

Implications of the Enigmatic Rise of Taliban: A Historical Perspective



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Abstract: *The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1994 was the opening of a new chapter in the current Afghan history while Afghanistan's socio-political environment was in disorder. The emergence of the Taliban was a new phenomenon, and no one expected that an ordinary militia would become a strong power in Afghanistan. Taliban was a highly secret force that had neither formal structure nor any formal membership. It was also believed that the Taliban were Pakistan protégé. Their rise to power in Afghanistan had a profound impact on Pakistan's society. Violence, drug trade, corruption and soared with the rise of the Taliban. Pakistan aimed in the militia support a friendly regime in Kabul and strategic equilibrium in the region. However, the Taliban harsh policies against women and Human Rights violations invoked international criticism. Taliban had no economic vision except for revenue from the drug trade and smuggling of goods via the Durand Line. Their policies had serious implications for the region and the globe. The Taliban support and provision of sanctuaries to Al-Qaida invited international sanctions. The September 11 Terrorist attack on US soil ultimately turned into the fall of the Taliban.*

Key Words: Pakistan, Taliban, Afghan, Al-Qaida

Introduction

The origin and rise of the Taliban phenomena were linked to a story of Mullah Omar and his students: one day, he was sitting in his small Madrassa (religious school or seminary) with his students in Singesar village Maiwand district of Kandahar province and a father of girls complained that a commander of Kandahar had kidnapped his two teenage girls and raped. The father sought Mullah Omar help, and the latter, along with his students, took arms, whose total number was thirty and had only fourteen or sixteen rifles to free the girls from the camp. Afterwards, they were called the Taliban. Taliban attacked the commander camp, hanged the commander and freed the girls. Afterwards, for few months, it had become a practice that people faced with the problem had to appeal to Mullah Omar and the Taliban had to move to their help against warlords (Rubin, 2002).

The emergence of the Taliban happened in a time of acute socio-political crisis in southern Afghanistan. Support to any socio-political or military movement to purge the society from the evils in such an environment is unquestionable. Taliban were expected to restore law and order in Kandahar, and for that reason, their rise received pleasant support from

the people of Kandahar. Even though the Taliban had no resources and weapons in their embryonic stage and it was supposed that they received assistance and backing from transporters whose business was highly damaged due to infighting between warlords (Goodhand, 2008).

Taliban and Pakistan contact had come to the front at a time when Pakistan sent a convoy loaded with medicine, goods and food from Quetta passing through Kandahar-Herat to Turkmenistan. It was held in Kandahar by a warlord and put conditions for the release of the convoy. The first attempt was made with negotiation through tribal elders; however, talks were failed. Consequently, Pakistan approached the Taliban and requested the release of the convoy, and on November 3, 1994, the Taliban released the Pakistani convoy from the warlord Mansur Achakzai (Dixit, 1995).

Taliban moved to the city, and all of the commanders were ousted from Kandahar and captured large amounts of ammunition, including Tanks, jets and helicopters. Mullah Naqib, the commander who was appointed as corps commander of Kandahar by President Rabbani, did not resist at the

cost of receiving handsome money from Pakistani intelligence ([Tanner, 2002](#)).

The capture of Kandahar was a triumph of the Taliban and was celebrated by Pakistan Government. Jamiat Ulema Islam, and Nasrullah Babar, praised the victory by saying, "They are our children" ([Rashid, 2001](#)). The Taliban force also increased from a few hundred to 2500-3000 just in few weeks. The success of liberating Pakistani convoys and ousting warlords from the Kandahar Taliban cleared the ways for the Taliban to advance towards other provinces. Kandahar, the second-largest city of Afghanistan and historical capital, was now under the rule of the Taliban ([Dorransoro, 2005](#)).

In the three months after the takeover of Kandahar, the Taliban had captured 12 provinces and were knocking the outskirts of Kabul to the north and Herat in the west ([Rashid, 2001](#)). In August Taliban ran over Jalalabad and also took the Kabul forces by surprise that had left no option for Massoud (Northern Alliance) but to vacate the Kabul city in September 1996 as any resistance could have been proved futile. About two-third of Afghanistan was now in Taliban control ([Sullivan, 2007](#)).

The Taliban first horrific act was the merciless killing of former Afghan president Najibullah, who had taken refuge in the UN compound after their exit from power in 1992. The execution of Najibullah was condemned by the world in general and the UN, in particular, that resulted in diplomatic pressure on Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, allies of the Taliban ([Cooley, 1999](#)).

