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How Tribal Are the Taleban?

Afghanistan's largest insurgent movement between its tribal roots and Islamist ideology

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent developments in Afghanistan have underscored that there is still an immense lack of understanding – and even of interest – with regard to the nature of the Taleban movement.¹ Discussions about whether ‘moderate’ Taleban exist have overshadowed deeper questions about the character of the Afghan Taleban movement. As a result, there is considerable confusion as to whether the largest and most influential insurgent movement is mainly driven by ethnic, religious or political motives. This paper aims to clarify the often complex forces that shape the Afghan Taleban movement. It explores several central questions, including the following: Are the Taleban a Pashtun tribal or even nationalist force or are they, as they claim to be, supra-ethnic Islamists who do not acknowledge tribal, ethnic and linguistic differences but ‘only know Muslims’? In addition, this paper discusses the place of tribes

and their institutions within Afghan society. A distinction is made between what is real and what is myth, as constructed by Afghans and also by foreign observers.

The paper then discusses the origins of the Taleban movement, the (limited) role of Islamist ideology and the extent to which it can be considered a Pashtun nationalist movement. Furthermore, this paper looks at the beginning debate about whether the Taleban have morphed into a ‘Neo-Taleban’ movement.

Today’s Taleban movement is dualistic in nature, both structurally and ideologically. The aspects are interdependent: A vertical organisational structure, in the form of a centralised ‘shadow state’, reflects its supra-tribal and supra-ethnic Islamist ideology, which appears to be ‘nationalistic’ – i.e., it refers to Afghanistan as a nation² – at times. At the same time, the movement is characterised by horizontal, network-like structures that reflect its strong roots in the segmented Pashtun tribal society. The movement is a ‘network of networks’. Religious, tribal and regional components overlap even when it comes to the organisational principles of the Taleban.

¹ This paper further develops thoughts laid out in Thomas Ruttig, *The Other Side: Dimensions of the Afghan Insurgency: Causes, Actors – and Approaches to Talks*, Kabul/Berlin: Afghanistan Analysts Network, Thematic Report 01/2009, July 2009. It builds on two presentations given at a workshop organised by the Abbassi Program in Islamic Studies, at Stanford University on 3 December 2009, and at the Jamestown Foundation’s 2009 Terrorism Conference ‘The Changing Strategic Gravity of Al Qaeda’ in Washington on 9 December 2009.

² This term is not specific enough. In Europe, it even has a chauvinistic undertone. ‘National’ would fit better, and many Afghans therefore often refer to ‘national’ (*melli*) almost synonymous with ‘patriotic’, another word disliked by many in Europe.

Individually, the Taleban are deeply rooted in their tribal societies. But, in their self-identification, the balance between being Pashtun and being Muslim has changed, as is the case with many Afghans.

In thirty years of conflict and gradual state collapse, Pashtun tribal society has undergone drastic changes. Traditional social and political relations have increasingly been weakened and dissolved. The younger generations questioned the authority of the 'elders' who they held responsible for these conflicts. This had negative impacts on intra-tribal cohesion. As a result, the *jirga* as the major conflict-resolving mechanism of the Pashtuns has lost much of its authority. Powerful newcomers are able to ignore *jirga* decisions with impunity. Might often trumps *pashtunwalai* and even Islamic law. Rising levels of education have changed the character of tribal representation. Diaspora communities of certain tribes have emerged in the big cities. Their members absorbed modern skills but maintained links to their original tribes. This way, influences of modernism penetrated even the rural communities. This diaspora-tribe relationship intensifies in times of crisis.

In many Pashtun tribes, the more-permanent tribal *shura* has replaced the *jirga*. Some of them still represent a form of 'traditional' self-organisation, but many others are convened by the new strongmen. This makes them hierarchical in structure, in contrast to the egalitarian *jirga* where ideally all male members of a certain tribe find a consensus about a certain conflict. Meanwhile, a *shura* deliberates and gives advice to the leader who then decides whether he makes use of it or not. Many Pashtuns use both terms, *jirga* and *shura*, interchangeably now.

Today, some tribes cover such a large area that they are simply too big to have a single leader – although it is doubtful whether there was always *one* undisputed leader at any given time on any given level of the tribal pyramid. In ongoing competition, various aspirants for leadership would fought each other for prestige and influence. Leadership and power within any tribal segment resembled an ever-changing equilibrium. The lack of a 'dynastic principle' amongst Pashtuns stands in the way of a coherent and continuous tribal leadership.

Furthermore, the 'tribal code' of Pashtuns, *pashtunwalai*, needs to be understood as an idealised concept. As the Pashtuns' genealogical chart, it can change in time and space. Categories used by outsiders as if set in stone (like the much-discussed Durrani-Ghilzai divide) are fluent. Different local versions of *pashtunwalai* (called

nirkh) are used. In cases of conflict between groups, a decision would be made in advance whose *nirkh* to use.

