

From Order to Isolation: An Analytical Study of the Taliban Regime (1994–2001)

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ABSTRACT

Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, the country entered a prolonged period of civil war among rival Mujahideen factions. Warlords exploited this instability, further exacerbating the suffering of an already devastated Afghan population. In these circumstances, the Taliban's promise to restore peace and security was widely welcomed. Initially, they succeeded in establishing a degree of order; however, a combination of factor - most notably their rigid interpretation of an Islamic state, limited education, and lack of experience in governance and international relations - soon earned them disfavor by majority of Afghan population at home and isolation in international arena. However, this too didn't last long. In 2001 there was another regime change. This time it was managed by international community but to be replaced by Taliban once again in 2021. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 reminded people around the world, their previous regime in 1990s. The question frequently asked is whether the current regime will succeed in bringing peace and prosperity to Afghanistan. This research is an attempt to find an answer to this question by critically analyzing the factors responsible for their sudden rise and fall within a short span of less than seven years. This research finds that main factor behind the sudden rise of Taliban was their promise to bring security and peace to the devastated and war-fatigued Afghan nation. The reasons for the fall of Taliban in 2001 included their flawed understanding of statecraft, their mixed ideology of Islam and Pashtun culture and their human right violations. All these factors isolated Afghanistan in the comity of nations thus further exacerbating the conditions of a war-devastated nation. The research concludes that the current Taliban regime can bring peace and stability in Afghanistan by adopting a balanced blend of Islam with modernism and by combining the state-building process with nation-building process.

Keywords: *Afghan civil war, Taliban rise, Islam and Pashtun culture, Stability in Afghanistan*

INTRODUCTION

The Taliban's re-emergence as the ruling regime in Afghanistan immediately after the withdrawal of U.S.-led coalition forces has sparked serious concern both domestically and

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internationally. The group previously governed Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Their takeover of Afghanistan on 15th August 2021 reawakened traumatic memories among those who experienced their harsh governance during the 1990s. The disturbing images of thousands of Afghans at Kabul airport, attempting to flee the country, despite assurances of safety from Taliban leadership, reflect the deep fears of the Afghan population regarding the country's future.

This situation warrants an analysis of the reasons for the sudden rise of Taliban in 1994 and downfall in 2001 and their governance structure during the seven years of their rules. Thus we will be able to find fault lines in the previous Taliban regime which should be avoided by the current regime, to make Afghanistan a peaceful, stable and progressive country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

After the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan lost its relevance for the world. It was only after the al-Qaeda's attack on US Embassies in North Africa in 1998 that Afghanistan reappeared on the radar of the US and the western world due to the presence of Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Perhaps this is the reason that not much literature was produced during the intervening period (1994 – 1998). However, a large amount of literature exists on the current Taliban leadership, initially as a resistance movement and subsequently as the ruling power in Afghanistan.

For the purpose of this research, we have primarily focussed on scholarship produced about the previous Taliban regime and then on literature about the current regime to understand how “these” are different from “those”. This scholarship has been contributed by Afghan as well as non-Afghan scholars. Thus, we can have viewpoints of insiders as well as outsiders.

Nazif Shahrani in his article “The Taliban Enigma” identified the factors in the Afghan history and political culture of Afghanistan that provided space and support for the rise of extremist militant movement of Taliban. He concluded that person-centered politics, the presence of competing muslim sponsors with their divergent ideologies and political and economic views provided ideal environment for the emergence of Taliban (Shahrani, 2000).

David Brown, provide a layered perspective of Taliban movement by presenting the life histories of three Afghan leaders who played pivotal roles at critical moments in Afghanistan's history. These three persons are Nur Muhammad Tarakai, founder of the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Samiullah Safi, one of the leaders of the tribal resistance against the Marxist regime and Qazi Muhammad Amin, the deputy Amir of Hizb-i-Islami (Edwards, 2002).

Tamim Ansary an Afghan scholar in his book “Games without Rules: History of Afghanistan” gives a historical account of Afghanistan from inside, looking out. Part IV of the book, (pages 201-266) titled, “Old Afghanistan erupts” gives us a detailed account of the civil war – the intra Mujahideen forces and then between Mujahideen and the Taliban. Ansary also gives the details of the political development and armed struggle in global perspective (Ansary, 2012).

“The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan” written by Neamatollah Nojumi in 2002 is a comprehensive account of the rise and fall of Taliban in Afghanistan from an Afghan lens. The book also includes details of the involvement of international community specially the US in the internal political development of Afghanistan (Nojumi, 2002). Like Ansari, Nojumi also offers the perspective of the Afghan people on the Taliban regime.

Barfield has also given a brief but fairly concise account of the rise and fall of Taliban in chapter four of his book “Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History” (Barfield, pp. 255-270).