The death of Najibullah was also condemned in Pakistan by various human rights groups and criticized Pakistan for supporting of Taliban. The response of Massoud was that 'Pakistan is trying to subjugate Afghanistan and turn into a colony by installing a puppet government. It would not work because the Afghan people have always been independent and free' ([Rashid, 2001](#)). On May 24, 1997, the Taliban took over Mazar Sharif, which was a setback for the Northern Alliance and on the day next, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE granted diplomatic recognition to the Taliban ([Maass, 1999](#)). By the end of the year 1998, the Taliban had controlled more than ninety percent territory of Afghanistan and all major cities and towns except Badakhshan, whereas the Northern Alliance had less than ten percent population, and none of the remarkable cities was in their control.

Objectives of the Taliban

Taliban movement was military and highly secret; however, it had neither formal structure nor any formal membership. Further, the Taliban movement was comprised of different ranks, one of former Mujahideen who fought against Soviets in Harkat Inqilab and Hizbe Islami, second of those of fresh students of Madrassa who had joined now the movement and third group was the former communists who had joined the movement on the basis of ethnic unity and on behest of Pakistan ([Davis, 1998](#)).

The official stated goals of the Taliban movement that they had issued were the restoration of law and order, improvement of a socio-economic condition which was the result of the very poor condition of the society after state collapse. Therefore leading goals of the Taliban movement were the restoration of peace, disarmament of the population and protection of the Islamic character of Afghanistan and, ultimately, the establishment of the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan ([Sullivan, 2007](#)). Mullah Omar also had expressed the prime objective of the Taliban movement to achieve the aims of Afghan Jihad and protect the innocent Afghans from the bandit warlords ([Rashid, 2001](#)).

Earlier at the time of the rise of the Taliban, their primary objective was the restoration of peace, and they were limited to Kandahar; however, after success and winning the support, their objectives were changed, and their goal had become the establishment of the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan, which was supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and even, covertly, by the USA to encircle Iran (Personal Communication with Dr. Khadim Hussain, on 20th April 2019).

To the Taliban leadership, the most important issue was the prevailing poor security situation, and according to them, it was due to the absence of a truly Islamic government. For the enforcement of the law, a department of religious police had been established with the name of Amr Bil-Marooif Wa-Nahi Anil Munkir (Department for promotion of virtue and the Suppression of Vice), which was one of the best departments in Taliban administration.

They had imposed the strict form of Islamic law in areas under their control. They had banned women from work; a tough dress code was imposed, girls were banned from going to school, girl's schools and colleges were close down that affected seventy thousand girls students only in Kabul. Besides,

amputation of hands for thieves and stoning to death for adulterers as punishment were announced. Though extremism had flourished and strengthened before the intervention of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan however, Taliban policies in Afghanistan had further intensified extremism in Afghan society ([Dorransoro, 2005](#)).

Taliban economy was dependent on revenue from Afghan transit trade and opium cultivation. Taliban believed that they would provide security that will encourage foreign investment in the form of the pipeline and would bring socio-economic stability to Afghanistan ([Rubin, 2000](#)). Taliban viewed Oil and Gas pipeline as a lifeline for their future government; nonetheless, continued infighting, civil war, and terrorism not only hampered the pipeline project but isolated the Taliban internationally. Subsequently, opium production had become a prevalent business in Taliban control areas. According to UNDP reports, ninety-seven percent (97%) of poppy was produced in Taliban control areas, and they had levied 10% (usher) on opium production, and another 20% Zakat levied on traders ([Rubin, 2000](#)).

Opium trade and smuggling of goods under the Afghan Transit Trade was another major source of revenue for the Taliban. Goods were to be imported from Japan, Dubai to Afghanistan through Pakistan and then had to be smuggled back to Pakistan and sold duty-free at a cheap rate in the markets. Another route of smuggling trade was imported from Dubai via Iran to Afghanistan and then from Afghanistan to Pakistan. The estimate of that trade was about \$2.5 billion per annum, and the Taliban had to receive a handsome share in the form of tax from the illegal trade. Taliban had a large share of the revenue from goods trade than opium trade, and later they had banned poppy cultivation and drug trade in 1999 though, it was a major source of their revenue initially ([Brown, 2013](#)).

