

TALIBAN VIEWS ON A FUTURE STATE



BORHAN OSMAN AND ANAND GOPAL

Introduction by Barnett Rubin

CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TALIBAN VIEWS ON A FUTURE STATE

By Borhan Osman and Anand Gopal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	5
INTRODUCTION	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
KEY FINDINGS	6
INTRODUCTION	8
POWER SHARING: WHO BELONGS IN THE NEW ORDER?	10
Power Sharing Today	12
ISLAM AND THE FUTURE STATE	16
Political Representation	19
WHOSE ISLAM?	22
Evolution	25
CONCLUSION	30
ENDNOTES	33

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INTRODUCTION

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It is understandably difficult to arrive at a balanced appraisal of people who are trying to kill you. Confronted daily by extremist, al-Qaeda tactics such as suicide bombs, most involved in the Afghanistan conflict on the side of the government and the U.S.-led coalition conclude that the Taliban's conditions for ending the war are equally extremist. If the Taliban are determined to fight until they destroy representative democracy and replace it with an Islamic Emirate implementing the same regressive policies that they enforced during 1996-2001 there is not enough common ground even to imagine a political settlement.

Anand Gopal and Borhan Osman have come to a different conclusion from interviews with members of the Taliban's political wing and analysis of the movement's official publications. Few if any Taliban say they want to re-establish the Emirate or revive the policies that rightly drew the world's opprobrium upon them. Their main grievance is the continued presence in Afghanistan of the foreign military forces that overthrew their government to punish them for a crime that, in their view, they did not commit: the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. Even their criticisms of the "un-Islamic" nature of the current constitution derive more from the circumstances under which it was adopted – what they see as a "foreign occupation" that has targeted them for killing or capture – than on any specific provisions. The anarchy, criminality and division of the country that led the Taliban to re-arm themselves after the Soviet withdrawal no longer exist, so there is no reason to fight other than against the "occupation."

Reports of track two meetings between representatives of the Taliban and Afghans supporting the current system reinforce these conclusions: the two sides find it surprisingly easy to reach consensus, at least on general principles for governing Afghanistan. At first I thought this meant that the conflict might be less difficult to resolve than many think. But on reflection, I have reached a different conclusion: the conflict is not mainly about ideological differences among Afghans. It is about the foreign presence and the ways it has empowered some groups at others' expense. The Taliban also receive assistance from al-Qaeda and other borderless militant organizations who urge them to pursue more radical goals.

The Taliban with whom the authors spoke often qualified their statements, saying that fighters on the ground who have made sacrifices and lost family members might have different views. Every conflict eventually becomes self-referential: each side fights to avenge the losses it has suffered. Overcoming the fighters' sentiments would depend on leadership. Even when the leadership issues contrary instructions, fighters who capture territory by force of arms (e.g., Kunduz in September 2015) often revert to type by looting and carrying out revenge killings of those associated with the government or progressive social policies.

It is still too early to judge the effects on Taliban policy of the deaths of Mullah Omar and his successor Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur. The Taliban's political office had started working toward a political path out of the war under the leadership of Tayyib Agha, whom everyone knew represented Mullah Omar. Tayyib Agha resigned in July 2015 following the revelation that Pakistan

and Mullah Mansur had concealed Omar's death for two years. The relationship between the political office and the current leadership is unclear.

Without the complicity of the Pakistan military, which has viewed post-2001 arrangements in Kabul as a threat to its security, the insurgency would not have reached its current size. President Ghani and the U.S. government have pledged to respect Pakistan's "legitimate" interests and have sought dialogue with the Pakistani establishment. As a result Kabul and Washington have unprecedented clarity regarding Pakistan's demands. Unfortunately, they exceed what Afghanistan and the U.S. can accept as "legitimate" interests.

Like other armed groups in transnational wars, the Taliban have also become closely linked to grey and black markets – not only narcotics, but also Afghanistan's many valuable minerals. What started as a way to fund a cause has become a cause in itself.

Above all, the two sides disagree bitterly about the presence of international troops. At one meeting where I was an observer, pro-government Afghans and Taliban representatives quickly agreed as usual on an agenda for negotiations over the future of the country. The Taliban said, however, that such negotiations could take place only after the "occupation forces" left Afghanistan. The Afghan government and civil society representatives saw those same forces as protectors. The troops could leave, they said, but only after a settlement. Hence, the settlement depends on something no Afghan controls: the deployment of U.S. troops.

Journalist Jeffrey Goldberg concluded after a series of interviews that President Obama has "developed strong antibodies to . . . the Carly Simon Syndrome, which is an affliction affecting American policymakers so vain that they probably think Islamist extremism, and everything else, is about them." When Americans say that the way out of the war is for Afghans to talk to Afghans, they too mean that the war is not about them. But Goldberg misinterpreted Carly Simon's lyrics. "You're so vain, you probably think this song is about you," she sings – and then goes on to sing entirely about him, his vanity and narcissistic carelessness. Much as we Americans would like to deny it, the war in Afghanistan is also about us. We should not be so vain as to imagine it can end without our active engagement.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the views of a section of the Taliban political leadership on the form and functions of a possible future Afghan state, should the various parties to the current conflict come to a negotiated settlement. It analyzes interviews with Taliban officials and examines the region's history dating back to the Islamic Emirate of the 1990s in an attempt to understand Taliban views on the following three questions:

- Which actors should be included in the post-withdrawal state?
- What should be the form of such a state? In particular, how flexible are the Taliban on the notion of resurrecting an Islamic Emirate, as opposed to working within the framework of an Islamic Republic? What is their view on elections?
- What policies should this state adopt and implement on social, political and economic issues? In particular, has the Taliban leadership modified its notorious stances on women's rights, education and civil liberties, as its representatives sometimes claim?

This study offers one of the first attempts to systematically interview members of the Taliban's political commission and their allies in the movement who work in the area of outreach and media. It also elicits the opinions of key personalities outside the Taliban but closely related to the movement and with good links to their leadership. Taken together, the views presented here are a window into the mindset of figures who will likely participate in any future negotiations. The Taliban's actual position in these negotiations will depend not only on their mindset but also on the political constraints they face. The movement depends on its leadership's sanctuary in Pakistan, and Pakistan will try to shape the process in its own interest. But however much influence Pakistan may have over the Taliban, it does not control their minds.

KEY FINDINGS

POWER SHARING

- Interviewees claim that the Taliban leadership does not seek a political monopoly, and that it recognizes the importance of sharing power with other Afghan factions. "After two decades of fighting," said one interlocutor, "it is now obvious that the opponents of the Islamic Emirate cannot be forced to surrender nor be eliminated. We will be in the state of an unending war if each side stresses their primary positions against the other."
- A section of the Taliban leadership has been engaging in informal contacts and talks with its erstwhile enemies in the former Northern Alliance and related factions. The Taliban political committee is currently working on a comprehensive platform that will serve as a set of internal guidelines on the question of power sharing.
- However, the Taliban—from the senior political leadership to the military rank-and-file—are unlikely to accept any power-sharing arrangement that merely absorbs them into the current order. This would include plans to grant the Taliban some ministries or provincial governorships. Rather, interviewees argued for a reconfiguration of the post-2001 order, including of the armed forces, contingent on the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

Even in the case of withdrawal and the reconfiguration of the state, the Taliban military rank-and-file are likely to be the most resistant to any power-sharing arrangements (and, before that, to negotiations). Unlike the Pakistan- and Gulf-based leadership, the fighters in the trenches have suffered hardship and personal tragedy, and are unlikely to accept a settlement without significant concessions. In the interviews we conducted, however, Taliban officials seemed unclear as to what concessions would be required. This suggests that an elite-level settlement should be accompanied by attempts to address grievances of the rank-and-file, as well as a truth and reconciliation process for all sides to help heal the wounds of the past four decades.

CONCEPTIONS OF THE STATE:

- The conception of the state is underdeveloped and under-theorized within the Taliban movement. Beyond the two essential elements—a withdrawal of foreign troops and a state based on Sharia—the movement does not appear to have grappled with the specifics of a future state.
- Respondents largely agreed that the current Afghan constitution does not have to be scrapped in the event of a deal. Rather, they emphasized that the Islamic legitimacy of the constitution is linked to a) whether it is fairly and consistently applied, and b) whether it relates to a state that is sovereign and free from foreign influence. In other words, the Taliban objections to the current state and its laws are political, rather than religious.
- Respondents viewed the ideal role of the state as one that protects the ethical and physical life of its citizenry. But interviewees did not see any role for the state beyond acting as a guardian of cultural and moral values, and providing security. This means they do not view the promotion of political and social equality, or human rights, as necessary features of the state.
- According to interviewees, most Taliban members do not see elections as incompatible in principle with Sharia. Rather, they judge the value of elections in relation to the outcomes they promote.

LIFE UNDER AN ISLAMIC STATE:

- Most respondents agreed that the Taliban has evolved considerably in its social outlook. They attribute this to the changed conditions from the 1990s: Many Taliban leaders have now spent over a decade in Pakistan or the Gulf, which has greatly broadened their horizons from their parochial upbringings in southern Afghanistan. In addition, many Taliban leaders—who were poorly educated—have since 2001 completed their studies and engaged with the broader world of Islamist discourse, opening their perspective to new interpretations of Islam.
- For this reason, respondents now judge many Taliban edicts of the 1990s—such as those enacted by the notorious Vice and Virtue religious police, or the shuttering of girls' schools—as too harsh or inappropriate for today. Taliban views on personal dress, female education and television appear to have softened considerably.
- Nonetheless, Taliban views on gender equality in general remain quite restricted (although keeping in line with mainstream belief in parts of Afghanistan). In other words, in some areas the Taliban appear to have evolved from uniquely strict interpretations of Islam to more standard conservative views that are found in Islamist political parties in countries like Pakistan and Egypt.¹

These findings suggest a number of openings in which more liberal forces can engage with the movement. They also point to the deep challenges and contradictions that will plague the peace process.

INTRODUCTION

While the Afghan Taliban have delivered numerous detailed critiques of the post-2001 order, they have publicly offered few alternatives. Beyond vague references to Sharia law and a state “independent” of foreign domination, the Taliban’s vision for the shape of the state after the withdrawal of foreign troops is, at least in public, quite ambiguous. The movement’s obsession with the ongoing fight against the Afghan government and its international supporters has meant that questions about the future posed to Taliban leaders have resulted in evasive or imprecise answers. For example, in a 2009 interview Mullah Beradar, then the movement’s deputy leader, referenced the possibility of talks and the shape of a post-withdrawal government with a laconic reply: “This will be decided once it happens.” He added that the issue of dealing with or including former communists, the Mujahidin, and the officials of the Karzai administration into a future state would be decided according to future “circumstances.”

