate as well as the wage level of private and public services. Therefore the competition for intact bureaus, project buildings and high-standard homes goes on and concentrates mainly on the district of Shar-e-Naw, where such facilities are available. The rents being paid for these estates may indirectly help to develop the country in a financial way. But on the other hand the all-embracing recruitment of Afghans for different aid organizations proves to be partially an obstacle for the development of the country in general and for Kabul in particular. Dire consequences especially result from the wage policy of the international governmental and non-governmental organizations. (The monthly wage of a driver is about: 500 to 600 USD; which is somewhat more than the monthly salary of university professors). Everyone who adequately speaks English has good promotion prospects. National and municipal institutions cannot compete with the wages paid by aid organizations.

In summary, this leads to the fact that Ministries and municipal development departments can not work efficiently anymore, because well-educated manpower is working for the foreign aid organizations. This "New Great Game" for development related human resources is mostly won by financially strong aid organizations from western countries. The consequences of the recent high level prices for real estate for Shar-e-Naw is clearly shown by the withdrawal of upper class Kabul residents from this area (fig. 1), which in its turn leads to an increased demand in the NW of Kabul, in areas like Khairkhana. From a historical point of view this recent displacement of Kabul inhabitants from Shar-e-Naw caused by international aid is comparable to the displacement of citizens from certain parts of the old city (Shor-e-Bazaar, Bagh-e-Mardan etc.) during the British-Afghan wars of colonial times. There seem to exist certain similarities in the fields of functional and infrastructural re-shaping of a city caused by war and the arrival of international helpers. War damage is still omnipresent in Kabul.

However, the most serious damage does not result from the resistance against the Taliban regime or the combat operations of the US-troops, but they can be traced back to the long lasting conflicts between different Mujahedin groups (see fig. 2). After the Soviet withdrawal the capital of Afghanistan became one of the most important central battlefields.



**Fig. 2:** Frontlines of different Mujahedin forces struggling for control of strategic important places in Kabul during the Afghan civil war showing the bazaar area exposed to at least three major front lines



Source: A. Dittmann 2003, Cartography: G. Storbeck, H. Kieslinger.



supply of water and electricity is still not running permanently and electricity which is not frequently interrupted can only be found in some insular areas such as the airport and the western districts of the city, which benefited from special attention due to their strategic importance.

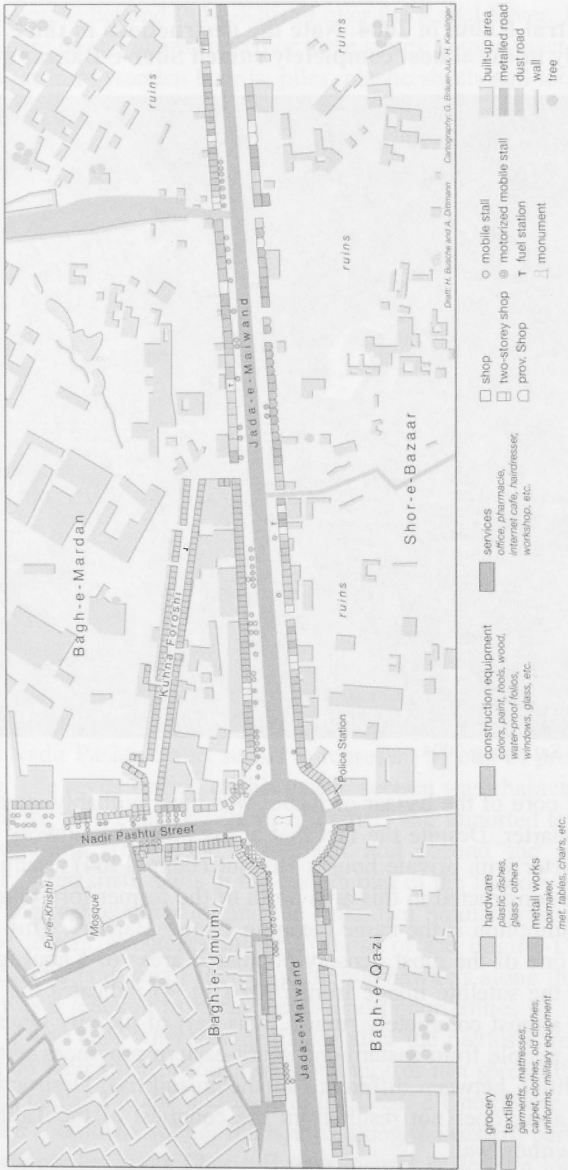
Today within Kabul one can clearly observe a displacement of the upper class population. They have settled down predominantly in the north western part of the city, Khairkhana. Khairkhana can be considered as a collective term for the adjoining districts of Qala-i-Malik Ashoor, Qala-i-Najama, Kitwaja Bughra, Hisa-i-Awal, Sra Mena and Purozha-i-Jadid. Most parts of these districts were not damaged seriously during the time of resistance against the Soviet invaders and the following conflicts between Mujahedin groups. Especially two reasons can be identified that recently result in Khairkhana as a preferred residential area: almost intact infrastructure and distance to the city centre of Kabul and the district of Shar-e-Naw. Today Khairkhana has clear indicators leading to some kind of "Gated Community", such as security people checking the streets periodically, single apartment blocks with engaged security services, and permanent supply of water and electricity.

