Neo-Taliban Movement in Afghanistan

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Islamist Movement in Afghanistan: An overview

Post 9/11 attacks, the U.S. decided to retaliate massively against the Taliban regime, in Afghanistan which harboured Osama bin Laden. The U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan started on 7 October 2001, and by December the same year, the Taliban had left their last stronghold, the southern city of Kandahar. However, a large part of the Taliban's and al-Qaida's leaders managed to escape to Pakistan. Meanwhile, a conference was held under the UN auspices in Bonn, Germany in the beginning of December 2001 to lay the foundation for a new government to be installed in Kabul. Under the Bonn Agreement, the Pashtun politician, Hamid Karzai, was appointed to the chair of a new transitional government in Afghanistan. Since 2001, international coalition forces have been present in Afghanistan to assist in the reconstruction and stabilization of the country that include International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghanistan National Army.[1] After the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005, there was general optimism in the mass media about the future of Afghanistan. In early 2006, Afghan and American leaders talked about the Taliban as "defeated" and "no longer able to fight large battles." However, this perception changed significantly during 2006, after a series of heavy clashes with the Taliban forces. Giustozzi has argued that the upsurge in 2006 was not a sudden development, rather, it was the continuation of a military build-up on the part of the insurgents that had started already way back in 2002–2003.[2] The Taliban's propaganda

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machinery started referring their movement to be carried out on behalf of "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" and the leadership views itself as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, which in their perception was unlawfully ousted from power during the U.S. invasion in 2001. The Taliban that has evolved since the fall of Kabul in November 2001 has been described as a "neo-Taliban" movement.[3]

Analysts have maintained that the Deobandi background of the Taliban provided the basis for their ideas. However, it may be pointed out that they represented an extreme form of Deobandism, which may be called neo-Deobandism, preached by Pakistani Islamic parties in Afghan refugee camps. The JUI, headed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, was instrumental in establishing hundreds of Deobandi madrasas in the North-West Frontier Province, as well as in Baluchistan. Mullas who taught at these schools had significantly drifted from the original Deobandi reformist agenda. Their interpretation of the Shari'a, which many characterize as very strict, was heavily influenced by the tribal code of the Pashtuns. However, like the Deobandis, the Taliban opposed the tribal and feudal structure, and did not allow traditional tribal chiefs in leadership positions.[4] The neo-fundamentalists, influenced by Arab Wahabism and the global Salafi ideas of al-Qaeda, have grown out of international fundamentalist networks and represent a mix of fundamentalist-type conservative values and radical actions.

In some ways the Taliban's rise to power in 1994–96 represented something new, since it was the first time that an Islamist movement had been able to control a substantial portion of Afghanistan's territory. On the other hand, the movement was not something new. In fact, Islamist-inspired anti- government opposition has a long history in Afghanistan.

Islam was introduced in Afghanistan very soon after Muslim armies left the Arabian Peninsula. Most Afghans probably became Muslims between the mid-seventh century, when Arab Muslims captured Herat, and the eleventh century when the Ghaznavid dynasty reduced non-Muslim influences on the land by conquering neighboring non-Muslim empires.[5] At present, eighty percent of Afghans are Hanafi Sunnis and the balance are mostly Twelver Shi'a. Afghanistan has tiny minorities of Hindus and Sikhs and a handful of Jews.[6]

Throughout its history, Afghan

leaders have often appealed to Islam to rally support for a particular cause. For example, in the 19th century, Islam was used to rally support among Afghans against the colonial British forces.[7] King Amanullah, who ruled from 1919-1929, initially increased his legitimacy by waging a short jihad against the British in India, but he was later overthrown by religious leaders who opposed his westernizing reforms. [8]

Islamist political movements did not become a major force in Afghanistan until the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s in which large groups of *mujahideen* were equipped and trained by foreign powers in order to counter the threat of Soviet communism. It is interesting to note that earlier attempts in religious mobilization had failed in Afghansitan . In 1959, for example, critics of the regime's unveiling of women were "swiftly repressed," and the 1975 uprising of the Islamists in the Panjsher Valley against the Daoud regime was also "crushed with ease by the Afghan army."[9] Gradually, the Soviets became an enemy against which efforts were made to unite the entire country. In view of their well tenit organization and outside network of support, the Islamist groups were in a position to take the most advantage.

In order to reconcile past Islamic insurrections with the rise of Islamist groups in the late 20th century, the past experience leading to the Soviet invasion may be briefly examined here.