For this study, we canvassed the opinion of Taliban members and analyzed privately circulated documents and public statements in an attempt to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the report. We will explore Taliban views along three tracks of inquiry: Which actors should be included in the post-withdrawal state?² What should be the form of such a state? And what should be the agenda and approach of such a state? That is, what laws, policies and stances should the new state assume and carry out, specifically with respect to human rights, civil liberties, women’s rights, education and health?

METHODOLOGY

This research draws on a combination of interviews with Taliban members, current and former, and a newly archived collection of the movement’s publications stretching from its years in power to the current stage of the insurgency. We interviewed nineteen individuals from all levels of the movement between February and May 2015. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in Afghanistan, through Skype, or occasionally via written communication.

Not all of the nineteen interviewees have been cited here because in some cases they merely provided corroborating evidence to those sources whom we have quoted. We have also excluded one interviewee on the grounds that he was unrepresentative of any tendency within the movement, having been engaged in an independent intellectual and ideological project that has not been commissioned or sanctioned by the Taliban.

All interviewees are anonymized to protect their security because they were not always authorized to speak on these subjects. They have been randomly assigned two letter initials:

1. YM is a member of the Taliban’s political office, based in Qatar. He was previously an official in the Emirate’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. SN is also a member of the political office, based in Qatar. He has no previous background in the Emirate.
3. BK is a former diplomat who has been active in peace efforts even prior to the opening of the Qatar office. He is based in Qatar.

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4. LM is currently affiliated with the political office, though he is not a formal member. He has family ties to members of the Emirate's senior leadership.
 5. MH currently helps run the Taliban's media operations from Pakistan. He held a similar position inside Afghanistan during the Emirate period.
 6. CH is affiliated with the movement's media arm. He was a media official during the Emirate and has family ties to leading figures in the insurgency.
 7. BS, based in Pakistan, is linked to the Taliban media arm and is a key figure in the broader intellectual current within the movement. He has been leading media and public outreach efforts to a regional audience, and operates some Taliban-related media outlets.
 8. AM was a member of the core Taliban leadership and a key minister during the Emirate. He is currently active in peace efforts.
 9. DF is a former diplomat now active in peace efforts on behalf of the Afghan government to reach out to Taliban leaders. He maintains links to the movement.
 10. PD, a *mawlawi* (religious leader), was a minister during the Emirate as part of the movement's ideological arm and was involved in interpreting Sharia. He is now reconciled with the Afghan government, but maintains links to the movement.
 11. NW worked in Mullah Omar's office, cooperating closely with Tayyeb Agha in Kandahar. He is now independent but maintains good relations with Taliban leaders, especially in the southeast.
 12. LA is one of the Taliban's founding members. He never formally joined the movement but has kept close ties with its principal actors.
 13. SH is a former deputy minister with ties to the media, political and other non-military departments of the movement. He is currently based in Kabul.
 14. WW is a former official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is now reconciled with the Afghan government but maintains ties to the insurgency's leadership.
 15. RZ is a civil society figure who is a close relative of a senior Taliban insurgent commander.
 16. MQ is an insurgent commander based in Dand, Kandahar.

LIMITATIONS

While the list of interviewees is unique in its access to the thinking of important figures in the current insurgency, the methodology suffers from three weaknesses:

1. Selection bias. It is likely that Taliban members who are more accommodating of outsiders and other groups are also more likely to participate as research subjects.

2. Sampling bias. The figures here are drawn predominantly from the Taliban's political wing. Many are currently based in the Gulf and (with some important exceptions) played nonmilitary roles during the Islamic Emirate and the current insurgency. It is an open question whether the views of the Taliban's political wing resonate with those currently in the trenches or their commanders. In fact, several spoke openly of the challenges posed by the military wing and described the weight of the military on the thought and practice of the Taliban. As such, the views in this paper should not be seen as representative of "the Taliban"—the movement is too disparate and fragmented (both horizontally and vertically) for there to be any unity of thought beyond foundational issues like the presence of foreign troops. This is one of the key challenges involved in assessing the likelihood of a negotiated solution to the conflict. The views here are representative of a section of the Taliban leadership, many of whom are from the old guard and play the role of movement intellectuals.

3. The third bias is that this line of inquiry reflects an international agenda—the form of a future state—which may not necessarily correspond to actual discussions unfolding within the movement. It would be misleading to infer that because interviewees responded to questions posed to them, they necessarily articulate these views within the movement or that the issue at hand (such as elections) has any importance in internal debates.

POWER SHARING: WHO BELONGS IN THE NEW ORDER?

POWER SHARING: A TALIBAN HISTORY

In the 1990s, the Taliban closely guarded power around a clique of ex-mujahidin religious students from Kandahar. Despite repeated attempts by the Islamic Emirate and its enemies to negotiate a solution to the conflict, this state of affairs remained largely unchanged by 2001. In more recent statements and private conversations, members of the Taliban leadership appear to have either qualified this past experience or reinterpreted it in a way as to justify their actions in retrospect. Interviewees pointed to three lines of evidence to support their assertion.

First, they argued that the Islamic Emirate was structured in such a way as to accommodate a future power-sharing arrangement. For example, the Council of Ministers in Kabul was initially called a "caretaker government," and ministers were *sarparast waziran* ("acting" ministers), with the understanding that some would be removed to accommodate political rivals.

Second, interviewees pointed to numerous cases in which power was successfully shared outside the Kandahar-based core: Table 1, which shows the cabinet as of June 1999 along with the political background of ministers and deputy ministers, indicates the outreach to groups outside the Taliban core.³ Much of this outreach was done during the 1994-1996 period in a series of talks with Jalaluddin Haqqani in Khost; Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi, the leader of *Harakat-e-Inqelab*, in Peshawar and Kabul; Mawlawi Yunus Khalis, the leader of *Hezb-e Islami* (Khalis faction); and representatives of *Harakat-e-Inqelab Mansur*, in Peshawar and Zurnat, Paktia.

Third, they pointed to sustained attempts to negotiate with the Northern Alliance and the Shia parties between 1996 and 2000. The first talks with Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani quickly deteriorated, but the Taliban seem to have managed at one point to secure a two-year-long *détente* with Dostum from 1998 to 2000. This was preceded by the notorious 1997 deal with General Malik, a disgruntled Dostum sub-commander who broke with his superior and allied with the Taliban, allowing them to enter Mazar-e-Sharif. Within days, however, Malik turned his guns on the Taliban, killing thousands and taking a number of senior leaders prisoner. The Taliban claim this was a great betrayal, and the events significantly bolstered the hardliners within the movement who opposed negotiations of any kind. Malik's side, however, claims that the Taliban reneged on a promise of genuine power sharing by offering him only the relatively low position of Deputy Defense Minister in Kabul rather than giving him control over North Afghanistan with his own forces.

Negotiations with the Northern Alliance picked up again in later years.⁴ According to one ex-minister, **PD**, Burhanuddin Rabbani was once offered the leadership of the council of ministers as part of a broader peace proposal but the move was rebuffed. Another former minister, **AM**, who attended Northern Alliance-Taliban talks in Ashkhabad in March 1999, claimed that Mullah Omar was ready to "give up his leadership—only the issue of who would be the overall leader broke the otherwise unanimous plan". He elaborated:

The ultimate stumbling block that caused the talks to fail in the last minute was the insistence by the Northern Alliance representatives upon the return of [the former king] Zahir Shah as the leader of the interim administration, which would pave the way for a broad-based government. We [Taliban representatives] disagreed on the leadership of Zahir Shah since the leader for such a sensitive and important setup should be a more unifying person, who is widely respected by the public. Zahir Shah was a divisive person, who could not get the respect of many ulama and was therefore unable to lead the process of facilitating an inclusive government.

While these three lines of evidence suggest that the group was slightly less rigid on the question of power sharing than it may appear, the reality is that such efforts are a far cry from a genuine attempt to share power. For example, all attempts led at most to the appointment of outside figures to ministerial positions at the deputy level or lower, or to relatively unimportant ministries (like Jalaluddin Haqqani's post heading the Ministry of Borders and Tribes). Almost no outsiders were awarded key portfolios, and when they were it was always as individuals who had no longer identified with their old political network.⁵

The result is a seeming contradiction between the Taliban's words and action. On the one hand, in public rhetoric and private discussion most Taliban appear to recognize that political legitimacy is inexorably bound up in the process of ruling Afghanistan as a nation state. Unlike al Qaeda or ISIS or other groups, the Taliban's aims have always been directed solely toward national concerns, which includes the idea that they represent all elements of Afghan society within their ranks. This means that they claim that other Afghan groups must be accommodated. On the other hand, however, the Taliban have harbored a deep-seated mistrust of outside groups and the mujahedeen in particular, especially given the latter's bloody track record in the period preceding Taliban rule. **DF**, a high-ranking diplomat during the Taliban's Emirate, explained:

You cannot end feudalism and warlordism by offering the warlords a pluralistic system. They will manipulate any space or opportunity to rise again and build their own fiefdom. You cannot be lax with them. There is a need for a unitary system which denies war-mongering faction leaders any opportunity to challenge the state. This is how a state is built in a time of rampant anarchy.

Another interviewee, **PD**, said:

The Taliban had to act revolutionarily. There was no government in control. In such a situation of chaos, the Taliban had limited options. They could only work with those they trusted and had to shun anyone standing in their way until there was proper order.

These two tendencies combined into a contradictory policy of fashioning the Islamic Emirate as one that appeared to speak to all Afghan factions, but nonetheless remained tightly bound around the Taliban core.⁶ This meant that the Taliban would, in theory, open most of the “civil” government to the opposition—hence the offer to Burhanuddin Rabbani of the prime ministership—but key institutions of Taliban power, such as the armed forces or the ministry for the protection of virtue and prevention of vice, were never seriously the subject of negotiations. Thus, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef records that:⁷

In our discussion prior to my leaving to meet with Massoud, Mullah Mohammad Omar had told me of his concerns on this point; while he would grant Massoud a position in the political or civilian sector, he thought it would be dangerous to share power in the military. From Mullah Saheb’s perspective he thought that giving Massoud power over the military would create more problems than it would solve. Massoud, however, continually stressed the importance of sharing military power.

