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# *Afghanistan's Islamist Groups*

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**T**he recent resurgence of the Taliban in parts of Afghanistan has, once again, attracted attention to this poor and relatively isolated Central Asian country for its notoriety as a haven for extremist Islamism. Islam has been a key element of Afghan identity for centuries. But it was only during the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad (1979-88) and the ensuing civil war (1992-2001) that religious traditionalism gave way to the radical ideas inspired by Saudi Arabian Wahhabism and South Asian Deobandi orthodoxy. Even today the Taliban's harsh and austere fundamentalism does not appeal to a majority of Afghans. Radical Islam has been kept alive in Afghanistan, however, by a combination of ethno-tribal dynamics and external factors, notably Pakistan's desire to control Afghan foreign policy—the history of which is long and complicated.

Contemporary Afghanistan emerged in the late nineteenth century as a buffer state between the British Indian empire and the czarist Russian empire. During the nineteenth century, Britain and Russia competed for influence in Central Asia through espionage and proxy wars in what came to be called the “Great Game.” Britain feared that the Russian empire might expand southward and threaten its control over India, the “jewel in the British crown” that had been progressively acquired at great expense over more than a century. While such security concerns led the British to push their Indian frontier westward, both they and the Russians encountered fierce resistance there from Muslim tribes. The Russian prince Alexander Gorchakov described these tribes as “lawless.”<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing Afghanistan as a buffer between them saved the two empires from having to confront each other militarily. The British had lost precious lives in their effort to control Afghanistan directly. By accepting a neutral and independent Afghan kingdom, they sought to pass on the burden of subduing some of the lawless tribes to a local monarch, albeit with British economic and military assistance. In 1893 representatives of both the British and Afghan governments agreed on a border through Afghanistan's frontier with British India that had been drawn by the British civil servant Sir Mortimer Durand.

This border, named the Durand Line, intentionally divided Pashtun tribes living in the area to prevent them from becoming a nuisance for the Raj. On their side of the frontier,

the British created autonomous tribal agencies, controlled by British political officers with the help of tribal chieftains whose loyalty was ensured through regular subsidies. The British used force to put down the sporadic uprisings in the tribal areas but generally left the tribes alone in return for stability along the frontier.

Adjacent to these autonomous tribal agencies, "settled" Pashtuns lived in towns and villages under direct British rule. Here, too, the Pashtuns were divided between the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan, which did not enjoy the status of a full province under British rule. Although Muslim, the Pashtuns generally sided with the cause of anti-British Indian nationalism and were late, and reluctant, in embracing the All India Muslim League's campaign for the separate Muslim state of Pakistan in the twilight years of the British Raj.

Religious sentiment has always been strong in Afghanistan and was a crucial factor in Afghan resistance to British influence. Conservative religious leaders successfully opposed attempts at westernization by King Amanullah, who ruled from 1919 to 1929, and subsequently supported the short nine-month reign of the Tajik Bacha-e-Saqqao on the basis of his promise to rule according to Islamic law. When Pashtun ascendancy was restored under King Muhammad Nadir Khan in 1929, Pashtun tribes secured support for him from the *ulama* (learned religious scholars) by granting the religious establishment considerable influence. Afghanistan's 1931 constitution described Islam as the state religion and officially endorsed the *sharia* (Islamic law) enunciated by the Hanafi school. It created a dual legal system, providing for *sharia* courts alongside secular ones. And in 1950 King Zahir Shah established the Faculty of Theology at Kabul University and counted theologians among his advisers.

Religion was not the only cohesive element in Afghan society, however. The monarchy, backed by British subsidies, managed by and large to create an Afghan national identity independent of religious devotion. Afghanistan served as both a buffer and a backwater for British India until 1947, when the withdrawal of the British and the partition of India created the independent state of Pakistan. As successors to the Raj, Pakistani leaders assumed that Pakistan would inherit the functions of India's British government in guiding Afghan policy. But Afghanistan did not share this vision and responded to the emergence of Pakistan by questioning its rationale.

Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's admission to the United Nations, arguing that Afghanistan's treaties with British India relating to Afghan borders were no longer valid. After all, a new country was being established where none had existed at the time these treaties were signed. Afghanistan demanded instead the creation of a Pashtun state, "Pashtunistan," that would link the Pashtun tribes living in Afghanistan with those in the NWFP and Baluchistan. There were also ambiguous demands for a Baluch state "linking Baluch areas in Pakistan and Iran with a small strip of adjacent Baluch territory in Afghanistan."<sup>2</sup>

The most outspoken advocate of this irredentist claim was Sardar Mohammad Daoud, a cousin of King Zahir Shah who also served as his prime minister for several years. Daoud was a leading member of the secular and modernizing Afghan elite that sought to develop Afghanistan with foreign, mainly Western, assistance.

For its part Pakistan attempted to overcome such conflicting ethnic allegiances—as well as the threat posed by the much larger India—by promoting Islamic identity and solidarity. Afghanistan's initial reluctance to recognize Pakistan and the Afghan claim on Pakistani territory inhabited by Pashtun tribes along their border added to the psychological insecurity of Pakistani leaders. These leaders already believed that India sought to undo partition. Their fear of an Afghan-Indian pincer movement led them to adopt a policy of encouraging conservative Islamic beliefs among the Pashtun tribes. They expected that this emphasis on religion, as opposed to tribe or ethnicity, would contain and roll back the demands for "Pashtunistan."

Afghanistan was a landlocked country with limited resources that had depended heavily on foreign, especially British, subsidies in the decades before the end of the British Raj. When British military and economic support dried up after 1947, the Afghan state sought outside aid. Efforts to secure significant American assistance did not succeed, however. The United States, seeking alliance with the much larger Pakistan, chose to neglect Afghanistan and "inadvertently pushed Afghanistan towards rapprochement with the U.S.S.R."<sup>3</sup> Even so, until 1953, the United States "dominated Afghanistan's external trade, aid and cultural contacts,"<sup>4</sup> indicating a marked preference for Western ties among Afghanistan's elite. But the monetary value of these exchanges stood at less than one million dollars a year.<sup>5</sup>

Afghan modernizers sought higher levels of aid for their country's development and were frustrated by the American view that Afghanistan was not ready for industrialization. U.S. aid was confined to an irrigation project that was never completed, as well as some agricultural and education projects. In 1949-50, furthermore, border clashes with Pakistan and an embargo by Pakistan on oil supplies to Afghanistan caused serious hardship for the landlocked country, which had hitherto imported virtually everything through the Pakistani port of Karachi.

In 1950 the Soviets offered, and the Afghans accepted, a barter agreement that provided for the exchange of Soviet oil for Afghan wool and cotton. Advocates of closer ties with the Soviet Union began winning the argument at the royal court in Kabul by pointing out that the Soviets were willing to finance Afghanistan's modernization while the Americans were not. The United States began providing a significant amount of aid to Afghanistan only in 1956 and only after Soviet aid had already started flowing. By 1968 Afghanistan had received \$550 million in Soviet aid compared to \$250 million in American assistance.<sup>6</sup>

Other developments, meanwhile, were taking place in the political arena. The 1964 constitution of Afghanistan established the primacy of secular law but recognized Islam's

sacred status and stipulated that *sharia* law would be the law of last resort “where no existing secular law applied.”<sup>7</sup> And with the introduction of an elected parliament in the 1960s, political factions began to emerge. Among these were the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Islamist groups that “set out to establish a political movement that would work for the creation of an Islamic state based on Sharia law.”<sup>8</sup> In *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (1995), Asta Olesen discussed the rise of the Islamist groups:

In Afghanistan, where the social and economic development was considerably slower than in the neighboring countries and the cultural polarization thus less pronounced, the Islamic revival movement was felt among the small group of educated youth, rather than in the population at large. Since the revival affected the educated middle class, there was a comparatively close correspondence between revival as a social-psychological phenomenon and the spreading of the religio-political ideology of what came to be known as Islamism.<sup>9</sup>

The strength of such Islamist sentiment increased more rapidly after 1973, when Sardar Daoud overthrew King Zahir Shah in a Soviet-backed coup involving the PDPA and proclaimed Afghanistan a republic.