In 2007, Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason in their Article, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan” have analyzed the dynamics of the re-emergence of the Taliban movement in post 2001 Afghanistan. According to them the Taliban were not just a radical Islamist group. In fact, it was an organization that had built upon its tribal ties and respected religious leaders to gain strong support in rural areas. In their view, help from fighters coming from Pakistan’s border regions further strengthened this support and made it difficult for the U.S.-led Coalition to succeed in its counterinsurgency efforts. At the operational level, the Taliban were fighting a guerrilla-style war, while the Coalition, the authors believe, was fighting the war according to the Taliban’s “Game Plan” leading to a gradual loss of war in Taliban’s favor (Thomas H. Johnson; M.Chris Mason, 2007). After fifteen years, their prediction proved true.

In 2007, Meredith L. Reunion also discussed the fundamentalist regime of Taliban in Chapter Nine of her book, “The History of Afghanistan” (L.Reunion, 2007).

Ahmad Rashid in his book “Taliban: The Story of Afghan Warlords” presents an in-depth account of the historical, political, and cultural influences behind the emergence of the Taliban and the subsequent events after they came to power. By exploring the group’s origins, Rashid explains the factors behind the Taliban’s enduring influence and resilience, while highlighting the complex ties between Afghan warlords, regional powers, and international actors (Rashid, Taliban: The Story of Afghan Warlords, 2001).

In 2002, Michael Rubin in his article written for the Middle East Review of International Affairs gives a detailed account of the emergence of Taliban and argues that the Taliban were the joint product of USA and the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) of Pakistan (Rubin M. , 2002).

Afsar and Samples in their Master’s thesis “The Evolution of Taliban” explained the Taliban’s endurance and growth by analyzing its organizational strengths, weaknesses, and adaptability to Coalition counterinsurgency efforts. It highlights the group’s deep integration within Pashtun cultural, religious, and ethnic structures and argues that conventional, large-scale military strategies and alien governance models fail to undermine these local networks. The study concludes by offering strategic recommendations for a broader Coalition approach to targeting critical Taliban linkages (Shahid Afsar & Christopher Samples, 2008).

In his article “Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Implications for Bangladesh,” Iftikharul Bashar examines the consequences of the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan. He argues that

the Taliban's re-emergence in Kabul is likely to energize other radical Islamist groups, such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State (IS). Bashar grounds this argument in the historical links between Afghan jihadist networks and Bangladeshi religious groups that developed during the Soviet–Afghan war. Among these, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HJI-B) was the most active organization. The article notes that during the Taliban's previous rule, HJI-B carried out at least 13 attacks in Bangladesh, targeting religious minorities, intellectuals, political leaders, diplomats, and cultural events, resulting in the deaths of at least 100 people. Bashar concludes that the Taliban's return in 2021 could lead to an increase in terrorist activity in Bangladesh, making it essential to review and strengthen the country's counter-terrorism programs (Bashar, 2021).

In 2025 Joshua Paldino and Justyne Powell wrote a research article, “The Taliban, Afghan Constitutionalism and Modern Islamic State. In this article the writers have examined the nexus between secular law and Islam based constitutional language. They have also tried to suggest how Taliban can combine both concepts. However, their research is mostly focused on the current Taliban regime (Powell EJ, Paldino J. , 2025).

Significance of this Study: A review of the above literature shows that although we have historical account of the first regime of Taliban, yet there is still a need for a focussed discussion on different aspects of the Taliban's governance from 1994-2001. This research aims at filling this gap by providing an analysis of the causes of the rise and fall of the Taliban regime (1994-2001) after considering both Afghan and non-Afghan viewpoints. In doing so it will also examine the governance structure under the Taliban rule from 1994-2001. The study concludes by offering recommendations for the current Taliban regime.

Research Question

This research aims at finding the answer to the question, “Will the current Taliban regime succeed in bringing peace, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan?” To address this question, we must critically analyze the factors behind the rise and fall of the earlier Taliban regime, including its system of governance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employs an applied research approach and is descriptive and analytical in nature with respect to its objectives. An inductive approach has been adopted to critically examine secondary data drawn from historical records and online sources.

Who is Taliban?

The word Taliban has its roots in Arabic word Talib which means ‘seeker’. This singular form combined with the ‘alif’ and ‘noon’ of Dari shaped the plural ‘Taliban’ the seekers. It is believed that the predominantly Pashtun movement first appeared in religious seminaries - mostly paid for by money from Saudi Arabia - which preached a hardline form of Sunni Islam (News, 2022).

These madrassas were established in the Refugee camps in the aftermath of Soviet invasion. Most of these students originally came from Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Frah and even from Ghazni and Nimroz. (Nojumi, p. 122). The concepts of Jihad and Shahadat were imbibed in these students during their religious training in these madrasas. However, these students received their military training when they were in religious services with local Mujahedin in Afghanistan. Thus, army training combined with strong belief in Jihad and Shahadat had made them fearless fighters in the battlefield (Nojumi p.123).