Olivier Roy points out that the rise of political Islam was often a reaction to colonialism and westernization.[10] The Islamist movement in Afghanistan emerged in the late 1950s in the intellectual setting of Kabul University. In 1951, as part of its continuing effort to increase its influence, the Afghan state established Kabul University's Faculty of Islamic Studies, which became the birthplace of Islamist thought in Afghanistan. The department was set up with the help of al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt.[11] As a result, several professors who taught in the Faculty of Islamic Studies spent some time abroad. Professor Ghulam Muhammad Niazi, who later became dean of the department, studied in Cairo in the late 1950s, where he first came into contact with the ideas of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Upon his return to Kabul, he started sharing these ideas with interested students.[12]These reading groups read and discussed the works of the contemporary Islamist thinkers such as the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB)

Sayyid Qutb and Pakistan's Maulana Mawdudi,[13] but they did not attract widespread support among Kabul University's student body.[14]

The enactment of the new Constitution in 1964 and the establishment of critical political parties legally and independent newspapers in 1965 under King Zahir Shah regime became critical of the emergence of political debates in Afghanistan, including the role of Islam in politics in Afghanistan society.[15] Notably, one of the prominent parties formed in 1965 was the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).[16] The increased communist activism on the campus of Kabul University in the second half of the 1960s created a resentment among the university's practicing Muslims and increased their activity. In 1966, religious minded Afghans started gathering in a more organized way to discuss the Qur'an and writings of important Islamist scholars, which were openly available in Kabul's marketplaces.[17] In 1969, these students formally established the 'Muslim Youth Organization of Afghanistan'.[18] Members of the 'Muslim Youth Organization' were proponents of Islamism. Although they won student elections at the university in 1971,[19] their success did not reflect countrywide support for politicized Islam. What is important to note is the involvement and coming-of-age of the future leaders of the anti-Soviet Islamist groups during this period. People like Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Maulavi Yunis Khales, and Abdur Rasul Sayyaf all played significant role in the Muslim Youth Organization in the 1960s and 1970s.[20]

While Zahir Shah was traveling in Italy, his previously ousted cousin Muhammad Daoud returned to power in a coup *d'etat* on July 17, 1973. The change in regime had significant consequences for the Islamists, ultimately resulting in their radicalization. Because Daoud was viewed as a leftist and ally of the Soviet Union, the Islamists feared that he would usher in communist rule in Afghanistan. The 'Muslim Youth Organization' shifted its attention away from the Marxist groups on campus to Daoud himself, and the Islamists' goal became Daoud's removal.[21] Thus, logically, Daoud viewed the Islamists and the threat they represented with suspicion and fear.[22] He began to monitor their activities and arrested their important leaders. Daoud's suppression of the Islamists did not only radicalize them further as they were forced underground, but many ended up going into exile in Pakistan, which had great consequences for the role

the Islamists played in the Soviet-Afghan war. [23]

The Pakistani regime welcomed the Muslim student leaders with open arms. Because Daoud supported "Pashtunistan," the idea that the Pashtun areas of both Afghanistan and Pakistan should be united. President Zulfikar Bhutto helped the exiled Islamists.[24] When General Zia ul-Haq came to power in 1977, he supported the Afghan refugees not only because Pakistan continued to be threatened by the Pashtunistan issue, but also because Zia was embarking on an Islamization campaign in Pakistan itself.[25] The presence of these groups in Pakistan, and Pakistan's support for them long before the Soviet invasion, proved critical to the strength of the Islamists after 1979. Daoud's crackdown on the Islamists, however, did not significantly impact the majority of Afghans' daily lives. When the Islamists tried to organize an uprising in 1975, the towns, tribal areas, and the army did not join it.

Nur Muhammad Taraki came to power in Afghanistan on April 27, 1978. While Daoud may have flirted with the leftists, Nur Muhammad Taraki, who came to power in Afghanistan on April 27, 1978, was a hard-core communist. The Islamist groups were now convinced more than ever that the central government needed to be overthrown. Whereas previously only a small number of Islamists had feared a communist takeover and agitated against Daoud's administration, the coup and the new regime's authoritarian implementation of ideological social, educational, and land reforms touched a nerve in a much larger segment of the population. As a result, the number of oppositionists grew, and spontaneous uprisings flared up in many parts of the country.[26] It is important to note that these new insurgents were not all Islamists. Many of the uprisings were tribal, organized along tribal lines and led by a recognized tribal leader.[27]

Taraki ordered the arrest of many prominent religious leaders, and many others left Afghanistan. The government's rhetoric and action against the Islamists resulted in the population's increased awareness about them when they were not much known outside Kabul. The PDPA demonized the Islamist parties by calling them "brothers of Satan," a play on words of the Arabic translation of "Muslim Brotherhood." By focusing Afghans' attention to the Islamist groups and demonizing them in this way, the communist regime defined the conflict in Islamic terms, making it easier for the

Islamist parties to later legitimize themselves. [28]

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, support for the Islamists was not widespread—but the Islamists were in a better position to benefit more than the other Islamic, tribal, or secular parties. The events of the previous decades had allowed the Islamists to learn about political Islam, build a network of like-minded people, develop highly organized parties, mobilize a growing segment of the population, discredit the clergy-based or tribal resistance parties, and receive outside support from Pakistan.