Pakistan and Taliban

The elongated Afghan conflict after the exit of Najibullah and the tilt of Rabbani towards Iran and India had worried Pakistan security policymakers and strategists. Further, Pakistan was facing problems in the attainment of its goals to get access to Central Asia, strategic depth and a friendly regime at Kabul in the presence of Rabbani and Massoud. In addition, Pakistan regarded support to the Hekmatyar and later Taliban as crucial to achieving Pakistan Afghan policy goals ([Alavi, 1998](#)).

It was also believed that the Taliban were the creation of Pakistan, and thousands of students had joined the Taliban from Pakistani madrassas with approval of the later. In other cases, how Taliban could carry out large campaigns without foreign support and made fast strategic advances without proper military logistic support and supplies. Further, Pakistan played a crucial role in their success and provided immense technical, financial and diplomatic support despite that the Taliban movement leadership and core elements were Afghans.

Further, policies and actions demonstrated in limited areas independence in their decision as Taliban leader Mullah Ghaus had complained once that Pakistan must accept Taliban status and should not bypass Taliban in any kind of Afghanistan related deal. However, their independent status was only limited to Kandahar when they moved beyond Kandahar, and in the sphere of foreign policy, they were not independent in their decisions (Personal Communication with Dr. Khadim Hussain, on 20th April 2019).

Pakistan had explained factors for the victory of the Taliban that it was the result of anarchy and people exhaustion and the Taliban response towards the restoration of peace, disarmament of the warlords and establishment of the justice system. Nonetheless, for an indigenous movement, it is just that it owns the history of the land, respect its customs, culture, civilization, and promote living codes. Ironically Taliban destroyed all that, even Buddha Statues. (Personal Communication with Dr. Khadim Hussain, on 20th April, 2019).

The sign of Pakistan close involvement and support for Taliban existed at early stage of their emergence. It was with the approval of Pakistan that Taliban had captured large dump of ammunition near Spin Boldak ([Coll, 2005](#)). Even though, Afghan Government at Kabul and foreign diplomats in Pakistan were sure that Taliban victory in Kandahar was not possible without Pakistan help. Pakistan patronized their operations and provided logistic, technical support, whereas Saudi Arabia financial support played a crucial role in the further advance of the Taliban.

Moreover, in Pakistan, different power pillars had links with the Taliban and civilians, military apparatus had backed the Taliban for their own objectives. In 1993, the new civilian government of Benazir Bhutto came to power in Pakistan and her

close aide Nasirullah Babar became an interior minister who was already at odd with ISI over Afghan policy and wanted control of Pakistan's Afghan policy. Benazir Bhutto Government was interested in opening route for trade with energy-rich Central Asia, and the shortest route was Ashkhabad Herat-Kandahar which was safe as compared to northern Afghanistan ([Coll, 2005](#)).

The Pakistan military had its own assumptions that the Taliban would recognize the Durand Line, a disputed boundary between the two countries drawn by the British in 1893. The military junta also believed that with the rise of the Taliban, Pakhtun nationalism would also die in Pakistan two provinces Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. However, the Taliban had also rejected the idea of recognition of Durand Line as an international border with fear that the issue could spark a tribal revolt against them (Personal Communication with Dr. Khadim Hussain, on 20th April 2019).

In the 1990s, the Benazir Bhutto regime in Pakistan was in alliance with (JUI). JUI chief Fazl-U-Rehman had a strong say in the federal government since he was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Maulana also had close interaction with intelligence agencies, while Benazir had found an ally that could counter Jamaat Islami and PML. Both were former allies of General Zia and were considered close to the military establishment. Deoband school ideas had a profound influence over Afghanistan Ulema, and their madrassa network provided the bulk of volunteer students who were trained in Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta (Personal Conversation with Madrassa student 2018). Pakistan persuaded Jalaluddin Haqqani to join the Taliban movement. Above all, Pakistan also had played a key role in the attainment of Dostum technical assistance to improve the Taliban Air Force ([Davis, 1998](#)).

Pakistan had also made diplomatic efforts to win support for the Taliban among its friendly countries. Pakistan had facilitated contacts between the Taliban and the Saudi government, and in 1996 Saudi intelligence agency chief visited Pakistan and met the Taliban leader secretly. Similarly, Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto paid a visit to the USA to win support for the Taliban. Islamabad asserted that the Taliban were the forces that could bring stability to Afghanistan, and US officials also had a soft corner for the Taliban as potential forces that could bring peace to Afghanistan. Moreover, they were anti-Iran, a pro

west force that made the Clinton administration response positive to the success of the Taliban and capture of Kabul ([Riedel, 2011](#)).