### **Communism versus Islamism**

**T**he overthrow of the monarchy and the increasing influence of Afghanistan’s relatively small Communist Party led to the emergence of anti-Communist opposition in the name of Islam. Some of Communism’s strongest opponents were conservative Muslims who supported traditional social structures and sought to preserve the free-market economy. But other would-be Afghan Islamists had already been looking to Pakistan’s Jamaat-e-Islami as both a model and a mentor.

By the 1960s Pakistan’s Jamaat-e-Islami had established links with Islamist groups in most parts of the Muslim world, notably the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. The writings of Jamaat-e-Islami’s founder, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, were being translated into several languages, and their arguments were particularly effective in mobilizing Islamist networks in many countries. As Pakistan’s next door neighbor, Afghanistan was among the first countries to receive Persian and Pashto language translations of Maududi’s writings. Jamaat-e-Islami also received financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-sponsored Rabita al-Alam al-Islami (Muslim World League) to support its ventures in global outreach, particularly in areas under Communist control or influence.

The Muslim-majority regions of Central Asia attracted Jamaat-e-Islami’s attention, and it began efforts both to establish contact with Muslims in those areas and to tell the world

about Communist oppression there. Next to its headquarters in Lahore, Jamaat-e-Islami established the Darul Fikr (Center for Thought) that published numerous accounts of the Communist oppression of Muslims during the late 1960s. Afghanistan was a crucial link in the Jamaat-e-Islami's broader Central Asia plan.

In 1972 the earlier informal Afghan Islamist groups coalesced to form Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Society of Afghanistan). Led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, a professor of theology at Kabul University, Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan resembled Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami in more than just its name. The party was inspired by Maududi and the thinkers of the Muslim Brotherhood. It sought to restructure all aspects of society in accordance with a particular and radical interpretation of Islamic principles.<sup>10</sup> Rabbani's early followers included two Kabul University students, Ahmed Shah Massoud and Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, who both played significant roles in subsequent events in Afghanistan.

In 1973, however, the newly established President Daoud did not countenance open opposition to his regime by Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan. He ordered a crack-down on the party's leadership, and they fled to Pakistan where they took shelter with Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami. Daoud soon turned against the Communists as well. Befriended by the shah of Iran, who urged him to cut Afghanistan's close ties with the Soviet Union, Daoud purged Communists from his administration in 1975, moved away from the Soviets and reached out to the West for aid. But this policy reversal did not last long as Daoud was killed in a 1978 coup orchestrated by the PDPA. Nur Muhammad Taraki took over as president of a Soviet-backed Communist regime led by the PDPA.

The events of 1978-79 contributed to a large extent to what happened next in Afghanistan. In 1978 Afghanistan signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. In early 1979 the Iranian Revolution took place—depriving the United States of a staunch ally in the region—and later that year Soviet troops occupied Afghanistan, ostensibly to help their Afghan Communist friends.

During the same Daoud era, of course, the exiled Afghan Islamists were engaged in a variety of activities in Pakistan. Long before the Soviet military intervention and soon after their arrival in Peshawar in 1973, Rabbani and his supporters were given financial support by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and some members of Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan were provided military training. After signing up for Pakistani support, however, the Afghan Islamists experienced dissension in their ranks. In 1976 Hekmatyar split off from Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan to form the Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan), which also operated from Pakistan.