The Soviet invasion strengthened the Islamists' hand in several ways. Whereas previously the resistance had opposed its own central government, the fight now became one against an outside invader. The atheism of the USSR was perceived to threaten Islam in Afghanistan from the outside for the first time in a long time.[29]

The Islamist parties benefitted greatly from Pakistani support. Zia ul-Haq's administration had already been providing support to the Islamists, exiled in Pakistan since the Daoud coup. Although dozens of Afghan resistance groups were formed in Pakistan after the Soviet invasion, including secular and traditionalist Islamic groups, in 1981 Pakistan decided to support only seven Islamic resistance parties in an attempt to unify them and increase their effectiveness. Among the Islamic parties, however, Pakistan provided the lion's share of funding and weaponry to the Islamist mujahideen, especially Hekmatyar, who it believed could be a potential "future leader for an Afghanistan more closely linked to Pakistan."[30] By receiving exponentially more funding, training, and weaponry than other groups, the strength of these fronts increased at the expense of the other parties. Additionally, the U.S. started contributing significant amounts of funding and weaponry to the mujahideen as the insurgency raged on.[31]

Millions of Afghans fled the fighting in Afghanistan to Pakistan. The refugee camps that housed them were run only by those Islamic parties that Pakistan supported.[32]Many madrasas where fundamentalist ideologies were taught were also established in many of these camps. In this way the camps ended up serving as critical recruitment pools.

Failure of Political Islam and Rise of Extremists

Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the

Islamist Jamiat-e Islami party, finally came to power in 1992 following the withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan in 1989, the cessation of Soviet aid to Afghan President Najibullah's communist government, and several rounds of negotiations between Najibullah, the mujahideen, and their state sponsors. Coalition of these *mujahideen* parties declared Afghanistan an Islamic state, but never managed to implement it in a systematic manner due to civil war and in-fighting. [33]

Cooperation between the Islamist groups had been rather tenuous for decades. The enmity between Hekmatyar, on the one hand, and Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud, on the other, was very deep and personal, and their parties had often attacked each other during the war with the Soviets and afterwards.[34]In the effort to gain the upper hand in the battles with one another, the situation devolved into one in which "the effective practices, constituencies and strategies of both parties had more to do with ethnic polarization and sheer political rivalries between their leaders rather than with [Islamist] ideology."[35] For these reasons, what began as Islamism in the 1960s and 1970s had already dissolved by the 1990s. One could argue that the ideological paucity of the Islamist parties was masked by their fame during the Soviet invasion, while their inadequate popularity was substituted with extensive international and Pakistani support. The continuing infighting among the leaders of the Islamist mujahideen groups of the Soviet-Afghan war throughout the 1990s subsequently discredited them, easing the way for the Taliban to come to power in 1996.[36]

The Taliban emerged independently of the organized political parties as a response, in part of the Islamist's failure to consolidate power, and restore order to the country.[37]While society previously had been based on tribal laws and customs, the long struggle against Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil war had led to a fragmented society, where power was no longer based on tribal heritage, but on military muscle. It resulted in a period of brutal suppression of the population, corruption, anarchy and lawlessness. It was this society that the Taliban movement set out to reform, by calling for a return to a "pure" Islamic society governed by a strict interpretation of *Sharia*, or Islamic law.

While the Taliban managed to bring some degree of security and stability to Afghanistan, running a state was a far more complex task than they had probably envisioned.

The Taliban government was criticised for numerous human rights violations, tolerance of poppy cultivation and for providing sanctuary to international terrorists.[38]

The Taliban movement quickly increased its strength, and came to control 90 per cent of the country in less than five years. Afghan social reforms and attempts at modernization in the 1960s and '70s inadvertently turned the country into a battleground for ideologies represented by much larger foreign interests. The Afghan conflict became a proxy war not only between the West and the Communist block, but also, unnoticed or ignored at that time became a training ground and rallying point for increasingly radical groups from the Middle East and Pakistan.[39]

The end result of a complex process of internal Pakistani reforms and policies, the Afghan refugee crisis, the influx of foreign radical groups combined with arms and money from the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and stark political instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan provided the main explanations for the Taliban's rapid rise to power.[40]

The explosive growth of the madrasa system under Zia ul-Haq's government saw a massive influx of mostly Pashtun refugees into Peshawar and temporary camps in the NWFP. Makeshift madrasas were hastily set up to serve the refugees. These institutions that suddenly accepted many more students had to employ teachers with much lower qualifications than normal to meet the needs for increased student population. The hasty assembly of the system and the explosive growth of the Deobandi network in particular created a dramatic de-centralization of the network. Combined with the sudden influx of Middle Eastern radical groups flush with money and enthusiasm for jihad, these factors rapidly catalyzed the spread of radical ideologies.[41]

As the Afghan resistance became a celebrity cause in the Muslim world and the West; money and arms sent to Afghanistan poured into the NWFP. Along with these came foreign fighters from all over the Muslim world and significant figures from the most radicalized splinter groups of the Arab Muslim Brotherhoods, including Abdullah Azzam and his former student Osama bin Laden.[42]

It was in Pakistan that Wahhabi, Salafist, and Arab radical Islamist doctrines came together and were sometimes blended almost indistinguishably into a kind of

"potpourri" of jihadi doctrine, encouraging some elements of Afghan resistance to get converted into militant extremism.[43] The money and support available from outside actors quickly made its mark on the madrasa system in the NWFP, which became increasingly disorganized and focused primarily on jihad at the expense of any real education.