He used to argue that, “We fought in the holy jihad as well! It is our right to have an equal share in the government”. But Mullah Saheb reasoned that, “We respect you. We are also mujahedeen and we fought in the jihad, but from a military point of view we need to have a united chain of command”.

POWER SHARING TODAY

Taliban associated with the political wing argue that the circumstances today are quite different from the Emirate period—not least because the group’s bargaining position, as a rural insurgency based in Pakistan, is far weaker than when it was in power. In fact, interviewees unanimously claimed that the movement does not seek a monopoly of power, even if it is eventually victorious in a military struggle. **BK** claimed:

If there was a monopolist view in the 1990s, it represented the majority of the [senior] Taliban. Today, such a view is held by only a minority. The Taliban have realized in recent years that it is impossible to establish a functioning and stable state without partnering and working together with other actors in politics and society.

While this is unlikely to represent the views of those in the trenches, it is nonetheless instructive to examine why interlocutors believe this change in thinking has come about. According to **BS**, a Pakistan-based member who is well acquainted with inner-circle policy debates, the dominant thinking in the early years of the insurgency had been one of a 1990s Islamic Emirate redux. Many senior members have long since accommodated themselves to the new reality. He explained:

I can tell you about two factors that caused this gradual change of mind. The first is that in the early years, military struggle in its new form of jihad against a foreign invader emerged as an ideal option. I remember there were many young Taliban who heard the stories of the jihad against the Soviets from their elders and keenly wished that they have a chance to do such a jihad against a superpower. As the Taliban rose against the foreign invaders in the initial years, such young fighters

vigorously joined the veterans to avenge the collapse of the Islamic Emirate. *Amir ul-momineen's* [Mullah Omar's] words upon the collapse of the Emirate, when he said that the mujahidin will return soon, echoed in everyone's ears. We thought that the fight would lead to a decisive victory within a short time, just a few years. However, that ubiquitous confidence has been shaken in many quarters of the Taliban as the military victory turned out not to be that easy. The second reason is that there is a fear among senior members that our struggle could turn into a *fitna* [intra-muslim civil war], and the jihad could lead to the materialization of the objectives of our enemies, who want Muslims, and Afghans specifically, to be disunited and fighting each other. And I think over the recent years, there is a better understanding among Taliban leaders of the other Afghan parties. After two decades of fighting, it is now obvious that the opponents of the Islamic Emirate cannot be forced to surrender nor eliminated. We will be in the state of an unending war if each side stresses their primary positions against the other.

LM, a Taliban veteran who was close to many leaders of the 1990s Emirate and has links to the various wings of the insurgency (civil, political and military, although he has now built his niche in the political wing), said:

One big reason holding back the Taliban from seeking monopoly of power is the recent experiments of monopoly-seekers, which turned out to be disastrous for both the country and the monopoly-seekers. Over the recent decades, the [former anti-Soviet] mujahidin were the first Islamic force ruined by attempts of each faction to build an exclusivist government. If the different factions had instead tried to work together, there would have not been need for a Taliban insurrection. A golden opportunity to form an Islamic state was wasted by the emergence of monopolist attitudes among the mujahidin parties. It is sad to see [Gulbuddin] Hekmatyar, who played the largest role [among mujahidin factions] in liberating the country, stuck in a fight for a bigger share in power. Then, it was upon the Taliban to unite the nation. They tried, but failed. Everybody [in the Taliban movement] realizes that should a common ground have been reached with the Northern Alliance, a joint government with the Taliban could have spared Afghanistan from the American invasion and the thousands of more lives spent to expel the invaders. Karzai was also stuck with the Northern Alliance which undermined his authority. Today, it is Ashraf Ghani whom we saw had to share power with his losing rival Abdullah because it is impossible to rule on one's own. If Karzai or Ghani excluded the former mujahidin from power, they would have fought the government. It is also not possible for the former mujahidin to make a government without participation of others. That is why the Taliban has also learnt that arriving at a peaceful Islamic Afghanistan is not possible without building a government in which all Afghan parties are represented.

According to **YM**, a member of the political committee, recent evidence of such a shift—at least among sections of the political leadership—includes the initiation of contacts and informal talks with various Afghan political figures, some of whom were among the group's enemies during the 1990s. These range from former Northern Alliance leaders such as Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Yunus Qanuni, and the late Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim, to prominent mujahidin figures like Mohammad Mohaqqiq and Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, to former leftist figures like Noor ul-Haq Uloomi and Hanif Atmar.

These contacts were initiated in 2012 and were mainly aimed at improving relations and building a better understanding of possible future partners in a post-American state. None of these politicians held government positions at the time of the contacts. The initiative stemmed from the political committee's realization that the Taliban was lagging in building relations with the irremovable actors of Afghan politics, and that there should be a clearer distinction in treatment between the state and the non-state centers of power. **LM**, who was part of this initiative, said:

There was a feeling among many Taliban leaders that they were getting “the others” wrong since the start of the movement. The enemy should have been clearly defined and confined to the government and its foreign supporters, excluding local politicians and leaders of the community, whoever they are.⁸

The political committee took these contacts a step further in the December 2012 meeting held in Chantilly, France, and the Qatar meeting organized by Pugwash in May 2015, where Taliban representatives met a number of Afghan politicians, male and female, from various ethnic and political groups.

DF, a former Taliban diplomat who is now leading peace efforts, claims that he learned two years ago from “credible sources” that Mullah Omar had given a green light for an “inclusive system”—which would be negotiated with various Afghan political groups, but worked out only if foreign troops fully withdraw.⁹ **BK**, a member of the Taliban’s political committee, confirmed this, and said that the committee was authorized to draw up a comprehensive plan which would culminate in negotiations with the incumbent Afghan government. That plan, however, appears to have been on hold since the summer of 2015, as Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Mansur tried to secure his leadership.

As with the other issues, however, the real test will be the response of the military rank and file to a negotiated settlement and the sharing of power with non-Taliban figures. Interviewees, who are largely associated with the political wing, tended to play down possible dissension in the ranks over such questions. A few claimed that military commanders have not privately opposed the leadership’s public declarations of pluralism, and pointed to the fighters’ record for obedience as a reassuring sign. But this may be wishful thinking, or political spin. The deep-seated grievances, local rivalries, land disputes, and sundry financial interests of those waging the fight might be difficult to address or overturn in the short-term. Indeed, three of the interviewees acknowledged that if there is any internal challenge to the Taliban’s inclusive position on power sharing, it will stem from the failure to prepare a considerable part of the movement’s fighting men for such a position. In **CH’s** words,

There is a considerable number of military chiefs and the long-fighting foot soldiers who fight for resurrection of an Islamic Emirate ... I do not know how unshakably this vision is cultivated in them, but I do believe it is quite firm with some.

The challenge is that unlike the senior leadership—most of whom live in comfort in Pakistan or the Gulf—many in the trenches have suffered great hardships during the last fourteen years. Years of personal tragedies and deep-seated grudges can make it inconceivable for the fighters to watch their leaders sit together with their rivals and oppressors. As **AM** said,

For many fighters, especially those who lost their family members and relatives, and for the young fanatics, a continued jihad is the desired status. It will be hard for this class of fighters to come to terms with a people they long fought as an enemy. Changing their minds will be a formidable process, but it won’t be impossible.

MQ, a field commander in Kandahar, described how:

I’ve lost two brothers in bombings. The Americans raided my house, they moved the women, and they broke everything. They killed the malek [elder] in our village and he was an innocent man. They disappeared innocent people in my village. How can I ever sit with them and have tea? How can I sit with the government? They brought misery to our lives.

Such grievances are ongoing in places like Kandahar city.¹⁰ With this in mind, interlocutors stressed that “power sharing” does not mean that the Taliban surrender to the Afghan state in return for certain ministries or control over particular provinces. “The Taliban did not lose their loved ones, their brothers and their fathers, and struggle so much so that their leaders can take control of some ministries,” said RZ, a close relative of a senior Taliban commander. “Never in a million years will these fighters accept this.” Rather, power sharing means reconstituting the post-2001 political order—in other words, creating a new Afghan state which, the Taliban believes, should be more inclusive than the current one.¹¹

Even if such grievances could be addressed, a host of other local-level factors are more likely to dictate the rank-and-file position on power sharing. In Garmser district of Helmand, for example, a longstanding land dispute between “immigrant” tribes (*naqilin*) and “indigenous” tribes has been expressed, in part, through the polarities of 30 years of conflict.¹² At the moment, the immigrant tribes (who tend to have poorer or less land) have generally sided with the Taliban—and may continue to fight if a settlement does not address this disparity. And even though a settlement might reduce politically-motivated government abuse, financial incentives may remain. For instance, the removal of Sher Muhammad Akhundzada from the Helmand governorship in 2005 (because of his drug links) severed certain Alizai networks in the province from his support. Many of them sided with the Taliban, for security and to protect their drug trade.¹³ Local-level patronage and financial networks may play a large role in whether elite-level power sharing holds at the local level.

To compound matters, outside of a couple of instances where leading field commanders were invited to Pakistan for a discussion on the future of the movement or policy issues, the military rank and file have not been officially engaged on this question. According to **LM**, who is affiliated with the political committee, during the winter lull in late 2011 the leadership convened a grand meeting in Quetta of military chiefs and field commanders from across Afghanistan to discuss political efforts as an option alongside the military struggle. The commanders, he said, all agreed to the launching of political efforts which would morph into official negotiations at some point. The meeting was followed by the Taliban’s announcement in early January 2012 officially confirming that they had been engaged in talks with the U.S. Apart from this, however, there does not seem to be active outreach to field commanders on major policy issues.

Even now, as the Taliban feel they are on the verge of overrunning urban centers, there does not appear to be clear direction from the leadership on how field commanders should deal with issues such as girls’ schools, the public role of women, and rival political groups. During the annual religious-ideological course for local commanders in Pakistan last winter, the movement’s leaders, including Akhtar Mansur and his deputy and now successor Mawlawi Hibatullah, gave only general directives. The commanders were told to protect public infrastructure, treat the local population well, not to hinder the activities of humanitarian organizations, and work to persuade enemies to surrender. They were given warnings against the precedent of the anti-Soviet mujahidin, who upon entering Kabul wreaked havoc on the city, but no serious appraisal was included of the Emirate’s rule during the 1990s. The new leadership most likely did not want to look critically at the past at a time when their legitimacy after the death of Mullah Omar was still on shaky footing. This, however, opens space for the rank and file to pressure the leadership to move in a direction away from inclusiveness and accommodation.