Rabbani wanted to move cautiously and gradually, building broader support before seeking power. Following Maududi's lead, Rabbani's original scheme for an Islamic revolution did not envisage open armed struggle and certainly nothing that could be described as terrorism. Although Maududi's followers have been involved in militant struggles for the last several decades, none of his writings explicitly advocated violence.

Rabbani, too, was initially reluctant to convert Jamiat-e-Islami into a militia or a guerilla army—though later, after the Soviet occupation, the party became a leading band of *mujahidin* (holy warriors).

Hekmatyar, on the other hand, willingly embraced radical methods from the beginning. His militancy soon made him a favorite of the ISI, which was at that stage more interested in putting military pressure on Daoud's regime than in laying the foundations of a sustainable Islamic revolution in Afghanistan. The ISI also had an eye on identifying future leaders for an Afghanistan more closely linked to Pakistan. As an ethnic Pashtun, Hekmatyar seemed more qualified for that role than the non-Pashtun Rabbani.

Once the Soviets intervened militarily, Pakistan converted its relatively small-scale operation of aiding Afghan Islamists into what has come to be known as the Afghan Jihad. The United States and its allies trained *mujahidin* in Pakistan to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The majority of the *mujahidin* were recruited from the more than three million Afghans living in Pakistan's refugee camps. Initially, the Afghans joined one of several *mujahidin* parties, at least three of which—the Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami (Islamic Revolutionary Movement) led by Maulvi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi, the Mahaz-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan) led by Syed Ahmad Effendi Gailani, and the Jabha-e-Nejat-e-Milli Afghanistan (Afghan National Liberation Front) led by Sibghatullah Mujaddedi—described themselves as moderate and opposed to fundamentalism. Nine Afghan Shia *mujahidin* groups also fought the Soviets, primarily with Iranian backing.

Over time it became apparent that the Pakistani authorities favored the Sunni fundamentalist groups, who also benefited from large-scale financial support from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Soon, Deobandi and Wahhabi *madradas* (Islamic seminaries) sprouted in Afghan refugee camps and in the border areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, producing the next generation of Pashtun Islamists for both countries.

The Afghan Jihad brought the once isolated Afghans into contact with the most radical elements of the global Islamist movement. The Palestinian teacher Abdullah Azzam set up the Maktab al-Khidmat lil Mujahideen al-Arab (Arab Services Bureau) in Pakistan to facilitate the participation of radical Arab Islamists in the jihad. In his monograph *In Defense of Islamic Lands*, Azzam laid out the case for global jihad and inspired radical Muslims from all parts of the world—including Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, Bosnia, Philippines, Uzbekistan and Thailand—to fight alongside the Afghan *mujahidin*.

The war in Afghanistan, which caused significant damage to Soviet prestige and military might, ended in 1988 when the Soviets agreed to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan under the Geneva Accords. The Accords did not provide, however, for a transition from the Soviet-installed regime to an internationally acceptable government in Kabul. The Afghan Communist regime survived for almost four years after the Soviet withdrawal, and the *mujahidin* continued their war—albeit without active American and

Western assistance. During this period Saudi Arabia and Pakistan remained involved in funding and arming different *mujahidin* factions, and following the fall of the Communist regime in 1992, the struggle for power among the Islamist factions plunged Afghanistan into a bitter civil war. The civil war raged furiously until the rise of the Taliban movement of *madrassa* students in 1993-94. The Taliban took over the capital of Kabul in 1996 and remained in power until 2001, when they were toppled by military action instigated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

The Taliban provided safe haven to Islamist militants from all over the world. According to one estimate, the total number of foreign jihadis in Afghanistan at the end of the anti-Soviet jihad included about 5,000 Saudis, 3,000 Yemenis, 2,800 Algerians, 2,000 Egyptians, 400 Tunisians, 350 Iraqis, 200 Libyans and dozens of Jordanians.<sup>11</sup> These veterans of the war against the Soviets served as the vanguard for jihadist movements in their respective countries and beyond, and eventually coalesced into al-Qaeda, the group led by Azzam's student from Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden.