Neo – Taliban Movement and Rise of Insurgency

The Taliban and al-Qaeda did not quite disappear after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and the standoff in Tora Bora. They are reorganized as guerrilla movements and have been harassing U.S. and NATO forces and Karzai supporters.[44] The Taliban that has evolved since the fall of Kabul in November 2001 has been described as a "neo-Taliban" movement. Only days after the Taliban were forced to flee Kabul in 2001, the first calls were made for jihad against the latest "foreign infidel forces". The main priority is still on re-establishing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, with Mullah Omar as the *Amir- ul-Mu'minin* ("commander of the faithful") and the introduction of *Sharia* and obedience to Islamic law. [45]

The Taliban that gradually reappeared is more sophisticated than its predecessor, in its military tactics and information strategies. The insurgents have been using a broad array of tactics. They have been ambushing U.S. and Afghan patrols, using remotely detonated explosives, attacking Afghan police posts, lobbing mortar shells at the U.S. bases, attacking NGOs and Karzai administrators to reduce state penetration, assassinating state-appointed clergy, carrying out suicide attacks on ISAF and NATO troops, and reasserting control over some remote areas as bases for future operations. They have also been spreading their message of jihad against what they perceive to be an infidel occupier and its puppet regime by distributing leaflets (night letters) and through broadcasts of Radio Sharia.[46]

There are four main insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan: *the Taliban, al-Qaida*, *Haqqani network* and *Hizb-i-Islami*.[47] The largest and most influential insurgent group in Afghanistan is the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), believed to be led by Mullah Muhammad Omar. It was formed by remnants of the Taliban regime that was ousted in 2001. Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, its leadership structure moved to Pakistan and based its operations out of three main cities: Quetta, Peshawar, and Karachi.

The Taliban's inner shura included the leadership structure and key commanders, and was headed by Mullah Omar. Shura in Arabic means "consultation," and includes the duty in Islamic law of the ruler to consult his followers in making decisions. The inner shura was divided into a series of functional committees: military, propaganda, finance, religious, political, and administrative. The political, military, and religious committees are based out of Quetta, where they enjoy support from Pakistani groups with similar ideologies. The Taliban and other groups recruited young Pashtuns from the local madrassas and financed their activities through forced religious contributions. The Taliban's headquarters in Quetta was critical because it allowed easy access to Afghanistan's southern provinces, such as Kandahar, where Mullah Omar grew up and which was a key military front for the insurgency.[48]

The propaganda and media committees are based out of Peshawar. Since the beginning of the insurgency, the IEA's media apparatus has become increasingly sophisticated. It uses today a wide range of media platforms, including modern technologies such as DVDs and the Internet, to spread its message. Some analysts argue that this represents a clear shift from the policies of the old Taliban government, which abolished television and cameras on religious grounds. Finally, the Taliban's financial base is located in Karachi. [49]

Al-Qaida members have been present in Afghanistan since the Soviet-Afghan war, and are likely to have long-standing ties to several of the current players in the Afghan turmoil. During the last half of the 1990s, al-Qaida also consolidated its ties with the Taliban regime, although the relationship seems to have had its ups and downs. After 2001, a large number of al-Qaida cadre escaped to the tribal areas of Pakistan, which is regarded al-Qaida's main stronghold today. Al-Qaida's stated purpose in the area is to help bringing back the Taliban regime to power in Afghanistan. However, al-Qaida also uses its base in Pakistani tribal areas to plan, support and prepare for terrorist operations outside Afghanistan's borders. [50]

The number of al-Qaida fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan today is small which suggests that they have little influence on actual operations carried out in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Arab fighters seem to provide local insurgents with key resources such as strategic advice, training and weapons-making, and

material and financial support.[51]

Jalaluddin Haqqani and his broader network is based out of Miramshah, Pakistan, as well as other areas of North Waziristan. A cleric who rose to fame as a *mujahideen* leader during the Soviet war in the 1980s, Haqqani served as minister of tribal affairs in the Taliban government. During the Cold War, he had close ties to the CIA. He enjoyed a support base and ran madrassas around Miramshah and Mir Ali. His son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, also played a major role and is based in Pakistan.[52]