The ideological roots of Taliban lay in Deobandi Madrasahs established in border areas of Pakistan mostly in refugee camps with the financial support of Saudi Arabia and the USA. The declared goal of Taliban was to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan by creating a “ pure Islamic State in Afghanistan along the lines of Salafi lines”. (Barfield p. 255)

The Taliban previously part of Mujahideen groups in Afghanistan shared the initial goal of opposing the Soviet invasion and the communist government. However, significant differences emerged over time. Some of these differences are given below:

Ideology: The Taliban, mostly coming from madrasahs established alongside Pak-Afghan border, implemented a strict interpretation of Islamic law combined with Pashtunwali, leading to a repressive regime. Other Mujahideen groups, while also drawing upon Islam, did not share the Taliban's view of an ultra-conservative version of Islamic Sharia.

Structure: The Taliban had a centralized structure under Mullah Mohammad Omar, whereas the Mujahideen groups were fragmented politically, consisting of various factions and warlords often at war with each other.

Chaos vs. Peace. The Mujahideen groups were often engaged in infighting leaving space for local commanders and warlords to operate independently without any accountability to anyone. This led to rampant corruption, extortion and atrocities against common Afghans, creating chaos and insecurity in the areas under their control.

The Taliban on the other hand worked under the central command of their leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar. The Taliban's promise to bring peace and security attracted the war weary people and facilitated the Taliban's rise.

Ethnic Representation: The Taliban were mostly Pashtuns, while the Mujahideen groups included a broader range of ethnic groups. This Pashtun dominance led to resistance against Taliban from Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara groups.

International Recognition and Relations: Initially the Taliban could gain support of some foreign countries but soon their extreme views and human rights record led to international criticism and sanctions. In contrast, the Northern Alliance, a coalition of mujahideen forces, opposed these radical policies of Taliban and in return gained some international support.

Rise of Taliban

The Taliban movement was initiated and led by Mullah Muhammad Omar who had fought against Soviet forces with a group of Hezb-e-Islam as a teen ager. He lost his left eye while fighting against communists (Nojumi, p. 121). After the Soviet withdrawal, he handed over his arms to a senior commander and joined a religious school (Madrassah). (Ansary, p. 233)

The emergence of Taliban as a political and military force has its roots in the second phase of civil war between ex-Mujahidin groups in Afghanistan. The post-Soviet behavior of Mujahideen, his erstwhile comrades disillusioned Mullah Omar, and he openly criticized them as criminals and gangsters (Ansary, p. 233). On international level, the failure of Afghan political leaders abolished their role in the Geneva Accord where Afghanistan was represented by Pakistani and American diplomats (Nojumi, p. 129).

In the spring of 1994, the incident of the kidnapping and rape of two girls by a mujahid gangster compelled Omer to take action. He along with his followers not only recovered the girls, killed the kidnappers and hanged his dead body from the barrel of his tank (Ansary, p. 234).

The failure of Mujahideen to ensure security and peace, provided space for the Taliban to emerge as the provider of security and peace to the people of Afghanistan. When Taliban announced their mission to bring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan through a national government, they were mostly welcomed by the local communities that were suffering from the war and also high handedness of some mujahideen (Nojumi, p. 121). Once in control of Qandahar, the Taliban also opened the region's roads (Barfield, p. 258).

From capturing Kandahar in November 1994, Taliban succeeded in capturing Ghazni, Wardak, Logar and Herat by September 1995. (Ansary, p. 235). The fall of Herat at the hands of Taliban was a great game changer in the Afghan politics. It secured the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan transit trade.

After Herat, Taliban started preparation for the capture of Kabul. They exploited the differences between the Nangarhar Shura led by Haji Ghadir and the Kabul government headed by Rabbani. The Nangarhar Shura did not expect any attack from Taliban and maintained neutral position. So, the Taliban attack on Nangarhar on September 11, 1996, took them by surprise and Taliban succeeded in capturing Nangarhar without much resistance. On September 27, Taliban attacked Kabul with full force. Massoud's forces and the heads of civil and military administration left for the North to avoid civil death toll and the same day, the Taliban entered Kabul (Nojumi, pp. 150-151).

Ansary believes that Pakistan's intelligence agencies were instrumental in providing arms, ammunition, sophisticated radio communication, artillery, tanks even helicopters, a claim which has been strongly denied by Pakistan (Ansary, p. 235). This view has also been expressed by Barfield that Pakistan also provided direct military aid and advisors and logistical support for the delivery of supplies (Barfield, p. 258)

After the capture of Kabul, the Taliban were faced with the gigantic task of establishing their administration all over the country on one hand and on the other to deal with two powerful and well-disciplined forces led by General Dostum and Ahmad Shah Massoud. They decided to adopt two pronged strategy involving negotiations with Dostum to win him over their side and at the same time full scale battle against Ahmad Shah Massoud. On October 5, 1996, Taliban attacked Massoud positions in Panjshir but Massoud, with his excellent military skills and might, forced the Taliban to retreat with heavy human losses. This was followed by the capture of Bagram airbase by Ahmad Shah Massoud. Realizing the superior military might of Massoud, Dostum entered into an alliance with Massoud.