The influence of Azzam and al-Qaeda has shaped the ideology of Afghanistan's radical Islamist groups in recent times. The older groups, Jamiat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami, have now been augmented by the well-structured and ideologically coherent Taliban movement. Each group's strategy and beliefs have altered somewhat over time under external influences.

## Traditional and Political Islam

For several centuries, Islam in Afghanistan combined tribal customs,<sup>12</sup> Sufi beliefs and formal Islam. Ninety percent of Afghanistan's Muslims are Sunnis; the rest are Shias. According to Afghan folklore, Pashtun tribes accepted Islam soon after the advent of the faith, converted by one of Prophet Mohammed's companions who belonged to the Bani Afghana tribe. Historians say that most Afghans converted to Islam much later, however, possibly in the tenth and eleventh centuries. While the claim of early conversion—and a direct link to the prophet—indicates the significance of their religion to most Afghans, Afghanistan was not rigorously orthodox throughout most of its history. It was, rather, a religiously conservative society where *sharia* was interspersed with Afghan tribal custom. Religious orthodoxy prevailed, but only alongside tolerance for other religions and sects. Traditional Islam meant low government interference in defining what was Islamic and the prevalence of Sufi practices and popular Islam—a folksy Islam that blended pre-Islamic rituals and a reverence for saints and shrines not explicitly identified with the teachings of Quran and the Prophet Muhammed.

The early influence of political Islam came to Afghanistan from the South Asian subcontinent. In the sixteenth century a Sufi Naqshbandi, Shaykh Ahmad of Sirhind (1563-1624), launched a campaign to purify Islam of the Hindu influence on Muslim

practices that had occurred while Muslims ruled large parts of India. Ahmad opposed the religious syncretism supported by the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542-1605), who ruled from 1556 until his death. Ahmad's declared mission was to return Islam to its roots—to the Quran and the Hadith—and a branch of his family, the Mujaddedis, later settled in Kabul during the nineteenth century and became prominent as conservative religious figures.

During the eighteenth century Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1753), an Indian religious scholar, renewed Ahmad's call for religious purity but coupled it with the need for political action. He appealed to the Afghan chieftain Ahmed Shah Abdali to "save the Muslims" in India and to preserve Muslim rule by defeating the rising power of the Hindu Marathas. Waliullah's Indian disciples were instrumental in the rise, during the nineteenth century, of the *mujahidin* movement led by Sayyid Ahmed of Bareili (1786-1831). This puritanical group fought Sikh and British rulers in Afghanistan and the region that constitutes the northwest region of Pakistan.

But despite their long tradition, fundamentalist movements in Afghanistan had somewhat limited influence until the Afghan Jihad and subsequent developments. Now fundamentalism is a powerful force in the country, with most Afghan Islamist groups linked to four key ideological traditions. These are the Deobandi and Jamaat-e-Islami (both with their origins in South Asia), the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, and the Wahhabi movement that originated in Saudi Arabia.

The Deobandis trace their origin to the Dar ul Ulum (Center for Knowledge) *madrasa* established in 1867 at Deoband, India. Influenced by Waliullah and his teachings, this group's founders sought to revive a version of the Prophet Mohammed's teachings and to reject all Western and other outside influences, which they viewed as amoral and materialist. The school was established to train a new generation of ulama who would know how to interpret *sharia* and guide other Muslims in leading their lives in accordance with Islam. The Deobandis emphasize the need to purify Islam by discarding un-Islamic practices, such as the veneration of Sufi shrines and saints, that they think have crept into the religion as a result of Muslims' interaction with polytheists and unbelievers. They have generally held a very restrictive view of the role of women and been predisposed to anti-Shia and anti-Western sentiments. Jihad has played an important role in their thinking since the militant campaigns against British rule initiated by many Deobandi pioneers.