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the leadership of Hizb-i-Islami were motivated by a similar ideology. It was built on the Ikhwan model of Islamic revolution, which stresses the establishment of a pure Islamic state. Hekmatyar was a Ghilzai Pashtun from the Imam Sahib district of Kunduz, who became a radicalized Islamist during his studies at Kabul University in the late 1960s. After a brief period of involvement with Afghan communists, he became a disciple of Syed Qutb and consequently the Muslim Brotherhood movement.[53] From the 1980s to the early 1990s, Hizb-i-Islami received more funds from Pakistan intelligence than any other *mujahideen* faction. After the overthrow of Taliban regime, Hekmatyar openly pledged to cooperate with al-Qaida and Taliban forces out of Pakistan to fight the "crusader forces."[54]

Together, the leaders of all these groups wanted to overthrow Hamid Karzai's government and replace it with a regime that adopted an extremist version of Sunni Islam. Ahmed Rashid described the insurgency as having four components: hard-core leaders with links to al-Qaida (driven by ideology); fighters recruited in Pakistani madrasas (driven by ideology); unemployed youth (driven by money); and disaffected tribes (driven by a variety of purposes, often stemming from local conditions).[55] In a study published in 2008, Giustozzi had a similar categorization. He leaves out the leadership of the organization and talks about the potential recruits of the insurgency as divided into four main categories, two of which are classified as "hard-core" and the two others as "non-core." Hard-core includes madrasa students (driven by ideology) and recruits provided by village mullahs (driven by xenophobia and personal rage due to U.S. airstrikes, etc.). Non-core includes local allies (independent militias driven by a variety of motivations) "mercenary" elements

(driven by money).[56]

From January to September 2002, there were occasional incidents of violence, mostly concentrated in the southern and south-eastern border areas of Afghanistan, and in particular in the provinces of Paktia, Paktika and Khost in the southeast, and Kunar in the East. From September 2002, the insurgency gradually developed into a more organized campaign. Attacks slowly increased in number and in geographical distribution. New tactics were also introduced, and the attacks became slightly more sophisticated. In the beginning, attacks involved mostly small numbers of fighters and tactics were limited to rocket attacks and ambushes on the U.S. targets, in addition to attacks on Afghan police and military. Towards the end of 2002 and in 2003 insurgents started to operate in larger units; the use of roadside bombs increased, and operations became more frequent. In 2006 reports started to emerge of insurgent activity in northern parts of the country.[57] In 2006, insurgents also stepped up their efforts in the southern provinces of Afghanistan, particularly in Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand, as a reaction to the deployment of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the area.[58] The number of suicide attacks increased from 1 in 2002 to 2 in 2003, 6 in 2004, and 21 in 2005. There were 139 suicide terrorist attacks in Afghanistan in 2006 and 140 attacks in 2007.[59] In 2007, the insurgency continued to spread towards western and northern parts of the country, and the fighting also came closer to Kabul. From the late 2007, a series of high-profile attacks have been mounted inside Kabul city, including the assassination Burhanuddin Rabbani by a suicide bomber on 20 September 2011.[60]

Insurgent activity in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Logar, Wardak, Laghman and Ghazni provinces have greatly intensified. Over the past few years, Kabul appears to be more often targeted with gunmen and/or suicide bombers than before. It is a disturbing development, as it indicates that militant networks have the ability to smuggle fighters and weapons even into the seemingly secure capital. Most attacks in Kabul have been directed against coalition forces, the Afghan government and certain foreign embassies. These developments have troubling implications for the plan announced by President Karzai in March 2011 for Afghan security forces to take over from the ISAF in providing security to most of the Kabul province and some neighbouring areas. Countrywide, Afghan

National Security Forces (ANSF) are expected to take over from NATO by the end of the year 2014. Overall, there is little doubt that the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. One indication is the rising number of coalition casualties per year.[61]

Apart from radical ideology and external support to it, the neo-Taliban movement builds on the widely perceived corruption of the Afghan government, the lack of basic services to the people especially in rural areas of the country, and the historical narrative of the fight against infidel invaders (British, Soviets, and Americans).

The Ethnicity Issue

The old ethnic hierarchy that had placed the Pashtuns at the top was only reluctantly accepted before 1978. Once war and internal conflict erupted after 1978, other ethnic groups refused to accept the hierarchy. After the state's presence in the countryside collapsed, the non-Pashtun ethnic groups, the Hazaras, the Tajiks, and the Uzbeks, were empowered. When the unifying narrative of jihad faded after Najibullah's fall in 1992, the political parties were able to use existing social tensions and resentments to build their political bases as representatives of different ethnic groups. Abdul Rashid Dostum (for the Uzbeks), Ahmed Shah Masud (for the Persian speakers), and Abdul Ali Mazari (for the Hazaras) have acquired the status of heroes in their communities. As a result of the changing balance of power between the different ethnic groups, the Pashtuns have been discriminated against in the North of the country, where they are a minority.[62]