In November 1996, Ahmad Shah Massoud convened a meeting of all anti-Soviet Mujahideen leaders including Uzbek Rashid Dostum, Hazaras, Tajiks and some other Pashtun leaders and formed a coalition “United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UFGA)”. Their objective was to establish a multi-ethnic modernist Islamic State with Rabbani as the President and Ahmad Shah Massoud as Commander-in-Chief. This coalition was supported by Iran, India and Russia. Ismail Khan, former Governor of Herat living in exile in Iran, was also reorganizing his forces against the Taliban (Nojumi, p. 156).

In the spring of 1997. The Taliban supported by Uzbek force of Malak Pahalwan launched a massive attack on Mazar Sharif which was successfully repulsed by the Hazaras supported by the units of Ahmad Shah Massoud and even low ranking Uzbek officers. After Taliban’s defeat in Mazar Sharif, Massoud put together a new Alliance, “National Islamic Front for the Deliverance of Afghanistan (NIFDA). This Alliance included the forces led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Uzbek forces under General Dostum, Wahdat forces led by Karim Khalili and Ismaili Shias led by Sayyed Nader Khan (Nojumi, p. 162).

On the political front NIFDA increased its diplomatic activities and attempted to form an interim government led by Abdul Rahim Ghafoorzai, representative of Rabbani, as the Prime Minister. He included several Afghan technocrats in his cabinet. Unfortunately, this government could not take place due to the death of the key leaders of NIFD, including Ghafoorzai, in a plane crash. Nonetheless, NIFDA managed to bring normalcy in Mazar Sharif. Diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan were revived. Refugees started coming back, educational activities were resumed and UN and International NGOS reopened their offices in Mazar Sharif.

The next four years saw fierce fighting between Taliban and NIFDA known as Northern Alliance (Ansary p.243). By the end of 1996, Taliban controlled three-fourths of Afghanistan including the highways connecting Afghanistan with Pakistan (Britannica, 2025).

The Northern Alliance, couldn’t form a sustained politically and militarily powerful united front against Taliban. The peace and security situation once again started getting worse causing unrest among the local people. The Taliban started getting advantage of this situation by communicating with the unhappy elements in Mazar Sharif. On August 8, 1998, they made a second attempt to capture Mazar and this time they succeeded. Their government was recognized by Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia (Ansary, p. 244).

On December 7, 1998, Massoud again convened a meeting of the remaining anti-Taliban commanders to Panjshir and established a new political and military organization, The Islamic United Front for the Liberation of Afghanistan (IUFLA). (Nojumi p. 170). By summer 2001, Taliban had the control of almost all of Afghanistan. (Ansary p.267)

Governance Structure

Taliban Ideology

The Taliban ideology of Taliban was based upon the concept of khilafat. Mullah Omar was declared as Amirul-Momineen as well as Khalifah. The Khalifah was expected to run the country according to the principles of Islamic Shariah and every person residing in Afghanistan, muslim or non-muslim, was obligated to obey the Khalifah. If the Amir called for Jihad, it was obligatory for every qualified muslim to follow his orders. According to the Taliban, the primary goal of an Islamic State was to establish peace and security and prosperity in Afghanistan through the enforcement of Shariah. The Parliamentary system had no place in the Taliban's political landscape. The Taliban issued various decrees for the enforcement of Sharia. To implement these decrees, an organization "Amar bil Maroof wa Nahi Anil Munkar" (Department for the Protection of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) was established (Nojumi, pp. 152-154).

The Taliban enforced a strict interpretation of Islamic law combined with a conservative Pashtun social code, leading to a brutally repressive regime. Women faced near-total exclusion from public life, they were not allowed to go to school, work or leave their homes unless accompanied by a male member of close family (Mahram) and covered from head to toe. The criminal penalties prescribed by Sharai were announced and implemented at public places after summary trials (Britannica, 2025).

Political Development

Nojumi describes the Taliban political development as a three-stage process. Stage one covered the period from 1994 when they, led by Mullah Omar, controlled Kandahar. At this stage they appeared as an armed force equipped with good fighting capacity but minimal organizational skills.

The second stage of their administrative development started in April 1995, during the siege of Kabul, when some religious leaders declared Mullah Omar as "Amirul- Momineen" (The Commander of the Faithful) (Ansary, p. 237). The other key members were assigned important positions under the title of 'acting minister'. This stage lasted for three years and during this period Taliban civil administration was run by two major councils (Shuras). The Inner or core shura, led by the Amirul Momineen, Mullah Omar Mujahid, consisted of six members. The second council that is Central Shura consisted of nine members plus Taliban's liaison officers in Pakistan and other countries. The Central Shura was under the control of Core Shura. The members of these Shuras were key figures in military administration too. These members had a fair degree of autonomy in their respective regions (Nojumi, pp. 137-138). The real power rested with the Core Shura led by Mullah Omar in Qandahar while regular administration and foreign

relations were handled by the Central Shura in Kabul (Barfield, p. 261). Since Mullah Omar refused to leave and all the important decisions were taken at Qandahar, the Ministers in Kabul remained out of the decision making process

Once in control of Kabul, Taliban tried to form a rudimentary form of government and announced their program of governance. In September 1996, the Core Shura appointed a seven member supervisory council to run the government in Kabul. Its main objective was to ensure that the ideology of Taliban is reflected in the daily life of the government (Ansary, p. 239).