Interviews the authors have conducted since the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar suggest an increasing divide between the leadership and the rank and file. Interviews with some field commanders and fighters indicate a turn toward more extreme views. Most interviewees rejected the prospect of working in an armed force that includes former members of the ANSF (although

there were softer views on the ANA particularly), while others made *takfir* of ANSF members (declaring them to be unbelievers) who fought against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and never repented. The fighters generally acknowledge that they have to follow what top leaders decide, but when asked about their individual opinions, they seemed much harsher than what the interlocutors from the political wing had to say about acceptance of the outside groups, particularly those they were fighting against.¹⁴

The same trend can be inferred from the social media feed of relatively better educated, but influential and well-networked, Taliban members. A vocal segment of the online Talibs have been calling for the targeting of journalists, intellectuals, and human rights and civil society activists, who they see as being part of an “ideological invasion” in parallel with the military invasion by the foreign forces. The foot soldiers and the online activists joined forces in early October 2015 when the Taliban issued a threat against Tolo and 1TV channels.

Following the fall of Kunduz, the military commission acquiesced to increasing pressure from the rank and file, as well as an active online campaign which sought to designate the two television channels as legitimate targets. These Taliban were deeply disturbed by the channels’ coverage, which they saw as biased against the movement. These rank and file soldiers and the online Talibs, arguably working together for the first time, influenced the Taliban leadership, leading to a shift in the group’s rhetoric toward the media. Unlike other statements, the anti-Tolo statement was signed by the military commission, which then sponsored an attack on a bus transporting Tolo employees home to a predominantly Hazara area of Kabul. Seven Tolo employees were killed in the incident, which took place on January 20, 2016.¹⁵

ISLAM AND THE FUTURE STATE

In the millions of words worth of Taliban publications and propaganda over the last decade, there has been precious little about the Taliban’s view of the state. There appears to be no consensus on the shape of a future state, nor on the specifics of how it would function or administer territory, indicating that this has been grossly under-theorized within the movement. However, we can begin to trace the outlines of what would amount to a tacit consensus within the movement’s political wing by focusing on what the Taliban elites believe are the functions of an ideal state, and by examining those issues which members believe are red lines in the formation of a new order.

When speaking of an ideal state, interviewees took for granted that it must be one based on Sharia law. This means, for them, that the state should be the primary guardian of faith and civil order for the benefit of its citizens. **SN** described it this way: “When we say Islamic state, it means the prime characteristic of such a state is to uphold Islam. With religious principles and parameters observed, such a state is responsible for ensuring public security and welfare of the citizens.” Two interviewees provided a well-defined list of functions for such an ideal state: preserving, in order of importance, the religion, life, lineage (by prescribing marriage and forbidding extramarital relations), intellect (through education and through the prohibition of intoxicants that undermines one’s intellectual ability, like alcohol and drugs), and property of its citizens. Indeed, these are the five foundational goals (*maqasid*) of Sharia. This means that safeguarding morals and preservation of civil order are the *sine qua non* features of the Taliban state. Interviewees rarely mentioned other possible state functions, such as safeguarding the rights of the individual (except property rights), or protecting social liberties and political freedoms. “Morals” were widely defined as values generally seen as part of the Afghan culture and social structure. **BK** said: “The nation has defined the essential values for itself over centuries. The government should preserve these values. That not only includes forbidding what is haram and promoting what is religiously obligatory, but

also things that distinguish Afghan society from others, such as the special respect for tribal and spiritual elders in deciding public matters. That also includes cultural aspects such as the Afghans' kameez and turban."¹⁶

Under the current constitution, no law may contradict Sharia. Furthermore, powerful conservative forces within the government seek to limit civil liberties in just the way the Taliban propose. In what way, then, is the current state not sufficiently Islamic? While the state does not enforce certain *hudood* punishments like stoning, interlocutors rarely brought this up as an objection. Instead, for nearly all interviewees, the key issue defining an Islamic state is the degree to which it is independent from foreign—and particularly, Western—influence. Most interviewees believe that Western countries, especially the United States, have had the final say in shaping the country's laws and policies over the past fourteen years. As **MH**, a media official in the movement, put it:

All the generous funding that came from western countries was not in fact free charity. Every country wanted to have a share in changing the sector it provided funding for. What have been the many foreign advisors sitting beside the ministers in all ministries doing? It is obvious that they acted as de facto ministers and policymakers. When the government is wholly run by foreign funds, that clearly denotes its submissiveness to the donors. The result is that we have a government which is a puppet of the occupiers. No Islamic government can submit itself, its policies, and its programs to foreigners. In an Islamic system, the government can get financial commitments from others on the basis of mutual interests and respect, but never on the cost of compromising its policies and rules. You cannot call a sold-out government Islamic.

Furthermore, interviewees unanimously argued that the military presence, together with this soft power, voided the Islamic nature of the state *ipso facto*. In the words of **SN**: "An Afghanistan where foreign military personnel, in any capacity, are on a mission, be it a combatant mission or training mission, could not be called an Islamic state." **BS** recalled a Quranic verse that suggests no infidel can have hegemony over a Muslim as a theological foundation for opposing the military presence of non-Muslim forces in a Muslim country.

THE DASTUR AND THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE

Historically, the Taliban have defined their own form of state, which they call the Islamic Emirate, in a *dastur* (constitution) initially approved by the ulama council under the supervision of the Supreme Court in June 1998, and re-approved for the insurgency era in July 2005. This constitution proclaimed Mullah Mohammad Omar as head (amir) of state, but it does not describe how such a leader is selected nor how long an individual may serve in this position. It is precisely this problem that the movement faced with a succession struggle between Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansur and rivals in the wake of the announcement of Mullah Omar's death in July 2015. The conditions that the Taliban have historically specified for being *amir al-mumineen* ("Leader of the Faithful") are non-specific and underdetermine the office. For example, Mullah Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil described them as follows in a 1996 interview:¹⁷

[Q] How are decisions made within the Taliban movement?

They are based on the advice of the amir of the believers. For us, consultation is not necessary. We believe that this is in line with the Sunnah. We abide by the amir's view even if he alone takes this view.

[Q] You appointed Mullah Mohammad Omar amir of the believers. Is this only for Afghanistan or for all Muslims?

This is only for Afghanistan.

[Q] How would the amir be deposed and how would another one be appointed?

If he asks to be removed or if he refuses to implement the Shariah.

[Q] There is a transitional council in Kabul. What is the Taliban leader's position with regard to the Kabul government and will he be the head of state?

There will not be a head of state. Instead, there will be an amir of the believers. Mullah Mohammad Omar will be the highest authority, and the government will not be able to implement any decision to which he does not agree.

This appears to have represented the standard Taliban opinion at the time. The dastur does, however, make certain specifications for the amir's qualifications: he must be a male Muslim follower of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence.

While the dastur vests the highest authority with the amir ul-mumineen, as Mutawakkil explained, it also makes room for a quasi-prime ministerial position (headed during the Emirate by Mullah Mohammad Rabbani) who chaired the Kabul-based Council of Ministers. During the Emirate, this council existed to execute the orders from Kandahar and implement—not formulate—policy. The Taliban's constitution also established a unicameral Islamic council as the highest legislative organ, whose members are appointed by the amir ul-mumineen (which appears to contradict the Emirate in practice, when laws were simply decreed by Mullah Omar or by the Supreme Court). Interviewees explain the contradiction by claiming that the dastur was not meant to serve as an all-weather constitution; rather, it was a document outlining the Taliban's vision for a transitional state until they agree on a new political order. They point to the late-1990s negotiations as evidence of the document's provisional nature, although as with other counterfactual Taliban statements the intent is impossible to verify. Nonetheless, the movement's re-endorsement and republication of the document in 2005 appears to have been a direct response to the Afghan government's 2004 constitution.

By 2010, however, the original dastur disappeared from Taliban discourse, suggesting the extent to which the specifics of a constitution remain an open question within the movement.¹⁸ According to interviewees associated with the political committee, it was this gap that necessitated the drafting of the aforementioned new post-withdrawal political framework. Drawing upon the input and expertise of a diverse pool of Taliban cadres and thinkers, this framework is intended to articulate a comprehensive roadmap toward a new political system based on Sharia—which would, according to proponents, result in a precise definition of that term. This roadmap is not designed to serve as a charter, but rather to guide the movement's internal work. As with other such efforts, however, it appears that this initiative stalled during the struggle over the legitimacy of Mullah Mansur's succession to the leadership.

Beyond this, however, interviewees struggled to offer a positive vision of the future state, and where views were offered, no two were identical. A number of interlocutors, such as Taliban veterans linked to the political commission, the media branch, and a former minister, did state that the constitution must be the outcome of a negotiated process, not something that the movement would put forward as a precondition or a blueprint for a new state. All interlocutors agreed that such a constitution cannot

describe anything but a “Sharia-based” state, and as such the constitutional committee must include a considerable number of ulama along with other legal scholars.

Interestingly, several interviewees said that the current constitution was sufficiently Islamic—whereas the state, by virtue of its subservience to foreign interests, was not. **CH**, **SH** and **LA** argued that the constitution would not require major changes in terms of Sharia compliance, but rather the state or the political order itself must accommodate the Taliban into its system. **LM** agreed:

It is not the religious credibility of the constitution of Kabul's administration which is a matter of debate. I am sure there is not much to be debated from that viewpoint. It is the fact that this constitution was written in response to the needs of foreigners not the Afghans should make us rewrite it from an Afghan perspective with regard to Afghanistan's interests. Another problem is that this constitution is meant to be a cover trying to satisfy Islam on one hand, but then forget about implementing it, and to satisfy international laws on the other hand. We should have a constitution free of inconsistencies and foreign influence; one which is taken seriously in action.