Communal and sectarian conflicts, which were essentially local in scale, now resonate throughout the country. In particular, the Afghan media has played a major role in expanding the geographical scope of ethnic and sectarian conflict. Far from promoting understanding between sectarian or ethnic groups, media outlets have actively fueled resentment in the last few years. Major political competitors own TV and radio channels and use them for mobilization purposes. The legal limit between information and defamatory attacks is unclear.[63]

Finally, since 2001, perceptions of Pashtuns and other groups are diverging due to the role of the Afghan state and the international community. Most Pashtuns regard the central government as being in the hands of non-Pashtun leaders. (Although Karzai is from an

aristocratic family from Kandahar, he is often seen as being under the influence of the United States.) As a corollary, non-Pashtuns resent what they view as favoritism toward the Pashtuns, who allegedly receive the bulk of international money. The state, being weak and lacking neutrality, is unable to effectively arbitrate disputes.[64] The Pashtuns perception of alienation is a major factor in the insurgency's success in the South.

The Local Governance Deficit

One of the major factors behind the success of the insurgency is the absence of administration at district levels (*uluswali*) and the acceleration of political fragmentation in the past few years. Chosen by the United States in 2001 mainly because of his closeness to the Bush administration, President Karzai lacked a political base and tried to eliminate local powers who potentially could threaten his control of the periphery. He relied on a narrow coterie to fill important positions in his administration, and nominated governors who were politically allied with him. Because of Karzai's poor choices (based more on personal relations than competence), this strategy backfired. As a result, there are today few local leaders who can control any significant territory. Even the few leaders who control sizeable territory are not rebuilding the state. The central government has sometimes successfully worked to rally local commanders to its side (by helping them get elected or giving them governmental posts), but the situation is not fundamentally changed in the sense that there is no real reconstruction of state structures. By controlling border transit and exacting customs and tolls, these regional strongmen gain personal revenue from legal or illegal cross-border commerce but do not use such resources for the public good and state building. In addition, local leaders take a percentage out of foreign aid. Because there is little control over aid outside Kabul, due in part to the poor security conditions, the money coming from the international community is easily redirected to finance local strongmen.[65]

The new Afghan government is also unable to provide essential services to the population, especially in rural areas of the country. Electricity is a good example. In the year 2005 only 6 percent of the Afghan population had access to power from the electricity grid.[66] And most of it was characterized by the low voltage, intermittent supply, and blackouts. The dire situation reflects a lack of

investment by the Afghan government and the international community, as well as poor maintenance. Moreover, most efforts were focused on supplying electricity in urban areas of the country, and not on targeting rural areas in danger of falling to the Taliban. Thus the situation that prevailed in the 1970s and during the long period of conflict—basic social services not reaching most of Afghanistan's people—has not yet been fundamentally changed with the partial exception of primary education."[67]

A study by the U.S. Defense Department's Joint Center for Operational Analysis, for example, stated that "as the operational center of gravity for reconstruction and governance shifted to the provinces, [U.S. government] supporting programs did not keep pace." It further reported that there were particular challenges with U.S. and other NATO Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which generally comprised of between 60 and 100 civilians and soldiers deployed to operating bases to perform small reconstruction projects or to provide security for others involved in the reconstruction. It noted that "many national-level programs that existed in the provinces were poorly coordinated with the U.S.-led PRTs. Lack of coordination limited the ability of the U.S.-led PRTs to align these programs to support the broader stabilization and reconstruction strategy. Additionally, nationally implemented donor programs had limited geographic reach."[68]

In most of the provinces, no district-level institutions are functioning. Some district administrators, known by the locals to be corrupt or inefficient, are often merely transferred to other districts. In this administrative and security void, the Taliban are building an alternative administration, discrediting the central government, and extending their influence into areas where they initially had no support.

Absence of Security

The Afghan government is unable to provide security outside the capital. In most cases, people now seek to resolve disputes by going to local *jirga* or to local *ulema* for Sharia justice. A major reason is the inability of the U.S. government to build competent Afghan security forces, especially the police. The few police officers that exist are poorly paid, prone to corruption, and poorly trained and armed. The result is a weak security apparatus that can not establish a monopoly of the

legitimate use of force within the country. [69]

The West has placed too much emphasis on economic development, despite the fact that successful state building will depend much more on establishing security and a functioning, responsive judicial system. The main problem in Afghanistan today is the absence of security and law enforcement structures, notably police and judges .