The third stage of Civil administration started in October 1999 and ended with the fall of Taliban regime in November 2001. An important development of this stage was the adoption of the Constitution of 1964, promulgated by former King Zahir Shah albeit with some changes.

The Taliban also tried to use statecraft to implement their political agenda in Afghanistan. However, their primary focus was on military affairs and services to the local communities was second in importance.

On international front, Taliban faced severe criticism for their human rights violation which they just disregarded. The other issue that made the things more complicated was the presence of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) in Afghanistan. Taliban's support for him resulted in sanctions by US and UN against the Taliban controlled areas in Afghanistan.

Taliban leaders, in a bid to avoid these sanctions and to get recognition of their government by international community, sent delegations to several countries. Nojumi claims that they even proposed to expel OBL if US recognizes their government and the sanctions were removed (Nojumi, p. 140).

Military Structure

The Taliban used the art of mobile military operations in a very effective way. They succeeded establishing a strong link between the front lines and the support lines at the rear, skillfully using modern communication, consistency of reinforcement, logistical support and supplies. Presence of ex-military officers of former Afghan national army, in the ranks of Taliban helped them in establishing such a well-structured formation. They also established military training camps in Southern Afghanistan to train the fresh youngster arriving from Madrasahs. In the meantime, the United Front was also receiving military assistance from Iran, India and Central Asian States (Nojumi, p. 172).

During the early stages of their expansion, Taliban took full advantage of the rivalries among the anti-Taliban groups. They even promised those who defected to their side, to appoint them at key positions in their government. They also paid large amount of cash as bribes to these elements (Barfield, p. 259)

Taliban governors also served as military commanders reporting directly to Mullah Omar. (Barfield p.261).

Foreign Relations

On diplomatic front the Taliban tried to gain international recognition for their government by sending their Foreign Minister Sher Muhammad Abbad Stanakzai to Washington DC. Afghan representative at UN, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, also tried to convince the UN member countries to recognize their government. In November 1997, the Taliban approached King Fahad of Saudi Arabia to support their request for the membership of Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). However, despite these efforts and the support of Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia, they were not granted full membership of OIC.

The Taliban also made efforts to attract Foreign Investment by sending delegations to China, Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia but their internal policies especially towards women, minorities and their political opponents foiled all such efforts. Many International humanitarian agencies and NGOs cancelled their operations in Taliban controlled areas. The double sanctions by UN and US created further problems in their diplomatic relations. Their support for Bin Laden made the things more complicated for the Taliban regime.

Political Front

On political front, the Taliban used both cash and kind to bribe local commanders to get their support. The hostilities between Taliban and their opponents were exploited by these commanders to receive money from both sides. In the words of Nojumi, “war politics became a great business for many local commanders (Nojumi, p. 174).

The ethno-nationalistic approach of Taliban created mistrust and hatred among other ethnic and religious groups which in itself was a great threat for the process of normalization and stability in Afghanistan.

Economy

The economy of Taliban regime was predominantly dependent upon foreign aid. As stated earlier, Taliban made several efforts to attract foreign investment. In February 2000, Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdul Rehman Zahid, led a delegation to Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark and Holland to convince these governments to lift sanction but in vain.

They even offered free land for anyone who would set up a factory. But their human rights policies coupled with the civil war in Afghanistan and the costs involved in the setting up of a factory, proved hugely prohibitive factors for any foreign investment. Amid such financial constraints, the cultivation of poppy crops presented a practical means of survival (L.Reunion, 2007).

The Taliban also attempted to develop the mining sector of Afghanistan but couldn't succeed due to lack of financial, technical and professional resources. Most of the key appointment holders were graduates of Madrassas and had no of financial management, economic, or any other management field thus depriving the Taliban government of professionally planned

economy. Thus the political and diplomatic success of Afghan government hinged upon a settlement or truce between the Taliban and Northern Alliance, availability of financial, technical and professionally trained human resources.

Civil Administration

While the capital of Afghanistan was Kabul, the decision making headquarter was Kandahar. Nojumi uses the term ‘fluid structure’ to describe the form of Taliban’s civil administration because it changed with the military expansion of their control. He also considers it as a strength because it gave the administration the flexibility to be mobile. He also believes that “this administration was functional within the nature of the Afghan social organization” (Nojumi, p. 140).

Taliban and Women’s Status

Afghanistan experienced the worst human rights abuses, particularly against women, during the period 1996- 2001. The systematic marginalization of Afghan women from social and political life was a hallmark trait of Taliban rule prior to their collapse in 2001. The Taliban’s view of women is reflected in a statement by a Taliban representative that, “the face of a woman is a source of corruption for men who are not related to her” (Sebghatullah Qazi Zada & Ziaolhaq Qazi Zada, 2024). Women’s rights to education, employment, health, freedom of movement and access to community were almost non-existent.