## **2 Kabul bazaar area – a place of destruction and re-shapement**

Recent developments of activities in the Kabul bazaar are not only processes of rehabilitation and reconstruction of pre-war bazaar structures but also an expansion, almost an explosion, of space covered by shops, stores, workshops, mobile stalls and other trading facilities. The bazaar is characterized by both a rapidly increasing number of traders, dealers, hawkers and shopkeepers on the one hand and by a generally unplanned and unstructured, yet continuous growth of the commercial areas. One of the major reasons for the current rapid growth of Kabul's bazaar is the fact that huge numbers of jobless people are desperately looking for any means of income, therefore flooding especially the informal sections of the economic activities in the bazaar. A certain number of these informal traders are refugees originating from outside of Kabul, predominantly from the eastern and southeastern part of the country. Others are Afghans returning from Pakistan where most of them settled for years in the North-West Frontier Province (Wiebe 1985). Both of these groups face the same difficulties of everyday life in the capital and struggle for economic and political success. Many of them had never been involved in any bazaar activity before their recent migration to Kabul and are more or less newcomers to the field.

The core area of the recent process of revitalization and restructuring is a section of the bazaar area located between the Kabul River and the Jadda-e-Maiwand boulevard, running West to East and dividing the old center into a northern, more active, and a southern, more stagnant, part. Especially the line between the Pul-e-Khishti mosque and the monument of the Unknown Soldier at the crossing of the Jadda-e-Maiwand and the Nadir Pashtu street indicates the most important sections of the bazaar (fig. 3). The quarters west and north of this line did not suffer too much from

Fig. 3: Sketch map of the central bazaar area of Kabul (2004) showing different stages of restructuring and re-formation



destruction during the civil war and many buildings, especially in the Bagh-e-Umumi quarter, where two and three storey houses dominate, have survived in good shape even the turbulent times since the second half of the 1990s (fig. 4).

**Fig. 4:** Central Kabul in 2004. Note the destructions in the E and SE, especially in the almost completely ruined Shor-e-Bazaar quarter



Source: ISAF Milit. Sat.-Image 2004.

The original old core of the bazaar of Kabul was most probably situated within the Shor-e-Bazaar quarter. Despite the fact that at his time of fieldwork Shor-e-Bazaar was a living quarter with private houses Helmut Hahn (1964) assumes that the old bazaar was once constructed in this area north of the former fort. One obvious indicator for this assumption is the name meaning "Noisy Bazaar". This quarter of Kabul, which was one of the most densely populated areas of Kabul today is quite a silent place. As the satellite image from 2004 (fig. 4) indicates the Shor-e-Bazaar area of today is almost completely ruined. This part of the city where traditionally Pashtu speaking people from eastern and south-eastern provinces settled fell victim to the fierce fighting between different Mujahedin militias. Destruction here, as in most parts of Kabul, does not result from the conquest of the Taliban forces nor from their later withdrawal.

Today the term "Noisy Bazaar" would suit much better the sections of the Nadir Pashtu street south of Kabul River and the central Jadda-e-Maiwand around the

central crossing with the monument of the Unknown Soldier. This line represents at the same time the area of well established traditional shops in the Bagh-e-Umumi quarter and the more informal shops east of that area which lead toward the very new commercial areas beyond Pul-e-Khishti over the Kabul River. It is in the Nadir Pashtu street where bazaar shops in two or three storey houses meet the area of simple stalls made up from wooden boards, piles, plastic sheets and tent material. Nevertheless this line seems to be one of the sites most commonly visited by customers. Today the Nadir Pashtu street is limited to pedestrians only although it has a needle-eye like traffic function within central Kabul. This important role of the street dates back to the time of investigations done by Helmut Hahn (1964, pp. 68-77) who worked together with Ghulam Jailani Arez of Kabul University.