The Taleban movement emerged from religious networks from the 1978–89 resistance, i.e., it is a broader movement that saw itself as religiously motivated. Only when the *mujahedin*, in the eyes of the later Taleban, violated their own religious principles, did the Taleban establish their own, now ultra-orthodox movement. Only after their initial moves, were the Taleban 'adopted', supported and instrumentalised by the Pakistani military establishment. Today, many Taleban activities in Afghanistan's southeast and south³ still centre around networks of *ulama*-led *madrassas* and mosques.

Politically, the Taleban movement aspires to aims that are larger than its individual tribal realms: political power on the 'national' Afghan level and the re-establishment of its emirate. They are nationalists, but cannot be called Pashtun irredentists, i.e., they do not strive for a 'reunification' of all Pashtun areas in a 'Pashtunistan'.

The Taleban movement's supra-tribal ideology, i.e., Islamism, keeps the door open for non-Pashtun elements. This has allowed it to systematically expand into non-Pashtun areas of the North and West. 'Islam' provides an umbrella that creates cohesion in an otherwise – ethnically as well as politically – heterogeneous movement.

The system of reference individual Taleban or their leaders allude to – tribal, nationalist and Islamist – depends on the circumstances under which a particular decision is taken and on the particular tactical or strategic aim at stake.

The combination of vertical (religious/ideological) and horizontal (tribal) structures gives the Taleban movement a high degree of cohesion while maintaining organisational elasticity. This elasticity in its horizontal dimension – based on Pashtun individualism – allows discussion and even dissent. It allows a sufficient degree of autonomy of local commanders and prevents them from feeling over-controlled. Subsequently, the movement has experienced no splits, or at least none that have seriously weakened its organisation.

The movement has shown more continuity than discontinuity between the pre- and post-2001 phases in the major aspects that characterise such

³ In this paper, 'Southeastern region' is used for the three provinces of Loya Paktia and 'Southern region' for Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan and Zabul. The latter region is referred to as 'Southwestern region' by some.

armed insurgent movements: the organisational structure including the composition of its leadership, ideology, political aims and programme. Most importantly, the movement still adheres to its undisputed and single most important leader, Mulla Muhammad Omar, the *amir ul-mo'menin*. The Taleban Leadership Council stems from the pre-2001 phase and is still mainly Kandahari. The presence of non-Kandahari Taleban leaders in this council is more symbolic than significant. The influence of newly recruited, younger-generation Taleban foot-soldiers on strategic decision-making is still minimal although the presence of Mulla Omar's two new deputies (after the arrest of Mulla Baradar) indicates that now both the old and the new generations are represented on this level. The major change in the Taleban is that up to late 2001 it was a quasi-government with a state-like structure, while after 2001 it was forced to reorganise as an insurgent or guerrilla movement that runs a parallel administration. Based on this, the movement claims the continuity of its emirate, which in its eyes a foreign intervention unlawfully removed and replaced with a 'puppet administration'.

There is no organised or recognisable 'moderate' (or any other 'political') 'faction' in the Taleban to counterbalance the 'religious' hardliners. It is more useful to differentiate between different currents: pragmatic, politically thinking, pro-talks Taleban who understand that a political solution is desirable but who still are conservative Islamists, compared with those who favour a purely military approach, often combined with a hypertrophic recourse to terrorist means. Both groups compete for the allegiance of the non- or less-political *majburi* and *na-raz* foot-soldiers.

The fact that a large majority of the Taleban are Pashtuns does not make them *the* 'representative' of *all* Pashtuns. Since the late 1940s, a pluralist political choice has always existed in Pashtun society. The armed conflicts of the past 30 years, however, have narrowed the political space. The marginalisation of political parties has further aggravated the problem. In today's violent atmosphere, between the anvil of the Karzai government and the hammer of the Taleban, there are no viable political alternatives for Pashtuns.

Tribes cannot assume the roles of independent actors. Rather, they provide an arena in which political competition takes place. Attempts to make 'tribes' into instruments for stabilisation, as has been done in the formation of 'local defence initiatives', is misdirected. Rather, alternative Pashtun political and social organisations should be given more scope and resources. At the same time, it is not too late to strengthen the internal

cohesion of certain tribes and their particular institutions by supporting their abilities to re-establish functioning, legitimate decision-making bodies (*jirgas*, *shuras*). External actors, however, should only provide a level playing field, a framework of security and possibly – where requested – take on the role of neutral arbiter. They should refrain from being seen as taking decisions on Afghans' behalf and be aware that interference often deepens, instead of remedies, existing rifts.

