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Afghan feuds

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The Taliban will not be the only vultures waiting on the feast

It would be a mistake to assume that the Taliban are the only group fighting the government and Nato/Isaf in Afghanistan. There is not one war being fought but many, and some of them predate the American invasion of 2001. Parts of the country are relatively peaceful, but even in the peaceful areas such as Samangan there can be incidents such as the suicide bombing on Saturday of the prominent anti-Taliban lawmaker Ahmad Khan Samangani. He died along with 22 others as he was greeting guests at his daughter's wedding reception. The Taliban were quick to disown the killings, and given that they are quick to claim their handiwork it is reasonable to assume that they might not have a hand in this event. Samangani was, to a degree, the architect of his own demise — he had told the security guards to relax and not search people as they normally would — a loophole quickly exploited. He was a man who had many enemies, the Taliban included as he had fought them between 1996 and 2001 just as he had fought the Russians before them. He was an ethnic Uzbek, and although he was regarded as 'reformed' and engaged with the democratic process of which he was an important part in Samangan, his past probably caught up with him eventually.

The targeting of public officials, whether it is by the Taliban for their reasons or by criminals who may have entirely different reasons, is increasing. The Afghan minister for higher education Obaidullah Obaid survived a roadside bomb on Sunday. He was unhurt but two of his escorts were wounded. Again this happened in the north, far from the intense fighting to the south and east. On Friday in Laghman province Hanifa Safi, the provincial women's affairs director, died

when a bomb attached to her car exploded. Her husband and daughter were seriously injured. As US and Nato troops withdraw and hand things over to the Afghan civil and military bodies, the quality of security for public servants is going to be crucial if peace is to be achieved. Thus far the signs are not good. Old enmities that go back decades or centuries have not gone away, nor withered — that is not the Afghan way. The Taliban will eat away at the body politic, but they will not be the only vultures waiting on the feast.