This suggests that the Taliban leadership—or at least some of the political wing—see the current constitution as not having a juridical or Islamic weakness, but rather a political weakness. This is because it was devised under the auspices of a “foreign occupation” and by a state “in the service of foreign powers” and security forces dominated by their harshest enemies. As with so much about the movement, though, it is unclear to what extent this view is held by the rank and file or those directing the military fight. If the 1990s are a guide, many field commanders are likely to resist this accommodating interpretation.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Taliban public statements have been almost unanimously critical of elections under the current order, but they have said little about elections in principle. For the most part, their anti-election arguments have been based on political reasoning rather than theological grounds. For instance, the group dismissed the last three presidential and parliamentary elections as a sham, charging that the results were predetermined by foreign powers, a Western attempt to divert the public from the main issue of the country's occupation. They were neither free nor fair, and were unrepresentative and biased (with candidates preferred by the West or by the election management bodies coming out on top). Generally, Taliban cadre and publications have argued that elections are a secondary issue that should only be addressed, if at all, following the successful struggle for national liberation.

Rarely, however, were elections attacked on principle (although see below for exceptions). Instead, the question of the compatibility of elections with Sharia law has not been settled within the movement. In many respects, cadres and field commanders alike have yet to fully grapple with the issue. At this rather inchoate stage, opinion about elections appears to be divided into three camps: positive, skeptical and neutral. Interviewees in the first camp maintained that some sort of electoral exercise was, in the broadest sense, compatible with their vision of an Islamic state. Some claimed that the Taliban have been increasingly thinking of elections as a viable post-conflict option. These interviewees claimed the Taliban are in particular taking inspiration from like-minded groups from the Deobandi tradition that operate in Pakistan, e.g. Maulana Fazl ur-Rahman's Jamiat e-Ulama Islam, or Maulana Sami ul-Haq's party of the same name.

AM, a former minister currently involved in the negotiation effort, offered a detailed speculative model for political representation in the post-withdrawal state. He suggested a strong parliamentary system based on district-level elections as a plausible compromise between the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, as stipulated in the dastur, and the current presidential democratic system. "The Emirate is based on the election by handpicked figures, such as the ulama and tribal elders," he said.

The presidential republic system is based on the election by an individual electorate on a grass-roots level. This system reserves one vote for both a layman and a well-educated person. Obviously, the laymen cannot make a perfect choice. The middle way will be to go for a system based on an election in which the ordinary people elect their district councils which will, in turn, elect a parliament, which will elect the leader for the country. Regardless of what the position of the leader is called, this three-tier system of election will address faults of both the Emirate and the presidential structures.

AM argues for a complete separation of powers, with a sizable representation of well-trained ulama in the legislative and judicial spheres. He stressed that this was his personal suggestion, but one that he believed would be acceptable to the Taliban and one that he is already sharing with the movement's leaders. It is instructive to note that, during the Emirate period, **AM** was part of the faction opposed to the hardliners on questions of power sharing, etc., and as such, his views should be taken as representing the most democracy-friendly end of the Taliban's spectrum. And yet his proposal displays a deep distrust of popular democracy. The Taliban's understanding of Islam and Afghan tradition as the ultimate sources of political legitimacy implies that those who have expertise in Sharia or village custom—the ulama and tribal elders, respectively—should have disproportionate political power.

Along these lines, a number of interviewees supported such a form of mediated or indirect democracy. **LM**, a Taliban veteran, argued that elections of some sort would be the ideal method for choosing a new leader, but in the event that they could not be held due to the absence of concrete measures to ensure transparency, he proposed two possible paths to the appointment of head of state. In the first, a jirga-like popular assembly of scholars, ulama, and "non-affiliated" tribal elders from across the country could appoint a leader through some previously agreed "well-defined procedure." A second alternative could be to convene a meeting of the *ahl-a-hal wa'l aqd* (religious scholars and influential pious members of the community who, in some types of Islamist theory, are qualified to choose a leader). It was through such a mechanism that Burhanuddin Rabbani was re-appointed for two years in 1992 as president and Mullah Omar, according to some narratives, as amir ul-muminin in the 1990s.

In the skeptical camp, interviewees claimed variously that the Taliban movement as a whole would be unlikely to accept elections, or that it should not do so. According to many in this group, the *ahl-al-hal wa'l aqd* approach is incompatible with the notion that democracy is religiously legitimate. **SH**, a former deputy minister, argued:

The *ahl al-hal wa'l-aqd* method remains superior to general elections. In the former, only knowledgeable and respected people in the community whose judgment is widely trusted in society chooses the leader. In the latter, such wise and respected people, which are a minority class, are overwhelmed by the common people, most of whom are illiterate and with poor political judgment. This is so far the common understanding of the issue among many Taliban.

CH, from the Taliban information and culture wing, said that since the mainstream of the movement believes Sharia implies an amir (perhaps chosen by an *ahl-a-hal wa'l aqd* assembly) while the international community stresses general elections, a plausible solution might be a middle road that accommodates elements of both. He described a two-tiered political system with a supreme leader chosen by an *ahl-a-hal wa'l aqd* assembly and the head of the government (possibly a prime minister) elected directly by the public, similar to Iran.

At the end of the spectrum within the skeptical camp are those who draw from contemporary events in the Middle East. Articles have occasionally appeared in recent Taliban publications that cast doubt on the efficacy of holding polls. Such articles draw lessons from places like Egypt, where popular elections failed to empower the Muslim Brotherhood—which became clear following the military coup ousting Mohammad Morsi in 2013. Some commentators on Taliban websites have pointed to these events to suggest that an election was not the proper—and according to one article, Islamic—road to power.¹⁹ One election-skeptical interlocutor, **BS**, who is part of the Taliban’s media operation targeting foreign audiences, also referenced the Morsi coup and the fact that “ Hamas could change nothing by winning the election in Palestine.”

The election-neutral camp, which by anecdotal indications appears to be the largest, maintains that elections in and of themselves are not the relevant question. Rather, it is the outcome of an election that is of crucial concern. In other words, individuals in this group maintain that if an election-based system can lead to the value-based system they aspire to, the Taliban will support it. For many, the outcome is contingent on the design of the electoral system. “It is a matter of what kind of an electoral system is being developed and how it is sold to the Taliban constituency,” contended **PD**, a former Taliban minister. He added: “The election mechanism must be something which could be explained in historic terms in both an Afghan context of political practice and in an Islamic context. The risk is if the electoral system is perceived to be copied from some western countries, many of Taliban individuals will try to find faults with it and reject it as non-Islamic.”

LA also said that according to his knowledge of the Taliban’s current thinking, they would not be against elections per se, but of the content or substance that these elections could produce. The Taliban require general assurances that the state would be governed solely by Sharia law, that social justice be ensured, that the system be free of corruption and foreign influence, and that pious individuals would make up the leadership.

Interviewees falling in this category consistently emphasized three factors as prerogatives of the state: that the state should uphold Islamic values symbolically, in action and as a meritocracy. **PD**, the former Taliban minister and **LM**, the member of the political committee, said that the religious legitimacy of a popular election was an issue at best open to *ijtihad* (interpretation, as sanctioned for those issues which are not precisely covered in the primary Islamic scriptures), which means that, in theory, it can be endorsed by the ulama. According to proponents of this view, as long as electoral politics do not interfere with clearly defined Islamic rules, the Taliban might gradually accept elections as Sharia-compliant. **LM** argues, “The fact that there have not been public voices against elections within the movement signifies there is no serious ideological or theological challenge to it in the movement.” The most important thing for the Taliban, these interviewees contend, is not the foundation on which the politics of power function. Rather it is that the Islamic values that they have so long fought for are upheld by the government—regardless of whether it arises through a popular election, *ahl-a-hal wa’l aqd*, or another means altogether.

WHOSE ISLAM?

The consensus around an Islamic and Sharia-based state actually prescribes little about the specific substance/content of such a state's work. That is, which interpretation of Islam, and which elements of Sharia, should govern the new order? On this question, it would be misleading to simply assume the Taliban's approach during the Islamic Emirate to be one that they would apply today. To explore this issue, we will first examine Taliban practice in the 1990s to understand the group's historical motivations and (at times self-serving) justifications for their behavior. We will then trace the evolution of Taliban thought over the years on these questions, and then offer tentative appraisals about views within the insurgency today.

THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

While the Taliban's record in government is well-established and notorious, the reasons members of the movement give for their harsh edicts are varied and subtle. Senior leadership during the Emirate and the current period have repeatedly argued that their most notorious impositions—the shutting of girls' schools, the *Amr bil Maruf* religious police, the banning of television—were not in fact essential elements of the Taliban platform, as such, but rather emergency measures taken to account for the exigencies of building a state in the context of civil war and a war against the Northern Alliance. In effect, the Taliban has argued that they operated under a “state of exception,” not unlike emergency prohibitions undertaken by democratic states to curtail civil liberties in the face terrorism threats. While this contention may be dubious, because we have been unable to observe the Taliban operating outside of such conditions, the formulation is nonetheless useful for the insight it gives into the leadership's thinking behind enforcing such harsh rules.

For the Taliban, three factors necessitated a state of exception: 1) the context of the intra-mujahidin civil war from which the movement emerged; 2) the war on the northern front against Shura-i-Nazar and allies that absorbed much of the regime's resources and attention; and 3) the relatively underdeveloped state of the movement as a political entity. The intra-mujahidin civil war, during 1992-1996, had so thoroughly swept away the traditional social constraints and injunctions that it appeared, from the Taliban viewpoint, as a period of unrestrained excess. Women and boys were pulled from cars and raped, drug-addled commanders erected checkpoints to shake down passengers, and large parts of cities like Kabul and Kandahar were laid to waste. All this was done not by the atheist Communist regime, but by self-declared mujahidin.

Afghans had lost their way, and for the Taliban, the only solution was a restoration of virtue by returning to (in their belief) the root of authentic, traditional Islamic practice of the village. This meant that as moral enforcers, their job was not merely to eliminate vice, but to eliminate the enabling conditions of vice. So it was not enough to proscribe pornography, but to outlaw anything that could be used to view pornography—in other words, all television. Thus we have, for example, former Taliban civil servant Wahid Muzdha's recollection:²⁰

Mullah Muhammad Hasan Akhund as prime minister would get extremely agitated at the sight of newspapers thrown on the ground and (for him) disrespected. He believed that the act would drive the country toward destruction. On one holiday when I visited him, he was very upset that pages of the newspapers *Hewad* and *Anis* were used in wrapping bakery-made cakes. He also noted that after the holiday when he went to Kandahar, he would discuss the banning of newspaper printing with Mullah Omar.