Women were not allowed to be at public places unless covered from head-to-toe and accompanied by mahram i.e. a male member of close family like father, brother, son or husband. Taxis were not allowed to pick unveiled or unaccompanied women. The shopkeepers were forbidden to sell goods to such women. Thus, a single women or widow with small kids could not buy even bread for her family (Ansary, p. 239).

Women’s mobility was restricted even within their own homes. They were prohibited from being visible from the street; as a result, houses with women were required to paint over their windows so that female members of the family could move freely within their homes (Bogaert, 2022).

Any breach of Taliban-imposed regulations was punishable by public flogging, stoning, or execution (Sebghatullah Qazi Zada & Ziaolhaq Qazi Zada, 2024). Due process and fair trial had no relevance under Taliban rule.

Oil Politics

After the withdrawal of Soviet Union, Afghanistan fell into obscurity for the US and the Western world. However, her importance reemerged after the first Gulf War, with the realization in the western world that they have to find alternative source of energy for gulf oil. The option was to access the huge oil reserves in the Caspian Sea Basin through Turkmenistan – Afghanistan-

Pakistan pipeline. Ansary is of the view that initially even the violations of human rights were ignored by the western democracies because of the global oil politics (Ansary, p. 241).

In early 1996, BRIDAS, an Argentina based oil company negotiated a 30-year deal with Rabbani government to construct oil pipeline across Afghanistan. Rabbani agreed and guaranteed to protect the interests of BRIDAS. However, the influence of Rabbani government was limited to Kabul and that too fell by the end of the year. The BRIDAS deal prompted UNOCAL, a Texas based company supported by policy makers in Washington DC, to start negotiations with Turkmenistan. At the same time, they started negotiation with Taliban and switched their support from Ahmad Shah Massoud to Taliban. The US authorities believed that only Pashtuns from Southern Afghanistan could counter the threat of Al-Qaeda and thus Taliban presented a perfect choice. So they threw their support behind Taliban. However, Taliban and Osama Bin Laden had come very close to each other. That's why when US asked Taliban to arrest Osama Bin Laden and hand him over to them, Taliban clearly refused saying that it was against the Pashtun Code of Conduct, Pashtunwali. (Ansary, pp. 242-252).

Although Taliban had control over two thirds of Afghanistan, but International Financial Institutions were still not ready to fund the pipeline project. On the other hand, oil companies like UNOCAL were also reluctant to initiate the project in the absence of an internationally recognized government in Afghanistan. The matter became more complicated by the internal divide between the Taliban leaders. The Kabul based, Mullah Abdul Rehman group supported BRIDAS whereas the Qandahari group led by Mullah Omar favored UNOCAL. Absence of professional experts prevented the Taliban from preparing a proposal based upon technical and financial analysis. In 1988, UNOCAL announced that it would not resume the project in the absence of a government officially recognized by International community (Nojumi, p. 176).

Fall of Taliban

Since the beginning of 1998, the issue of the presence of Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan was the bone of contention between Taliban and the US authorities. After the bombing of American Embassies in North Africa by AL-Qaeda, Saudi Arabia and the USA demanded the extradition of Bin Laden. But Mullah Omar refused to do so quoting the Melmastya rule of Pashtunwali. Their assurance that Bin Laden would not be allowed to target any foreign country from the Afghan soil could not appease these countries. Saudi Arabia withdrew her diplomatic staff from Kabul. Mullah Omar convened a meeting of almost 300 religious leaders to garner support for his refusal to extradite Bin Laden. These delegates suggested that Pashtunwali demanded protection of guests but by the same rule, the guest should also avoid bringing harm to the host. So Bin Laden should voluntarily leave Afghanistan (Barfield, pp. 268-269).

The Feminist Majority movement in US began to protest against the Taliban's social policies and their treatment of women as 'gender apartheid'. They even picketed the offices of UNOCAL forcing it to put their pipeline project on hold. In 1999 a US backed UN resolution imposed economic sanctions of Taliban.

By now Northern Alliance also included Hamid Karzai, a Durrani Pashtun, Haji Qadir another Ghilzai Pashtun of Jalalabad, Uzbek leader Dostum, Hazara leader Karim Khalili and Ismail Khan the leader from Herat. But still US did not decide to throw their full support behind Northern Alliance. A major reason for US opposition of Northern Alliance was Iranian support for Northern Alliance. Still, they knew that if there is no threat of Northern Alliance, Taliban would not have enough incentive to hand over OBL to them. So, they started giving just enough aid to Massoud's group to keep it alive as a threat to Taliban but not to be strong enough to rule Afghanistan.