The police were not an international priority after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, and they received significantly less money and attention than the army. The United States declined to provide significant assistance to the Afghan police in the aftermath of the Taliban's overthrow, and handed police training over to the Germans. By 2003, however, U.S. officials at the State Department, Defense Department, and White House began to debate that the German effort was far too slow; they trained too few police officers, and the initiative was seriously underfunded. In 2005, the U.S. military took the lead in providing training, equipment, and other assistance to the Afghan National Police and internal security forces in order to provide significant institutional reform in the Ministry of Interior, and to curb deep-seated corruption in the police and Ministry of Interior. Nevertheless, the competence of the Afghan police remained low. As a German assessment of the border police noted in 2006, "Neither the Afghan border police nor the customs authorities are currently in a position to meet the challenges presented by this long border."[70]

An assessment, headed by Col. Ricky Adams, director of the Police Reform Directorate for the U.S.-led Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, concluded that the Ministry of Interior was "ineffective," "poorly led," "corrupt," and that the police forces were "poorly equipped." In addition, they had no semblances of a national police infrastructure. They lacked uniforms, armored vehicles, weapons, ammunition, police stations, police jails, national command and control, and investigative training. [71]

Finally, the Afghan National Army is unable to deploy large units, despite better training and, according to some anecdotal evidence, a better fighting spirit. The ANA's command and control is still weak and does not enable it to operate on its own, independent of NATO leadership.[72]

The United States provided

significant assistance to local warlords, further undermining governance and weakening the ability of the Afghan state to establish law and order. Given that increasing the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan was not politically feasible in Washington, the U.S. desire to eliminate al-Qaida meant that the United States could not wait to develop Afghan government forces.

Public opinion polls showed that the increasing power of warlords was alarming to many Afghans. One poll conducted for the U.S. military, for instance, concluded that "a high percentage of respondents identified local commanders as bringers of insecurity to their district." The Afghanistan National Security Council's *National Threat Assessment* also noted, "Non-statutory armed forces and their commanders pose a direct threat to the national security of Afghanistan. They are the principal obstacle to the expansion of the rule of law into the provinces and thus the achievement of the social and economic goals that the people of Afghanistan expect their Government, supported by the International Community, to deliver." An Afghan provincial governor reinforced this assessment, warning that "keeping warlords in power is weakening the government. The more the government pays them off, the stronger they will become and the weaker the government will be."[73]

The Resentment against NATO Forces

The Taliban have the advantage of using idioms and symbols that resonate well with Afghans (Islamic law, etc.) while the US uses concepts that are important but have much less meaning for a population that is suffering from poverty and insecurity such as rule of law and democracy. After so much mismanagement and so many mistakes, it is easier today for the Taliban to convince Afghans in general, and the Pushtun in particular, that the US and NATO forces are not much different from the hated Soviet and British Armies of the past. Afghans for a number of reasons tolerated the US military presence for several years, yet the goodwill has evaporated in the Pushtun areas. The relationship between foreigners and Afghans has deteriorated due to three decisive factors: the isolation of civilian Westerners; arbitrary violence and civilian casualties; and lack of integrity in the international aid.

The counter insurgency efforts of the international coalition forces has caused many civilian deaths,

mistreatment and murder of prisoners, arbitrary arrests, and the abuse of civilians. News of the desecration of the Koran and of the abuse of Afghan prisoners by U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Diego Garcia, and Guantanamo, the desecration of the bodies of Taliban fighters in October 2006, the invasion of the privacy of Afghans during search and seizure operations, and the use of massive firepower that kills civilians and destroys homes caused riots in protest in different parts of Afghanistan.[74]

The United States has employed the controversial practice of target killings with more frequency in recent years, both as part of ongoing combat operations in Afghanistan as well as in the counterterrorism efforts in Pakistan. Since assuming office in 2009, Barack Obama's administration has escalated targeted killings, primarily through an increase in unmanned drone strikes on al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership, but equally through an expansion of the U.S. Special Operations kill/capture missions. According to a UN special report on the subject, targeted killings are premeditated acts of lethal force employed by states in times of peace or during armed conflict to eliminate specific individuals outside their custody. "Targeted killing" is not a term distinctly defined under international law, but gained currency in 2000 after Israel made public a policy of targeting alleged terrorists in the Palestinian territories. A study undertaken by the New American Foundation which relies solely on media accounts of attacks, claims that some 225 strikes have been launched since 2009, killing somewhere between 1,100 and 1,800 militants (as of August 2011). Since President Obama assumed office, the Pentagon has also increased the use of special operations raids (aka kill/capture missions) from 675 covert raids in 2009 to 1,879 through August 2011. According to the Pentagon, approximately 84 to 86 percent of these night raids end without violence.[75]

A sharp criticism of the U.S. targeted killings, and of drone strikes in particular, is over the issue of collateral civilian deaths. Some official Pakistani sources claim that seven hundred innocents were killed in 2009 alone. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Peter Bergen says the more salient question is, "What impact has the drone program had on the insurgency in Pakistan and, by extension, that in Afghanistan?" Violence in Pakistan has risen sharply since the drone campaign began, according to the U.S. National Counter terrorism Center; however,

Bergen adds that "a number of factors could have contributed to these increases." Civilians and local governments also condemn night raids as culturally offensive, given that U.S. soldiers enter homes in the dead of night, with women present, and utilize dogs (which are viewed as impure) in their search. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has called for a reduction in these covert missions and demanded that local soldiers take over the role.[76]

Proponents of targeted killings say the civilian death toll is exaggerated for political purposes and claim drone strikes and night raids remain the most effective and discreet tactics in pursuing militant leaders and their networks, especially as the United States begins to seek a smaller military footprint in the region. CFR's Micah Zenko says that while drone strikes are an effective military tactic, "military victory is not tantamount to political success." He says that while a policy of leadership decapitation can reduce "a group's capacity, it neither ruptures group cohesion nor ideological commitment."[77]

Popular support for the U.S. presence among the Pashtuns is very low. In fact, the IC has transitioned from "guest" to "enemy" (*mehman* to *dushman*) in Afghan cultural categories.