According to him with the majority of Afghans being illiterate, the Voice of Shariah radio served them well enough. He also observed, “All my life I have not read even one newspaper article. Instead of wasting my time at that I read pages of the Quran.” In the same gathering someone said he had read in a book that disrespecting letters of the alphabet was in fact dishonoring the Quran because Quranic verses were written in alphabets. That statement was made in affirmation of Mullah Hasan’s opinion.

Mullah Muhammad Hassan Akhund’s actions were typical of the Taliban ethos at the time: if pages bearing the words of the Koran could be misused, then the very act of reading it—and not the intent behind reading it—was the subject of discipline. Similarly, if a game such as chess could be used for gambling, the most just solution—in the context of a society which had failed to regulate itself—was to eliminate the temptation altogether by outlawing the game, as the Taliban did in an early edict.

Second, the regime’s fight in the north—and in particular, certain calamitous episodes such as the betrayal of General Malik (which led to the deaths of thousands of Taliban)—absorbed the leadership’s attentions to such a point that all else was relegated to lesser importance. This could mean, at times, that ministerial officials could be off at the front, as Robert Crews describes:²¹

Fourteen months after Taliban forces seized Kabul, a journalist for the Guardian reported that the minister of health, Mullah Abbas, “hasn’t been seen for a month.” After closing hospital wards for women throughout the capital, he had vanished, possibly to the northern front. At the minister’s office, the journalist found “four faded pink files stacked in an empty wall unit” as the “only signs of administration of a health service for a population of 19 million people.”

Among other things, this meant that the wishes and predilections of soldiers on the front had a preponderant influence on the leadership’s decision making. A number of interviewees claimed that harsh rules toward women were to appease field commanders, many of whom hailed from rural Pashtun villages where the cultural mores dictated a rigid seclusion of women inside the home. For these individuals, the Taliban were worth fighting for only insofar as this particular understanding of Sharia was enforced. **YM**, who says he has discussed with leaders the consequences of implementing the “village” interpretation of Sharia for popularity of the movement, said:

What I would usually hear in defense of the austere version of Sharia was that this is now the popularly accepted version among the rural fighters who would see its relinquishing as betrayal of the Sharia cause as they saw it. For example girls’ education and work could have shocked many fighters since they had never seen a girl going to school or working in office in their villages. Improving their understanding of Islam was necessary and there were already efforts to ensure the fighters know about the most basic teachings of religion, such as performing the daily prayers properly. But to undertake a massive effort to change their interpretations needed some peace and a lot of time. This was envisioned to come as part of a process of transition to a stable statehood.

One interlocutor, **NW**, who worked in Mullah Omar’s office in Kandahar, said that decisions by ministers in Kabul would often be overturned in Kandahar when they were perceived to be potentially upsetting to fighters. For example, according to him, in 2000 a proposal came from Kabul to open a girls’ madrasa in the capital, funded by some European countries in close observation of Taliban restrictions—but it was rejected by Mullah Omar’s office upon fears of repercussions from field commanders. Given this, there was reluctance in the Kandahar-based leadership to broach issues that might be religiously controversial. As a result, the

leadership never sought validation from the ulama or religious institutions inside or outside the country for key policies such as the closing of girls schools or the ban on moving imagery.

Third, the Taliban movement was strikingly unlike all other groups on the Afghan political spectrum in that they did not have the benefit of years of underground work like Jamiat-e-Islami or Hizb-i-Islami in the 1970s, nor did they have a homogenous political experience throughout the 1980s jihad. While the core of the Taliban leadership fought together in taliban fronts in the 80s, after 1994 the movement's ranks swelled rapidly, taking in thousands of newcomers, both from other parties and from madrasas across the border. These typically sent students who were too young to have participated in the anti-Soviet jihad and therefore lacked the years of political experience and ideological acculturation that marks the core leadership group.²² A result was a pronounced ideological unevenness in the group, particularly as one moved down the ranks.

AM, a former minister, and **LM**, a current political committee affiliate, said this lack of sophistication characterized the lowest echelons of the movement in particular: "The fighting generation was generally characterized by poor understanding and experience of applying Sharia, and therefore more oriented towards harshness and intolerance. The elders, on the other hand, were generally more knowledgeable and experienced, particularly when it came to dealing practically with daily matters in the light of Sharia. Although there were exceptions among the elders as well, the generational difference was quite evident." In addition to their ties to rural Pashtun culture, the lower echelons, according to **NW**, "had hardly a sense of how modern politics work; nor did they know about how modern Islamic groups elsewhere practiced politics."

Those in the higher ranks were more religiously and politically sophisticated, but even they suffered from an underwhelming religious education and inadequate exposure to modern forms of Islamic practice. Table 2 lists the educational backgrounds of a number of key Taliban leaders. From it we can see that the majority of the key figures in the Taliban leadership lacked proper religious credentials. Most did not complete their studies and are called "mullah" simply because they engaged in some religious study. Full mullahs or religious scholars (mawlawis) were rare among the Taliban core leadership. A 2008 editorial in *Al-Samoud*, the Taliban's flagship publication, added that the very quality of education the Taliban received, not just its extent, was to blame:²³

The Taliban was established and evolved in difficult circumstances, and includes the students of religious schools that have been present in the Indian Subcontinent for a long time. The students of the aforementioned schools, although they have reached the highest levels of belonging and loyalty to their religion and faith, do not know about politics, especially the political situation of our day and age that is governed by technology, which has altered most standards. This is due to the fact that the religious schools in the Indian Subcontinent do not teach political subjects and were not the object of whichever intellectual invasion.

This editorial was a response to a series of critiques levied by Sheikh Bassam al-Shatti, an Arab *Hadiths* scholar. In some cases, the Taliban have used this reasoning to rewrite history, such as the following, also from the dialogue with al-Shatti, where the movement claims to have opposed television for purely technical reasons:

In regard to the non-existence of television channels, it was due to many problems and crises that prevented the opening of such channels at the time. There was for example the jurisprudential dispute between the scholars of the region and the unavailability of specialists and technicians, because the Taliban—as we have previously mentioned—was composed of students from schools located in the sub-continent, and these schools did not teach the needed subjects. Therefore, the

students did not have any media background and did not know how to produce TV shows, not to mention the lack of tools and equipment used by television networks. In the meantime, the world was not helping the Islamic Emirate at this level, rather placing obstacles to prevent its progress and keep it in the corner, far away from the world, in the hope that these difficulties and this isolation will push it to abandon its Islamic roots and its rulings that are drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunna. Apart from that, the Islamic Emirate regulations stress the importance of the media and its efficient role in spreading Islam, serving the communities and building a great Islamic edifice. However, the circumstances made it focus on the available means, as it could not open or equip international channels, such as television among others, in order to air its shows.

Regardless of whether this is an accurate reflection of the Taliban's attitude toward television during the Emirate, the statement is indicative of the extent to which the movement has been forced to evolve in their public persona, in some cases adopting an apologist tone for strident past policies. This is partly because certain features that defined the State of Exception are no longer in place. Today, the Taliban's aim is not necessarily the restoration of virtue or building a state in the face of a Hobbesian breakdown of morality. Rather, its goal is to oust foreign occupiers, reclaim Afghan sovereignty, and convert the state into one based on Islam. This shifting emphasis explains why certain practices that were once controversial or proscribed, such as moving imagery, are now a regular part of the Taliban's propaganda repertoire.

EVOLUTION

As a result, there has been a critical reflection on a number of the harsher edicts. This has been spurred, in part, by the experience of living in the relatively cosmopolitan world of Pakistan and the Gulf, the exposure to a world broader than 1980s Kandahar, and (in a number prominent cases) the fact that Taliban leaders have completed their education during their years in exile. This improved Islamic training has opened up the movement's leadership to the broader world of Islamic discourse, in which the Taliban's social policies had always been on an extreme fringe.

Interpretations borne out of a rudimentary understanding of their religion and the traditional strictures of village life have been challenged by the relative breadth of religious reasoning and debate found in other more progressive regions. For example, many of the interviewees have in recent years been exposed to alternative Islamist discourses for the first time, and they often have found this literature rich and well argued. In the words of **BK**: "The environment of the [1990s] Emirate was typically one which was tightly closed. There used to be very little or no close interactions with non-jihadi Islamist groups. The ideological debates were only revolving around what some Deobandi ulama wrote or said. Beyond that, ideologies of Islamic groups doing political struggle, such as Jamaat-e Islami, were classified as unorthodox." Thus in the 1990s the Taliban took a harsh view toward groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami; during the Islamic Emirate, all publications by these two organizations, and more generally all works by Yusuf Qaradawi and Abul Ala Maududi—thinkers who have influenced a generation of Islamists—were banned. Today, however, the movement frequently defends the Brotherhood, cites Qaradawi and others for religious justification, and more generally places itself within broader global trends in Islamist thought.

BS explained some of the factors behind this evolution: "[It is] partly due to the embracing [by some Taliban leaders] of information technology and the free media. Now, most of the educated members of the movement read, hear and discuss about the plights of Hamas and of the Muslim Brotherhood; and the statements of Munawwar Hassan [leader of Jamaat-e Islami 2013-2014] and ideas of Qaradawi, Zakir Naik [Indian comparative religion scholar and orator] and even Salafi and Sunni Iranian scholars. The circulation

of the diverse ideas is made possible by CDs, televisions, newspapers and internet.” **BS** added that those in Pakistan, whether there for a winter recess or based permanently, had much better access to media outlets, books and the Internet along with more time for ideological discussions, which has inevitably opened them up to non-Deobandi schools of thoughts.

This shift has occurred concurrently with a broadening of social outlook. For instance, Mutawakkil, Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaeef, and other former Taliban insiders have established an organization with the aim of funding girls’ schools in insurgent-held areas. The organization is currently running a university and a school attended by girls and boys in Kabul, perhaps in response to unrelenting international criticism. And the daughters and female family members of leading Taliban cadres are attending schools and universities in Pakistan and the Gulf. **DF**, a former diplomat, said that his daughters were going to school in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia with full knowledge of the Taliban leadership. This points more generally to the fact that the state of exception that defined the 1990s cannot reasonably be defended today if a negotiated settlement is reached.