Until recently, however, the Deobandis were not considered a threat to the established order in Afghanistan even by the secular Afghan elite. In the early twentieth century the Afghan government sought their aid in setting up its own state-controlled *madrasas*, and Deobandi ulama attended the 1933 coronation of King Zahir Shah. At that time they submitted a memorandum to the Afghan prime minister regarding the services Dar ul Ulum Deoband could offer the government. The memorandum read in part:

The intellectual relations between Dar ul Ulum of Afghanistan and Dar ul Ulum Deoband [could] be developed for purely educational purposes in such a way whereby the authorities of the latter may directly estimate the latest academic needs of Afghanistan and the world of Islam and in the light of this estimate prepare such ulama in the changed circumstances of the period that they may co-operate fully with the aim and purpose of the free governments in the world of Islam and prove sincere workers for the state.<sup>13</sup>

Though some Deobandi *madrasas* were then set up as a result of Zahir Shah's flirtation with the original Dar ul Ulum in India, it was not until a half-century later that the number of *madrasas* increased significantly. During the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad, the Pakistani government of General Ziaul Haq encouraged the establishment of *madrasas* where young Afghans could be inculcated with jihadi ideology at an early age. Most of the *madrasas* in the rural areas and in the refugee camps, however, were run by semi-educated mullahs who were not that well versed in the conservative educational agenda of the Deobandi school. These jihadi neo-Deobandis promoted views that were influenced as well by both the *Pashtunwali* tribal customs<sup>14</sup> and Wahhabi funding from Saudi Arabian charities.

Deobandi influence reached its peak when the Taliban, students of Deobandi *madrasas* in Pakistan, assumed power in Afghanistan in 1996. The Afghan Jihad had helped the mainly traditionalist Deobandi ulama link up with radical global Islamist movements. Foreign sources of funding, aid and arms—as well as contacts with international networks—had slowly caused the Deobandi ulama to adopt more radical revivalist views. The financial ties that developed with Saudi Arabian Islamic charities and the Saudi Arabian government during the anti-Soviet struggle strengthened the ideological ties between Deobandi and Wahhabi Islam.

The Taliban were primarily *madrasa* students of Pashtun descent who had grown up in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. Disillusioned by the factionalism, criminal activity, and fighting among the warlords that continued to afflict their country after the Soviet withdrawal, they became determined to restore peace, cleanse society of its ills, enforce *sharia* and establish an Islamic way of life. The Taliban were backed by the Pakistani ISI, which saw them as a viable alternative to the various warring—and by-now-uncontrollable—*mujahidin* groups. They also received aid from Saudi Arabia and from various Islamist individuals and charities in the Gulf. Within the course of two years beginning in 1994, the Taliban gained control over most of Afghanistan. The country's northern region, however, remained under the control of a coalition of former *mujahidin* parties known as the Northern Alliance, which was dominated by Jamiat-e-Islami and its charismatic military commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud.

The Taliban regime took Kabul in 1996 and was soon recognized as Afghanistan's

official government by three countries—Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It opposed Afghanistan's tribal and feudal structure and gave no role to tribal chiefs. The close ties that had developed between the Deobandis and Wahhabis over the years led to an anti-Shia, anti-Sufi, puritanical form of Islam being taught in Afghan *madrasas*. The Taliban were against modernity and governed without reference to any scholarship on Islamic or Afghan history. One Taliban official explained, after the imposition of a ban on television and other forms of entertainment, that people "should spend their time going to the mosque and learning about prayer.... We want to reform society and make it 100 percent Islamic."<sup>15</sup> The regime's retrogressive policies, especially with respect to women, eventually both lessened the support of the Afghan masses and alienated international public opinion. But the Taliban did manage to keep control over Afghanistan until 2001, when American-backed Northern Alliance forces dislodged them from power.