Today the bazaar section of Kuhna Forooshi (literally, "Antique Sellers") east of the Nadir Pashtu Street represents to a certain extent the typical process of immediate reaction and a permanent reformation of commercial areas in Kabul. As its name indicates this bazaar section traditionally was the selling place for old and used goods, especially old clothes, mostly of European origin. The map published by Hahn (1964) indicates for this area shops with "Western and European clothes, some glass and a few small workshops". After the Soviet invasion and especially during the following years of Mujahedin rule in the Kuhna Forooshi bazaar mainly old uniforms and other military equipment of the former Soviet Red Army and the Afghan Peoples Army were sold here (see fig. 3). In general this former concentration of the bazaar section is still valid today, while the type of goods on offer has shifted to equipment from US and ISAF troops.

Among the first commercial areas of Kabul which started business soon after the fall of the Taliban regime were the shops, stores and workshops along the Jadda-e-Maiwand boulevard. Here the place of the monument of the Unknown Soldier at the junction of the Nadir Pashtu Street seems to represent a point of prestige and strategic importance. The revitalization of this bazaar section was characterized by both a rehabilitation of the well equipped shops of carpets and imported textiles in two- or three-storey buildings around the monument and second the rapid growth of wooden, quickly fixed small stalls in the eastern part of the Jadda-e-Maiwand. While the opening of big textile stores around the Unknown Soldier was, generally speaking, a recast of former structures fitting to those of the Bagh-e-Umumi area, the concentration of traders in small shops and mobile hawkers along the eastern part of the boulevard was a reaction to recent needs and opportunities of the present post-war situation. It was here where immediately after the battles came to an end the first traders set up their small wooden huts of shops or just spread their goods along the pathways. In contrast to the buildings in the Bagh-e-Umumi area and around the monument of the Unknown Soldier the houses along the eastern part of the Jadda-e-Maiwand and especially in the Shor-e-Bazaar quarter suffered a lot during the battles. Most destruction was a result of the shifting frontlines between different Mujahedin groups during the early 90s (fig. 2).

Today's struggle in the central bazaar areas of Kabul is less violent and less public but as important as the battles before, and it causes even more change. One of the major recent conflicts is between those groups who had been traditionally dominant in the central bazaar and those who are trying to enter into the bazaar as newcomers. The traditional conflicts between Pashtu and Tajik speaking groups is just one facet of the multitude of constellations in cooperation and competition. New players in the field of economic activities within the bazaar are certain groups of people returning from Pakistan, and members of the Hazara ethnic group. They did not play an important role in the traditional bazaar before the Afghan civil war. Beside these groups, economically well established and logistically well organized traders from the northern neighbouring countries of Afghanistan have also been trying to get more influence in Kabul's central bazaar recently.

### 3 Summary

The displacement of the upper class population from the center of Kabul can be considered as the continuation of traditional trends in the urban development of Kabul, which finds its origin in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the course of the British-Afghan wars main parts of the old town on the southern banks of the Kabul River were destroyed.

The later reconstruction of Kabul took place more on the northern side of Kabul River. With the construction of the royal castle in 1888 a decisive development impulse was given to the upper class population of Kabul which afterwards started to settle down in the neighbourhood of the royal quarter.

In the 1930's and 40's the concentration of the upper class population shifted to the north western district of Shar-e-Naw, where they settled down next to members of the royal family. In the following years districts of the old central part of Kabul, such as Bagh-e-Mardan, Bagh-e-Umumi and Shor-e-Bazaar were excluded from modernization activities. However the recent displacement of the upper class population to the north western sub-centre of Khairkhana at first seemed to be only a reaction to the conflict zone of the different Mujahedin groups in this area and a consequence of the insufficient water and electricity supply. But today the invasion of aid organizations in Shar-e-Naw constitutes a severe push-factor for the upper class population of Kabul due to the enormous development of prices for valuable buildings. These high rents are affordable only for high-salary (foreign) experts of NGOs and other institutions. Thus the result of the concentration of international helpers and organizations in Shar-e-Naw has almost the same effects on local population as certain wars in Afghan history before the recent hazard of reconstruction.

Comparing the post-war reshaping of Kabul's bazaar area with the former upper-class residential area Shar-e-Naw shows that development conditions, an almost complete destruction (bazaar) as well as an almost complete preservation (Shar-e-Naw), determine urban structures not only in infrastructural but also in functional



matters. While today the rapidly rebuilt and growing bazaar area is characterized by new groups of traders and hawkers who were absent in pre-war bazaar activities, the upper-class Kabul population of Shar-e-Naw has recently been displaced from their traditional residential areas for economical reasons.

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