Implications of the Rise of Taliban

Pakistan's aim behind support to Taliban was to enhance influence in Afghanistan and had a shared objective to gain access to Central Asia. Besides, the US-Iran confrontation had increased Pakistan importance for the United States and animosity used by Pakistan in its favour. Therefore, the formation of the Taliban government could isolate Iran that would help Pakistan and United States to materialize Oil and Gas pipelines that would end Iran monopoly over the central Asian routes.

As a matter of fact, the United States had the tacit approval of Pakistan support to the Taliban because both had shared interest in the region of Oil and Gas resources that were available through Afghanistan, and that factor had become a reason for the improvement of the Pakistan-US ties in the mid-1990s accordingly. The United States had provided assistance to Pakistan and had waived the Pressler amendment and rejected the idea to declare Pakistan as a terrorism sponsor country ([Kux, 2001](#)).

The Afghan conflict was an internal issue; however, the thirty years of devastating civil war had brought the involvement of regional, international players, and therefore, the Afghan conflict had profound implications on the region (Rais, 2009). Consequently, the emergence of the Taliban and their policies besides Afghanistan had serious implications for Pakistan and other neighbouring countries and the globe. Further, in Afghanistan, fundamentalism intensified, sectarian and ethnic violence enhanced while the concept of tolerance, peaceful coexistence disappeared from the society gradually ([Najumi, 2008](#)).

The sectarian and ethnic hatred, in fact, had already created a wide gulf in the Afghan society; however, the ultra-conservative policies and radical actions of the Taliban had profound implications for Pakistan society and the region. Pakistan supported the Taliban that they would provide strategic depth against India.

Amazingly, those madrassa students in different parts of Pakistan that had participated in the Taliban campaign in Afghanistan after their return to Pakistan wanted Taliban like movement in Pakistan ([Rasanayagam, 2003](#)). The Taliban leadership

connected themselves to the madrassa network, and the majority of Taliban leadership studied at Deobandi Madrassa in Pakistan Baluchistan and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (NWFP), which were under the patronage of Jamiat Ulma Islam. In fact, in 1980 and 1990,s hundred madrassas were established, of which the majority were funded by Arab countries.

Moreover, the spread of the madrassa network also had socio-economic impacts as the Pakistan government had not provided its due heed to modern education and on the improvement of the socio-economic sector; therefore, poverty and population growth also contributed to the madrassa education and Talibanization. In Pakistan, more than thirty-five percent of people were living below the poverty line, and they could not afford modern education; subsequently, they send their children to Madrassa, where Madrassa provided to those children a free religious education, free boarding and food.

In 1995, a religious movement had appeared in Malakand agency and took the streets named Tehrik Nafazi Shariat-i- Mohammadi led by Sufi Mohammad and demanding imposition of Shariah in the country and participation in Jihad in Afghanistan. The government used force to press the movement and restored law and order; nevertheless, it conceded under pressure to introduce Islamic law in the region, and that was the first reflection of Talibanization in Pakistan ([Abbas, 2005](#)).

The rise of phenomena had a profound impact on Pakistan's society. Even though the process of radicalization had begun earlier in Pakistan society; nonetheless, extremism got momentum after the enigmatic rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. Taliban leadership denied involvement in sectarian violence and had expressed their ignorance about the presence of terrorist militants in Afghanistan involved in violence in Pakistan (Rais, 2009).

The sectarian tension further intensified political instability in Pakistan and had acute adverse effects on the economy. The sectarian violence had not only internal impacts on Pakistan state and society but had caused damage to bilateral ties with neighbouring countries ([Jalalzai, 2002](#)).

Taliban had formed relationships with Pakistan establishment, political parties, religious forces and drug mafias, transport business. Astonishingly, support for the Taliban did not exist just in the military establishment, but they had access to all influential

forces that could lobby for them in Pakistan ([Rashid, 2001](#)).