On September 9, 2001 Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated and just two days after his assassination, four American civilian jetliners were hijacked by Al-Qaeda men- crashing one into Pentagon, two in the World Trade Centre and one into the ground near Pittsburgh. The United States responded with a large-scale military offensive in Afghanistan. It adopted a two-pronged strategy: first, delegating the main combat operations - backed by U.S. support -to the Northern Alliance; and second, pressuring Pakistan to end its support for the Taliban (Ansary p. 262). While US jets were ponding Taliban positions from air, the Northern Alliance forces started ground attacks on them (Barfield, p. 269).

On November 8, 2001, Taliban leaders quietly left but Northern Alliance was prevented by US to enter Kabul until the 'international Community could prepare a plan for a new government.' However, on November 13, 2001, the different factions of Mujahideen, except that of Hikmatyar, entered Kabul (Ansary, p. 262).

ANALYSIS

The answer to our research question "Whether the current Taliban regime will succeed in bringing peace, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan, requires an analytical assessment of the factors underlying the Taliban's previous rise and fall, based on our preceding research. For this purpose, we will study the factors supporting the sudden rise of Taliban as well as those leading to the fall of Taliban

Reasons for the Rise of Taliban

The Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan can be attributed to several factors:

After the Afghan-Soviet War (1978–92), the Mujahideen failed to establish order outside Kabul, leading to extortion and assaults by local militias and warlords. The Taliban gained popular support by promising security and showcasing religious fervor. After successfully subduing a local warlord in Kandahar, 1994, they set about bringing order in nearby areas. Soon they became a larger movement. Public fear and hatred against Mujahideen largely contributed to the success of Taliban. Wherever they went, they introduced a fragile sense of security.

The Taliban's success in extending territorial control is largely attributable to the Afghan people's exhaustion with war. Prolonged civil conflict had devastated millions of lives, creating a strong desire for peace and security. When the Taliban reopened trade routes between

Afghanistan and Pakistan and disarmed local militias, many Afghans believed a return to normalcy was possible. As a result, substantial financial and political support was extended to the movement.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual tribal society with mostly Pashtun dominance. The Taliban's initial appeal heavily relied on uniting Pashtuns, resentful of the Rabbani government, which was dominated by ethnic Tajiks (Britannica, 2025). Even the US support for Taliban was partially due to their belief that a Pashtun-led government would be in a better position to bring stability in Afghanistan thus facilitating the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline.

The rise of the Taliban can also be attributed to the backing of foreign states such as the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, each driven by distinct strategic interests. The United States sought access to the energy resources of the Caspian Basin through the proposed Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan (TAP) pipeline, a project that depended on stability in Afghanistan. U.S. policymakers believed that only a Pashtun-led government could restore order, making the Taliban appear to be the most viable option. Saudi Arabia supported the Taliban both to counter Iranian influence in the region and because of ideological affinities with Wahhabi/Salafi interpretations of Islam. Pakistan's support was motivated by its interest in the TAP pipeline, its desire for access to Central Asian markets, and its broader objective of achieving regional peace and stability. Together, these three states supplied the Taliban with the direly needed financial resources, advanced military technology and training in its use.

Reasons for Taliban's Failure

Mullah Omar, the Taliban commander, did not relocate to the capital Kabul. Thus the ministers in Kabul were often out of the important decision making process. This lack of coordination between the Central command at Kandahar and the Ministers in Kabul weakened their command and control structure. Taliban leadership was divided into three groups: Kandahar based conservatives, Kabul based moderates and religious police. The Kandahar based conservative group led by Mullah Omar was opposed to the concepts of democracy and democratic institutions. They tried to enforce a very radical view of Islam through various *Laihas* (decrees) covering almost all aspects of life. They felt threatened by the moderates.

The Kabul based Rabbani group that tried to reform the radical policies related to women, education and human rights. They allowed female doctors and nurses in Kabul hospitals,. This group was in favor of peace agreement with other players in the power game, followed by election to form people's representative parliament. Their main argument was that the establishment of a representative government was essential to obtain foreign aid which was direly needed for the establishment of a strong civil government and peace in Afghanistan.

The third group, the religious police comprised of the members of the "Department for the Protection of virtue and Prevention of Vice" under the supervision of Maulvi Kalamadin. This was an independent organization and operated through thousands of young informers recruited from madrasahs. Ideologically, the Religious Police was closer to the hardliner Taliban.

They would patrol streets and report any unislamic activity or social behaviour to the members of the Department. (Nojumi p.179-180) However to address the objections of critics of their policies regarding Maulvi Kalamadin announced that they would eventually reopen girls' schools 'after' separate buildings and transportation was arranged for them. Until then the girls and women would stay home. (Nojumi p.181).

Despite their military expertise, the Taliban lacked statesmanship, leading to ineffective governance at home and isolation abroad

The Taliban's ethno-nationalist policies, particularly those targeting Hazaras and Shi'a communities, led to the political and social alienation of these groups. Resistance to the Taliban was particularly strong among non-Pashtun ethnic groups such as the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, who perceived Taliban rule as a continuation of Pashtun dominance and a threat for their respective communities,

Taliban's radical ideology and their enforcement of ultra-conservative Islam was another cause of their unpopularity. The Taliban's religious outlook reflected a fusion of Salafi Islam and Pashtunwali, in which Pashtunwali predominated. This ideological orientation was reflected in their policies toward women and their decision not to hand over Osama bin Laden.