Even if the “state of exception” argument is disingenuous, or if the Taliban have made a virtue of necessity over the years, the fact that the enabling conditions—the civil war anarchy, the internal war—might no longer be a factor means that an ideological space is opened up in the context of negotiations.²⁴ On this point, a number of interviewees emphasized that Taliban redlines lie not with female education as such, but rather with co-ed or wholly secular education, which accords with views voiced even by Mullah Omar:²⁵

We do not object to women working or to the education of women in our country. However, what we object to and prevent by force is if this work or education breaches Islamic Shari’a. Nowadays, there are scores of schools, especially for girls in the area of the [Islamic Emirate], and there are jobs performed by women, such as the teaching of girls and medicine for women. We encourage this and we call for it on condition that hospitals for females are segregated from hospitals for males, and on condition that the work conditions are in harmony with Islamic Shari’a, not to satisfy instincts, whims and lust. We do not care if the West or the world complain about us in this respect. All we want is to establish Islamic Shari’a in Afghanistan; we do not care who is satisfied and who is not satisfied.

Similarly, several interviewees presently active in the movement said that an Islamic state should not only allow women to go to school, but it must encourage them; indeed, the state should use its resources toward this end. The condition for such education is that girls should observe the proper hijab and that there should be full segregation. There appears to be little change on the view of women’s right to work, however. Most interviewees accepted the need of women in the sectors of health and education, and in any government department dealing with women and children. Beyond that, there appears to be little enthusiasm for the idea of women holding public office or working in businesses not dealing with females or children. **LM**, a member of the political committee, offered perhaps the most liberal view when he said that a woman should be able to work any job fitting “her tender nature” with the condition of a segregated work environment. “Women in an Islamic state can also work in the field of engineering,” for example, he said, “by contributing to the design process.”

These and other political committee proposals are clearly a far cry from gender equality, though the evolving stance does point to openings on questions of negotiations and the accommodation of more liberal forces in a future state.

Similarly, there has been critical reflection on other notorious practices. For instance, Akbar Agha, one of the founding members (though not part of the Emirate himself) voices an opinion repeated by a number of interviewees when he writes:²⁶

The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has recently come under a lot of criticism ... The minister was ... not especially professional [since he did not act by] slowly starting and gradually introducing things until people became used to the new rules. An indication of his unprofessionalism was that he set up *pataks* [checkpoints] for prayers and would make everyone pray regardless of whether they were sick or hadn't even done their ablutions. Many people (including myself) told him that they should perform their duties like the Saudis do, only asking the shopkeepers to shut their shops during prayer time and guiding people to perform their prayers. Other people in the city usually had to work with the shopkeepers and when the shops were closed they would come and perform the prayers. In some provinces, uneducated people were assigned to this administration. Most of the things that the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice implemented were necessary, but they should have been introduced gradually.

Taliban interviewees unanimously admitted that the behavior of the *amr bil-maruf* religious police was excessive and erroneous—and according to some, disastrous. **YM**, a political committee member and former senior official in the foreign ministry, cited Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, the erstwhile justice minister notorious for his puritanical implementation of Sharia, as recently acknowledging that he was misrepresenting Islam due to his “own ignorance of the religion.”

I met Turabi in Pakistan last year. He was wittily making fun of his past extreme behaviors. In retrospect of practices such as stopping people in public to check their beard for trimming and violently crushing music tape cassettes on streets of Kabul, Turabi asked: “Wasn't it dumb of us to engage in such trivial acts?” I was amazed how he had realized his mistakes [given his character as a stubborn person in the past]. He said the prison [for several years in Pakistan] taught him a lot about the erroneous behaviors of the Taliban and made him realize the extreme harsh practices were not in accordance with Sharia, and also the main source of people's negative perception of the Emirate.

On the question of media, too, the Taliban appear to be slowly learning the lessons of the 1990s. Video clips are frequently used in propaganda, and more generally, Taliban interviewees have focused on the content of media rather than the inherent form. The chief reservation with electronic media remains centered around films and music that encourage “obscenity and promiscuity” through programs featuring unveiled or dancing women. “Under an Islamic state, you cannot have young boys and girls flirting on air, foreign serials promoting Western culture, or the Afghan Star show,” said **MH**, a member of the media wing, referring to the popular song contest airing yearly on Afghan television.

Interviewees also objected to the current atmosphere of what they felt to be “unlimited” freedom of expression, which some saw as subjecting dignified personalities to slander and made it acceptable for media outlets to receive foreign funding. The culmination in this line of thinking is perhaps the attack on Tolo TV personnel in January 2016. In general, while the Taliban have evolved from their hardline stance regarding the moral status of television in principle, they remain a fierce opponent of any form of independent media.

Nonetheless, these conservative tendencies are far less worrying than the bigger challenge: the rank and file. One of the key factors that drove the 1990s state of exception remains in full force: the political weight of the military command. In fact, some interlocutors argue that the military command plays an even greater role today than during the emirate period, since the movement is an active insurgency with a thin veneer of political, cultural and legal institutions directing it. Although the new generation of fighters is more cosmopolitan than its predecessor, the same concerns of legitimacy drive Taliban discourse to hew closely to statements

about jihad and the vague notion of a future “Islamic state.” The leadership and propaganda wings deftly avoid specifics on the treatment of women and minorities, or political pluralism. If in the course of negotiations the Taliban surrenders too much of what its core military base considers essential to its self-conception, the group runs the risk of having a diminished ability to enforce a settlement.

For example, after the Taliban issued a new education policy in 2012 that banned attacks on schools, a number of commanders in Helmand refused to comply. When the leadership pressed them, they threatened to quit the movement altogether. Mullah Mansur, as acting head of the supreme council, intervened and asked the fighters to stop voicing their objections publicly, while he promised to investigate the matter. It is unclear how this issue was resolved, although school attacks did decrease in subsequent years.²⁷

To complicate matters, the movement rarely speaks about specific rules under an Islamic state, obsessed as it is with the current fight. Its silence regarding individual freedoms and women’s rights might be a tactic to simultaneously appease the base and the international community. Privately, leading members will offer candid assessments of these questions. Two members of the political committee and a Pakistan-based member of the cultural commission admit that during the Emirate the Taliban could have offered more concrete evidence of the provisional nature of their social restrictions. In public, however, the movement avoids pertinent issues, allowing the military wing to enjoy a de facto authority that can pose a great threat to the shape of a future state.

THE POST-WITHDRAWAL STATE

The foundation of the future state in Sharia law is the bedrock—and in some cases, the extent—of the Taliban’s theorization on the subject. Individually, however, a number of figures have put forward proposals that are surprisingly accommodating to the current constitution. **DF** and **PD**, ex-Taliban officials who keep themselves abreast of the Taliban’s evolving demands, and **CH**, an active media figure in the movement, argue that the current constitution only needs to be taken seriously and enforced. The present-day laws have already been made on the basis of Sharia and the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, according to this view.

AM, a former Taliban minister, said: “There are two types of laws. The first is the constitution, which sets out the overall legal framework of a state. And the second is a collection of civil or common laws. When it comes to constitution, the current constitution only needs slight modifications to sort out the contradiction between equal recognition of international conventions and Sharia. The common laws are already Islamic and would only need full enforcement.” **AM** said that the constitution should clearly state the superiority of Sharia in cases where certain provisions of international conventions clash with Islamic law.

Other respondents demanded stricter implementation of laws prohibiting usury and alcohol, and argued for the enforcement of *hudood* (the Sharia penal code consisting of severe punishments for adultery, fornication, transgression, robbery, and theft) and harsh measures against corruption. Implementation of the *hudood*—which can include the public execution of a murderer by the victim’s family and the amputation of a thief’s hand—would clearly be an affront to international human rights norms, although it would not necessarily be unpopular in Afghanistan.

Beyond formal politics, interviewees were unanimous in agreeing that the state should undertake measures to promote and inculcate religious values and mores in the population. Practically, this would be most prevalent in the fields of education and media, specifically in the use of Islam in schools, through generous funding for madrasas and mosques, and through the support of the ulama in national politics. An internal letter circulated in Pakistan among the Taliban leadership urging the movement to begin to grapple with the requirements and challenges of a post-withdrawal state, arguing that:

Anti-Islamic organizations such as Oxford, Cambridge and Agha Khan Education were given the tasks of writing books and printing of the curriculum books of Afghanistan. These three organizations prepared a curriculum which does not have any links to religion. Most of the authors of these books do not have any links with religion and it is because of the struggle of these organizations. When the readers of the new curriculum reach the state of pre-medical/engineering/arts entry tests, their names will be of Muslims and their thinking will be of an English or of an American. They will be so distant from religion that they will be considering religion (Islam) as the religion of the past people. They will have no respect for our values, ulamas (scholars) and our educational history. They will consider Mehmood Ghaznavi as a hungry invader who according to them invaded India about ten times for the sake of silver and gold. They will consider Amanullah Khan as an intellectual who competed against the uneducated scholars in order to implement democracy.

AM, the former minister, argued that an Islamic state should be understood in an Afghan context, meaning that it should promote Afghan culture and traditions, which would overlap with public manifestations of religion. For an Afghan Islamic state, **AM** stated that is not enough to simply copy a practice from another Muslim country, even if it is considered Islamic there. He mentioned, for example, the hijab, a certain form of which might be considered acceptable in Malaysia or Egypt but would not be considered sufficiently Islamic in the Afghan context.

As with other cases, the views of the rank and file are more difficult to determine. There is unlikely to be a consensus on the issue, if only because it appears to have been rarely discussed among field commanders or their fighters. Rank and file fighters interviewed in this study and by the authors elsewhere appear to place primary emphasis on national sovereignty in determining the constitution's legitimacy and less so on the document's actual content.

CONCLUSION

The Taliban—or at least one element of their leadership—have undergone a marked evolution in thought over the years. They have expanded from an idiosyncratic, doctrinaire movement that policed every aspect of social and religious life to one that is growing more aligned with the traditional concerns of conservative Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the Jamaat-e Islami and Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam in Pakistan. Using this transformation as a guide, we can tentatively divide political issues of concern to the Taliban political committee into two categories: Red-line issues, and those issues open to negotiation that have been discussed within Taliban circles. Red-line issues include:

- The complete withdrawal of foreign troops
- A state based on Sharia law

While the second red line appears to be prohibitive with respect to a democratic or pluralistic society, in fact Taliban respondents in this study argue that the current constitution is consistent in theory with Sharia under the condition of Afghan sovereignty. That is, the withdrawal of foreign troops and the end of what is perceived as foreign domination are the true red lines, and the Taliban—or at least one grouping within the leadership—is prepared to accept some version of the current constitution with appropriate framing to highlight the supremacy of Sharia. The specific emphases of Sharia and the role of state/society relations appears to be up for debate. These include the role of women, the possibility of elections, and the question of which social mores to discipline and how to do it.