Their rise to power had brought immense losses in terms of revenue for Pakistan that the latter could gain from economic and trade. The Afghan Transit Trade had become one of the leading sources of smuggling in the world indeed, which was taking place between Central Asian countries, Gulf States and Iran. In the name of Afghan Transit Trade smuggling, Taliban, Pakistan-Afghanistan transporters, drug mafia, bureaucracy, Politicians, police, agencies all interests were involved. However, it was the major source of Taliban revenue.

The Durand Line at Chaman-Spin Boldak had become one of the busiest crossing points between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and on a normal day, more than 300 trucks were to be passed. Pakistan CBR (now FBR) had estimated that in 1994-95 financial year twenty billion rupees loss in revenue shortfall and in 1997-98 had thirty billion losses to the exchequers due to smuggling of goods via Pakistan to Afghanistan and the return of good back sold in Pakistan ([Goodhand, 2005](#)).

Furthermore, corruption flourished and had become rampant in Pakistan as illegal trade had deepened. The officials of the revenue department, staff of security forces, were involved in the corruption and politicians; ministers were involved in issuing permits for the transport of goods to Afghanistan. Subsequently, the black economy in Pakistan took a foothold strongly that highly damaged its economy because of the Taliban movement.

The illegal trade and smuggling crippled legal business and black marketing; Bara markets flourished throughout Pakistan and were flooded with imported goods available at a low rate without custom duties. Although, Pakistan had tried to block the illegal trade under Afghan Transit Trade nevertheless, the Pakistan government had taken decision back under pressure from establishment, which was not prepared to resent the Taliban or stop support to them and Taliban had also opposed Pakistan decision ([Conrad, 2004](#)).

Although, Kalashnikov culture and heroin were the gift of Soviet Afghan war and had profound impacts on Pakistan society. Violence and drug addiction had increased during Taliban rule particularly in Pakistan two provinces, Baluchistan and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (NWFP). Thus the Afghan conflict in 1990,s and the rise of Taliban had overwhelming implications on Pakistan and society. Pakistan's economy had been in

a state of stagnation because of immense illegal trade and smuggling; sectarian and extremist violence intensified and widened the gulf among its citizens. The ratio of crimes and the number of drug addicts had gone up many folds in Pakistan (Medler, 2005).

In Pakistan, religious-political forces strengthened, and support for the Taliban grew, whereas secular, liberal and nationalist forces in Pakistan were put behind the walls (Bhutto, 2008). In the 1997 general elections, the right-wing party government of Nawaz Sharif came to power that also had continued support to the Taliban. Moreover, he also sought Taliban style government in Pakistan and had introduced legislation in parliament (Bhutto, 2008).

Iran regarded the Taliban as an anti-Shia force and a threat to her interest in the region; therefore, it entered into an informal alliance with India and Russia. India supported Rabbani because of Pakistan as the latter supported Taliban, whereas Russia had supported anti-Taliban forces because the latter feared that the fundamentalist movement if succeeded, would threaten Central Asia. Hence, two informal alliances emerged in the region the first one of Pakistan-Saudi Arabia backed Taliban and another of Iran, India, Russia, and Central Asian countries backed anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan.

Therefore, Pakistan and Iran, which were friendly neighbors turned rival competitors in Afghanistan and with the emergence of the Taliban, their bilateral ties were also damaged. Further, the

murder of eleven Iranian diplomats in Mazar had brought Iran nearly on the brink of war with Taliban however, with back-channel diplomacy the crises were averted (Riedel, 2011).

With the rise of Taliban power had left serious implications on Pak-Afghan ties. Relations were strained with Rabbani government, who had publically accused Pakistan of supporting Taliban and condemned the later interference in internal affairs of their country. The Rabbani regime representative at UN, in his statement had held Pakistan responsible for trouble in Afghanistan. Pakistan also openly assailed Kabul government and declared his regime guilty for all ills and proclaimed as illegitimate by asking him to step down to end fighting. Besides, the Pakistan excessive involvement in Afghanistan had brought the involvement of the other regional players that perceived the rise of Taliban as threat to their countries and interests (Sinno, 2008).

The Taliban support and provision of sanctuaries to the religious militant groups of Central Asia, Iran, China and Pakistan made further isolated them. A large number of Taliban fighters in northern Afghanistan were from IMU, Al-Qaida and Pakistani militants. Taliban support to the Islamic fundamentalist movements and separatist organizations had intensified hostility among Afghanistan neighboring countries. The presence of Al-Qaida leadership and its involvement in terrorist activities and September 11, 2001, ultimately caused the Taliban's fall.

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