The Taliban were ultimately punished by the international community for giving refuge to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Because of the contacts he had made during the Afghan Jihad, bin Laden was on good terms with several Afghan *mujahidin* factions, and they had welcomed him when he came to Afghanistan in 1996. Eventually, however, he established a bond with the Taliban and supported their regime.<sup>16</sup> Despite immense political and military pressure after 9/11, the Taliban regime refused to give up Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization on the grounds of their adherence to the *Pash-tunwali* tribal code that emphasized hospitality and refuge.<sup>17</sup> But bin Laden's status as an Afghan Jihad veteran and his assistance to Taliban finances in the face of international sanctions were the more likely reason.

When the Taliban regime fell, a new U.S.-backed government was formed under President Hamid Karzai—a government that now faces a "resurgence" of the Taliban in some areas of Afghanistan and in the border areas of neighboring Pakistan. Though the Taliban regime was defeated, most of its fighters were never caught or disarmed. They simply melted away into the Afghan countryside, making possible a return to the battlefield of an ideologically hardcore contingent. And the resurgent Taliban are clearly less influenced by traditional Deobandi ideas than by al-Qaeda's radicalism. In a recent interview on British television, the influential Taliban leader Mullah Dadullah declared:

The Americans have sown a seed. They will reap the crop for quite a long time. We will get our revenge on them, whether in Afghanistan or outside.... The suicide martyrs, those willing to blow themselves up, are countless.... Hundreds have registered their names already and are ready to go, and we have hundreds more on the waiting list. Each is anxious to be the first to be sent.<sup>18</sup>

Another distinct element among Afghanistan's Islamists is the breakaway faction Hizb-e-Islami led by Maulvi Yunus Khalis. This faction represented—as did the Taliban—

the Deobandi school during the anti-Soviet Jihad and its aftermath. Its military commander, Maulvi Jalaluddin Haqqani, joined forces with the Taliban and served in their government as a minister. And Haqqani now actively participates in the violence precipitated by the Taliban's resurgence, though he is not formally part of the Taliban and maintains a separate identity.

## The Impact of Maududi and the Muslim Brotherhood

The other South Asian ideological movement that affected Afghanistan was Jamaat-e-Islami, whose founder, Maulana Abu Ala Maududi, is considered to be the first complete theoretician of the modern Islamic state. He believed that contemporary civilization was leading the world to doom and only Islam could rescue humanity. For him Islam was more than a religion; it was an ideology, a way of life. He devised the concept of "theo-democracy," which meant a theologically circumscribed democracy or "limited people's sovereignty under the suzerainty of God."<sup>19</sup> Maududi upheld the doctrines of one single law (*sharia*) and divine sovereignty, while advancing the idea of an Islamic revolution ignited by the struggle between Islam and un-Islam that would lead to the creation of an Islamic state. He also realized, however, that an Islamic state would be unable to reconcile the ideals of democracy with the rigid demands of Islamic law unless the population willingly abided by the demands of that law. It was necessary, therefore, to Islamize society before creating an Islamic state.

To this end Maududi created an organization called the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Party) in 1941. It was organized like a communist party, with cadres and so on, and its aim was to educate society in preparation for the revolution. Accordingly, Jamaat placed a good deal of emphasis on education and propaganda. The Jamaat-e-Islami is perhaps the "first movement of its kind to develop systematically an Islamic ideology, a modern revolutionary reading of Islam and an agenda for social action to materialize its vision."<sup>20</sup>

The origins of Jamaat-e-Islami's counterpart in Afghanistan lay in the 1950s in Kabul University. Such Afghan professors as Gholam Muhammad Niazi and Burhanuddin Rabbani, who had studied in Egypt and been influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood as well, were the movement's initial supporters and leaders. The influence of Maududi and Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan grew once the Afghan Islamists took refuge in Pakistan.