In all of these deliberations, the question of the military rank and file looms large. Most respondents indicated that an Islamic state would necessarily require a clampdown on certain rights and freedoms as a way of pacifying those in the trenches. Likewise, it would be expected to have a prominent role for the ulama in defining the state's structures and laws. Many fighters have lost loved ones and comrades—unjustly, they feel. Thus, deep-seated grievances will not likely be resolved through an elite settlement that leaves either the lower echelons of the movement or dynamics in local communities untouched. This suggests that elite-level talks should proceed simultaneously with efforts to:

- Address grievances in communities and among fighters. This does not mean “reintegration” or providing jobs, but rather addressing the factors that have led to dislocation and oppression. This includes working toward curbing or removing counterterrorism operations, pro-government strongmen and militias from the political scene.
- Launch a truth and reconciliation mechanism that can help heal the wounds of four decades of war. Such an endeavor, if truly fair, should include all sections of society that have been affected by the violence, not just those who are currently allied with the government.

TABLE 1: TALIBAN CABINET, MID-1999

Name	Position	Faction
Abdul Latif Mansur	Minister of Agriculture	Harakat-e-Mansur
Jalaluddin Haqqani	Minister of Borders and Tribes	Haqqani
Abdul Hakim Munib	Deputy Minister of Borders and Tribes	Harakat-e-Mansur
Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansur	Minister of Civil Aviation	Taliban
Mullah Abdul Razaq	Minister of Commerce	Taliban
Mullah Obaidullah Akhund	Minister of Defense	Taliban
Amir Khan Mottaqi	Minister of Education	Jamiat-e-Tulabha (Nabi)
Mullah Agha Jan Motassim	Minster of Finance	None
Mullah Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Jamiat-e-Tulabha (Nabi)
Qari Din Mohammad	Minister of Higher Education	Harakat-e-Nabi
Mawlawi Arsala Rahmani	Deputy Minister of Higher Education	Harakat-e-Mansur
Qodratullah Jamal	Minister of Information and Culture	Harakat-e-Nabi
Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund	Minister of Interior	Taliban
Mullah Noruddin Turabi	Minister of Justice	Taliban
Mawlawi Jalaluddin Shinwari	Deputy Minister of Justice	Zahir Shah
Mawlawi Abdul Raqib Takhari	Minister of Martyrs and Refugees	Harakat-e-Nabi
Mullah Mohammad Easa Akhund	Minister of Mines and Industry	Taliban
Mullah Mohammad Wali	Minister of Amr bil-Maruf	Taliban
Mullah Saduddin Saeed	Minister of Planning	Taliban
Mullah Mohammad Abbas Akhund	Minister of Health	Taliban
Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai	Deputy Minister of Health	Harakat-e-Nabi
Mawlawi Ahmadullah Muti	Minister of Public Works	Taliban
Mawlawi Yar Mohammad Rahimi	Minister of Telecommunication	Taliban
Mawlawi Ahmad Jan	Minister of Water and Power	Harakat-e-Mansur
Qari Ahmadullah	Director of Intelligence	Haqqani
Mawlawi Abdul Kabir	Deputy Prime Minister	Hizb-i-Islami Khalis
Mullah Mohammad Rabbani	Prime Minister	Taliban
Mullah Mohamamd Hassan Akhund	Deputy Prime Minister	Taliban

TABLE 2 - HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED (2001)

Name	Position	Education
Mullah Mohammad Omar	Supreme Leader	Incomplete mullah
Mullah Mohammad Rabbani	Prime Minister	Incomplete mullah
Mullah Nooruddin Turabi	Justice Minister	Incomplete mullah
Mawlawi Mohammad Wali	Amr bil-Maruf Minister	Full mullah, incomplete mawlawi
Mullah Obaidullah	Defense Minister	Incomplete mullah
Mullah Beradar	Deputy Defense Minister	Incomplete mullah
Mullah Ahmad Wakil Mutawakkil	Foreign Minister	Incomplete mullah
Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund	Deputy Prime Minister	Incomplete mullah
Mawlawi Abdul Kabir	Deputy Prime Minister	mawlawi

ENDNOTES

¹While the Taliban's views for example on elections, relations with other states and women's education are getting closer to those held by political Islamist parties in Pakistan (Jamaat-e Islami and Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam) and Egypt (Muslim Brotherhood), considerable distance remains in views on subjects such as women's role in public life and politics. There does seem to be some opening in this area too, but the gap is still remarkable. The harder line on such issues can be understood in the context of the cultural environment in which the Taliban operates. Compared to (rural) Afghanistan, Pakistani and Egyptian societies are generally much more liberal/tolerant when it comes to freedoms for women.

²"Post-withdrawal" here refers to the ideal-type case of full withdrawal of foreign troops. It appears unlikely that troops will ever fully withdraw except as an outcome of a political settlement.

³Table 1 lists, in effect, the formal distribution of power. The informal distribution of power, which includes those working in the office of Mullah Omar, and certain Ulama, are even more heavily biased in favor of "core" Kandahari Taliban.

⁴For more on these negotiations, see Felix Kuehn (2013), *Missed Opportunities: Lessons from the West's Talks with the Taliban pre-2001*. (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

⁵A typical example is Qari Ahmadullah, a Khogyani from Ghazni who studied in North Waziristan in Jalaluddin Haqqani's madrasa and later fought under him in the jihad. Ahmadullah left his studies in 1994 to join the nascent movement—before the Haqqanis had entered into a power-sharing deal with the Taliban—and quickly rose to become the director of intelligence. Because he joined as an individual, not as part of a political settlement with the Haqqanis, he should not be seen as a Haqqani appointment.

⁶This stance is not unique to the Taliban; the Northern Alliance behaved the same way. In fact, it is highly likely that any powerful political group will adopt this negotiating stance.

⁷Zaef, Abdul Salaam (2011) *My Life with the Taliban*, London: Hurst

⁸Such assertions do not square with the experience on the ground however, where local figures—including tribal elders and village notables—continue to be targeted or harassed. This suggests the breadth of the divide on thinking in this matter between the political wing and the fighters on the ground.

⁹As with all other statements and attitudes attributed to Mullah Omar, it is difficult to know to whether this was Omar's actual position or whether it had simply been attributed to him by elements in the Taliban leadership.

¹⁰Gopal, Anand (2014) "Kandahar's Mystery Executions," *Harpers* August

¹¹As usual, the Taliban are imprecise as to what "inclusiveness" would mean in practice, and how it would differ from power sharing.

¹²Malkasian, Carter (2013) *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier*. Oxford University Press

¹³Martin, Mike (2014) *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, 1978-2012*. Oxford University Press

¹⁴Forthcoming publication *Post-Mullah Omar Taleban*, Borhan Osman, Afghanistan Analysts Network.

¹⁵ibid

¹⁶This illustrates the Taliban's origins as a "traditionalist" movement. See Gopal and Strick van Linschoten, forthcoming, in the Afghan Analysts Network.

¹⁷"Taliban Spokesman on Aims, Philosophy," *al-Majallah*, October 23 1996, via the Taliban Sources Project.

¹⁸In fact, during the May 2015 Taliban statement to the International Pugwash Research Conference, the group described the need for a new constitution and makes no mention of the old dastur: "We frankly and courageously affirm that this constitution will be drafted by Afghan intellectuals in a free and independent atmosphere which will then be presented to the masses for approval. The present constitution of Afghanistan is unreliable because it is imitated from the west and is drafted under the shadow of B-52 bombers of the foreign invaders. Its contents are vague and inconsistent which are imposed on the Muslim masses of Afghanistan." See: <https://activist1.wordpress.com/2015/05/05/qatar-islamic-emirate-afghan-taliban-release-full-statement-delivered-at-international-pugwash-research-conference/>

¹⁹One article which was published in the wake of Morsi's topple and titled "Lessons for Islamists from Mursi's unjust fall", presented arguments against an engagement of Islamists in electoral politics. The writer, who goes by a pseudonym but is reportedly an influential Taliban ideologue, says that even when disregarding the controversy around elections from a Sharia point of view, it has become unrealistic for Islamist movements "to reach the goal of [establishing] an Islamic state through a democratic struggle". The writer supports the argument with two "facts". The first is the perceived corruption of Muslim societies by "a century of Western imperialism" that makes them choose a "non-Islamic" person over an "Islamic" candidate in elections. Second, the writer concludes that those Islamist movements that stuck to democratic processes were doomed to bloody failure; he refers to the coups against Islamists who won democratic elections in Algeria in 1991, in Turkey in 1997 and in Egypt today. He writes that they should change their approach to use "force, *dawah* [missionary work] and revolution" instead, in order to reach the goal of establishing an Islamic system. More at Mursi in Kabul: Afghan Islamists Scrutinize Democracy in the Wake of Egypt's Coup by Borhan Osman, Afghan Analysts Network, September 2013.

²⁰Muzhda, Wahid (2002) *Afghanistan Under Five Years of Taliban Sovereignty*, via the Taliban Sources Project.

²¹Crews, Robert D., in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Crews, Robert D., and Tarzi, Amin. Boston: Harvard University Press

²²See Strick van Linschoten, Alex and Kuehn, Felix, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban-al Qaeda Merger*. Hurst, London. 2012

²³Shahabuddin Ghaznawi (2008) "Correcting the Concepts," *Al-Samoud*, Issue 19, via the Taliban Sources Project

²⁴Of course, changing battlefield conditions—especially with the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan—may recreate this sense of internal war and anomie.

²⁵Taliban Leader Explains Policy," Al Sharq al Awsat, May 10 1998, via the Taliban Sources Project

²⁶Agha, Syed Akbar (2014) I Am Akbar Agha, First Draft Press

²⁷Task Force Helmand INTSUM 2009, May 15 2012

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Cover Photo: Taliban political office at a conference in Kyoto together with Massoum Stanekzai, CEO of the High Peace Council. Stanekazi, second from right, and Hanafi, with white beard. © Masanori Naito/Doshisha University