In 2001, a delegation of Al-Azhar trained religious scholars visited Taliban to dissuade them from destroying the Bamiyan Buddhas but in vain. They declared that Taliban lacked real knowledge of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence because they didn't understand Arabic language and linguistics. (Barfield p.261)

The Taliban lacked training and experience in foreign affairs. During their five-year rule, they were largely unsuccessful in cultivating international support and failed to secure broad diplomatic recognition for their government. Their policies also alienated even the states that initially recognized them. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia eventually withdrew their support due to the Taliban's refusal to expel Osama bin Laden. Iran, angered by the assassination of its consular staff in Mazar-e-Sharif and the Taliban's anti-Shi'a policies, began supporting anti-Taliban groups, while Tajikistan facilitated the transit of military assistance to the Northern Alliance (Barfield, p. 265). Additionally, the Taliban's treatment of women galvanized feminist movements in the United States, making the issue part of the domestic political agenda and prompting U.S. authorities to withdraw support for the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan pipeline project.

The destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas invited severe criticism from all over the world specially Japan which had the largest Buddhist population and was also an important donor of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current Taliban regime confronts challenges that are more complex than those faced by them during their first regime. When the Taliban first came to power in 1994, Afghan society had been devastated by prolonged civil war, and the population was urgently seeking any force

capable of restoring peace and security, which explains the initial public welcome of the Taliban. In contrast, when the Taliban returned to power in 2021, Afghanistan was more stable, peaceful, and progressive both at national and international level. Their return reminded people of their previous repressive regime and was widely perceived as a threat rather than a source of relief. On international level, too, the current Taliban regime is far more isolated than the previous regime of Taliban in its early years.

This changed environment warrants a change in the strategy previously adopted by the Taliban. Following are some of the recommendations for the current regime to bring peace and stability within Afghanistan and recognition of the legitimacy of their government by the International community.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country. In order to be successful, it is imperative for any Afghan government to involve all these groups in the state formation process. Although Taliban during their previous regime, claimed that they were representing only Sharia but Ansary claims that their program reflected more ethnic, racial and religious hatred than Islamic values (Ansary, p. 240). Thus, the current Taliban regime can achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan only by engaging all segments of society in the state affairs and protecting the interests of all Afghans, without any discrimination.

Taliban tried to enforce a radical version of Islam which has been challenged by several renowned scholars. The Ulema in Darul Uloom Deoband which is considered to be the source of Taliban ideology believed that the Taliban had gone beyond the spirit of Islam. (Nojumi p.181). This application of radical Islam cause more harm than support for the Islamic State.

It is therefore recommended that Ulama who command credibility among broad segments of the Afghan population engage with the current regime and use mosque platforms to promote and protect human rights. As noted above, many of the cultural norms and ideological positions embraced by the Taliban that normalise violations of women's rights are inconsistent with Islamic principles. It is also recommended that Ulama from progressive Muslim societies such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey etc., where Muslim women enjoy substantial rights, engage with the Taliban and persuade them to give up their extremist views toward women

Islam is a complete code of life for all times to come. An important lesson drawn from the failure of Taliban regime in 2001 is that an Islamic government can be successful by balancing the requirements of present day political systems with Muslim law based on sound knowledge of real Islam. This will require the inclusion of qualified jurists, experienced statesmen and professionally educated civil bureaucracy answerable to the people of Afghanistan.

We are living in a comity of nations. No country can survive on its own. It has to maintain friendly relations with other countries. This is particularly true for developing countries that are heavily dependent on foreign trade and external assistance for their development. Taliban's refusal to respect human rights, extradition of Bin Laden and destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas reflect their Islandist approach. This approach deprived them of even their recognition as a legitimate government and thus closed all doors of progress on Afghan People. Thus, in order to progress,

the current Afghan regime will have to adopt global approach instead of an Islandist approach. They will have to reassess their foreign policy, particularly in relation to immediate neighbors such as Pakistan, Tajikistan, China, and Iran.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the answer to the research question is that the Taliban initially gained popular support by restoring peace and a fragile sense of security in Afghanistan. However, as their social and political policies became clearer, their rule grew increasingly harsh and regressive, effectively pushing the country back to conditions reminiscent of the era of Bacha Saqao. The Taliban's Islandist approach reflected in their refusal to comply with requests from the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia to extradite Osama bin Laden - even after the 9/11 attacks - triggered a decisive and forceful response from the U.S.-led international community. By that time, the Taliban had already lost the support of the Afghan population, which was suffering under their harsh rule. Together, these factors culminated in the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001. If the current Taliban leadership seeks to achieve stability and peace in Afghanistan, it must avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

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