In 1965 this Islamist group of professors and students formulated its program in a *shabnama* (night letter) entitled *Jihad*, which declared its goal to be the creation of an Islamic state in Afghanistan. The group's other publications included the pamphlet *Ma ki asteem wa chi me-khwaheem* (Who We Are and What We Want). This pamphlet talked about the decay and degeneration of Afghan society, the bad effect of foreign ideologies, and corruption among the elites. The remedy for these ills lay in the revival of true Islam, which would guarantee equality, freedom, moral uplift and prosperity.<sup>21</sup> From 1967

onwards, Rabbani's group focused on cultural reform and translated works of foreign Islamists like Sayyid Qutb and Maududi.

When Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan was eventually established as a political entity in 1972, it consisted of both Pashtuns, such as Hekmatyar, and non-Pashtuns, such as Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masood who were both ethnic Tajiks. Hekmatyar had first become known for his movement Sazman-i-Jawanan-i-Musulman (Organization of Muslim Youth), which protested the pro-Western policies of King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister Daoud. After he broke away and formed Hizb-e-Islami in 1976, the Pashtuns rallied under its banner, and Jamiat-e-Islami became a predominantly Tajik group. Hekmatyar's faction remains active in parts of Afghanistan today, waging a war against the Karzai government and international forces alongside the Taliban but not under their leadership.

The only Afghan Islamist group to embrace Wahhabi theology openly and in its entirety is the Ittehad-e-Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Union of Afghanistan) led by Abdur Rab Rasul Sayyaf, a Saudi-trained theologian who gained influence during the anti-Soviet jihad through his ready access to Saudi funding. Sayyaf was the only significant Pashtun warlord to side with the primarily non-Pashtun Northern Alliance during Taliban rule. And that has enabled him to play an active political role in the post-Taliban era. Strongly committed to *sharia* rule, Sayyaf's group has succeeded, through bargaining, to secure control over Afghanistan's judiciary under the Karzai administration.

Afghanistan remains a major battleground for the struggle between the forces of modernity and Islamist obscurantism. The Karzai government is still struggling to establish the writ of the state throughout the country. In doing so, it has accommodated several Islamist factions (such as Sayyaf's group, a major section of Rabbani's party and a splinter group of Hizb-e-Islami) in the government. Efforts have also been made to identify Taliban leaders who might be labeled moderate and, therefore, allowed to participate in the legitimate political process. President Karzai has been consistently forced to mediate in the ideological struggle between Afghanistan's secularists and Islamist blocs within the government.

The Taliban continue to pose a major threat to Afghanistan's security, as well as to the reformation of a modern Afghan state. In addition, Afghanistan must also contend with a burgeoning narcotics trade and the regional ambitions of its neighbors, especially Pakistan. There is evidence that in some cases, extremist Islamist groups including the Taliban have utilized profits from the illegal trade in opium and heroin to fund their operations. For the foreseeable future, the shadow of Islamist groups will continue to loom over the West's efforts to advance Afghanistan's reconstruction.

## NOTES

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11. Figures taken from Richard Engel, "Inside Al-Qaeda: A Window into the World of Militant Islam and the Afghan Alumni," in *Jane's Intelligence and Insight*, [http://www.janes.com/security/international\\_security/news/misc/janes010928\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/misc/janes010928_1_n.shtml).
12. The indigenous Afghan code of conduct known as *Pushtunwali* includes such concepts as *nanawati* (refuge or asylum) and *malmastiya* (hospitality to all).
13. S. A. A. Rizvi, *History of the Dar ul Uloom Deoband* (Deoband, 1980), p. 230; cited in Olesen, p. 188.
14. See note 12.
15. "Afghanistan Bans TV Sets, VCRs," Associated Press, 12 July 1997.
16. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), pp. 327-28, 379-81.
17. Peter Bergen, *Holy War Inc.: Inside the World of Osama Bin Laden* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 161.
18. "Taliban Commander Vows New Wave of Suicide Attacks," British Channel Four News release, 2 March 2007.
19. Frederic Grare, *Political Islam in the Indian Subcontinent: The Jamaat-e-Islami* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), p. 21.
20. Ibid., p. 94.
21. Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, p. 232.