Finally, the absence of integrity in the management of international aid fuels Afghan discontent. There are too many subcontractors dispersing international aid with too little coordination and accountability to Afghans and their interests. The population especially resents the accumulation of wealth by the new Afghan elites.

Conclusion

Only days after the Taliban were forced to flee Kabul in 2001, the first calls were made for *jihad* against the latest "foreign infidel forces". Islamist-inspired anti- government opposition has a long history in Afghanistan. Islamist political movements became a major force in Afghanistan in the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s where large groups of *mujahidin* were equipped and trained by foreign powers, to counter the threat of Soviet communism.

The Taliban that gradually reappeared is more sophisticated than its predecessor, in its military tactics and information strategies. They reorganized themselves as a guerrilla movement and have been harassing NATO forces and Karzai government. The main priority is still on re-establishing the Islamic

Emirate of Afghanistan, the introduction of *Sharia* and obedience to Islamic law.

Many have pointed out that the Deobandi background of the Taliban provided the basis for their ideas. It can be said that they represented an extreme form of Deobandism, sometimes called neo-Deobandism, preached by Pakistani Islamic parties in Afghan refugee camps. Mullas who taught at these schools were far removed from the original Deobandi reformist agenda, however. Their interpretation of the Sharia, which many characterize as very strict, was actually heavily influenced by the tribal code of the Pashtuns. Moreover, it was here in Pakistan that Wahhabi, Salafist, and Muslim Brotherhood radical Islamist doctrines came together and sometimes blended almost indistinguishably into a kind of "potpourri" of jihadi doctrine, encouraging some elements of the Afghan resistance to militant extremism.

Another vital factor explaining the growth of the insurgency is the insurgents' cross-border sanctuary in Pakistan. The unruly border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan function as a safe haven for insurgent leaders, and the border itself is so porous that fighters and supplies can be transported across it with relative ease. The insurgent leaders receive military and material support from individuals within the Pakistani authorities and security services. The last point is blankly denied by the Pakistani authorities, but a number of academic as well as journalistic sources have indicated otherwise.

The weakness of the Afghan state is undoubtedly important. The failure of the Afghan government and the international community to provide security, a reliable justice system and development opportunities to the people of Afghanistan has made many people disillusioned, especially in rural areas. In addition to causing grievances, the weakness of the Afghan state creates room for the insurgents to gain influence and set up parallel governance structures. International coalition force's negligent behavior makes it very easy for their enemies to present them as anti-Afghan and anti-Muslim.

In the current conflict, the Taliban enjoy several advantages in the Pushtun areas: they are suitably organized, they know the Pushtun social landscape much better than their opponents and their finances are secure. In addition, they have outmatched the Afghan government in the area of Islamic credentials. If history is any indication, the odds are not on NATO's and Mr. Karzai's side

in this conflict. The policy recommendations to reverse this trend are straightforward, though they would be posing a big challenge and to implement them would likely take a long time to produce results. In this regards the following points may be made:

Firstly, history shows that Islamists succeed only when they can successfully garner a broad base of popular support. The first recommendation is to extend governance into rural areas of the country. This includes providing key essential services. Focus new resources in places where the Taliban are still relatively weak: around Kabul and in the North to counter their strategy of geographical and ethnic extension of the war.

The second recommendation is to establish effective law and order. The Afghan government, with international assistance, needs to make a concerted effort to strengthen the state's security apparatus. This means increasing the competence of the police and curbing the power of warlords, who have become entrenched throughout the country and significantly undermine the governance.

Third, stop focusing on the local leadership of the Taliban in Afghanistan and focus more on the central command in Quetta while pressurising Pakistan directly to take action there.

Lastly, IEA's attitudes towards negotiations and power-sharing. A more realistic approach is probably to try to weaken the IEA's coherence through negotiating with low-level commanders and tribal leaders inside Afghanistan. The insurgent movement consists of a wide variety of actors, which may be seen as proof of its strength – but it could also constitute weakness if properly and systematically exploited.

Together they would likely undermine the Taliban's support base and increase the government's monopoly of the legitimate use of force within Afghanistan. So would greater efforts to counter insurgent ideology in Afghanistan and Pakistan. ■

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