The Afghan government's draft Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program – as well as the West-dominated approach that creates an artificial division between 'reconciliation' and 'reintegration' – still treats the Taleban problem mainly as a technical one. It supposes that many Taleban can be won over by economic and social incentives – and the insurgency, in effect, split. This underestimates the political motives that drive the Taleban insurgency. Furthermore, there still is an – although not publicly expressed – incongruence between the US approach (using the 'surge' to weaken the Taleban before any talks) and President Karzai's approach that still seems to favour immediate direct contacts.

The June 2010 peace *jirga* in Kabul has not brought the necessary clarification process forward. It was not preceded by a broad consultation and lacked genuine representativeness. Only an approach to reconciliation based on genuine broad participation and buy-in by Afghans can lead to an outcome in which the Taleban can be absorbed into the political mainstream and Afghan society. An approach imposed from the top down, even if covered with rituals of surrogate participation, will always be vulnerable from spoilers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in Afghanistan have underscored that while the complex issue of reconciliation and reintegration is discussed and even shaped into programmes, an immense lack of understanding and – as it seems, even of interest – exists regarding the nature of the Taleban movement. This lack was reflected in Western governments' approach at and after the international Afghanistan conference in London in January 2010 when the still under-developed 'Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program' (APRP) of the Afghan government received political approval and even some financial commitments. It continued in the mainly welcoming response from Western capitals with regard to the June 2010 National Consultative Peace *Jirga* in Kabul. But it

also was evident at the Afghan-led discussions at the jirga itself.

President Hamed Karzai reflected on the outlines of the APRP – which was presented to the London conference and to parts of the donor community in Kabul – in his opening speech to the delegates of the jirga. But the document was not presented to or distributed amongst them. In this major government document (although still a draft) the criteria for political accommodation with the insurgents have not become clear yet. This reflects the still-enormous lack of understanding of who the insurgents (and their main composite element, the Taleban movement) are and what aims they pursue. Alternately, perhaps, it reflects the view that a differentiated analysis is not necessary for the implementation of the programme of which President Karzai's Western partners have unambiguously adopted only the reintegration side.

The National Consultative Peace Jirga, as well as the wave of arrest of Afghan Taleban leaders in Pakistan in January and February this year,⁴ shows that motives of power and control still dominate the 'peace and reconciliation' agenda. No interest was shown in how common ground can be created at either the national or the regional levels.

Discussions about whether 'moderate' Taleban (i.e., Taleban interested in talking or negotiating) exist have overshadowed deeper questions about the character of the Taleban movement and how it affects prospects for political accommodation. As a result, considerable confusion exists as to whether the largest and most influential insurgent movement is mainly driven by ethnic, religious or political motives. This paper aims to clarify the often-complex forces that shape the movement. This paper explores a central question: Are the Taleban a Pashtun tribal or even a nationalist force or are they, as they claim to be, supra-ethnic Islamists who do not acknowledge tribal, ethnic and linguistic differences but 'only know Muslims'? Do these two concepts exclude each other or can – and do – they coexist? The answers to these questions have important implications for the debate on reconciliation and reintegration, as they provide an indication of whether and under which circumstances the Taleban may be ready to join a political process and what they would want to get

⁴ See Thomas Ruttig, 'Implications of Mulla Baradar's Arrest' *AAN Blog*, 16 February 2010, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=646>; Thomas Ruttig, 'The Taliban Arrest Wave in Pakistan: Reasserting Strategic Depth?' *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, vol. 3 (3) (March 2010), pp 14–6.

out of it.⁵ The question of how 'tribal' the Taleban are is also significant in the debate on whether and how so-called 'tribal' or 'community defence' forces can or should be used to push back the influence of the Taleban in certain areas of Afghanistan.

To better understand how tribal the movement is, this paper first discusses the place of tribes and their institutions within Afghan society, how they function in reality and what changes and developments they have been subjected to during the phases of modernisation in the 20th century and the post-1973 conflicts in Afghanistan. A distinction is made between what is real and what is myth, as constructed both by Afghans and by foreign observers.

The paper then discusses the origins of the Taleban movement, the (limited) role of Islamist ideology, and the extent to which the movement can be considered Pashtun nationalist. Furthermore, this paper will look at the just begun debate about whether the Taleban have morphed into a 'Neo-Taleban' movement after the collapse of their regime – i.e., whether there is more continuity than difference between the movement in its pre-9/11 incarnation, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), and the resurgent movement of the present time.

2. PASHTUN TRIBES, BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

Much has been written about the *pashtunwalai*, the code of conduct and way of life of the Pashtuns. But much of it had been mystified, both by Afghans and foreign observers, not least because – in the light of more than 30 years of conflict – the past radiates a golden light of nostalgia. In order to understand which roles tribes and their institutions are playing today, a lot of rubble has to be cleared. Although *pashtunwalai* is often described in its ideal form and as static, it actually evolves and differs in time and space. Individuals have started to dominate institutions, which were originally the embodiment of collective interests.

With its core principles of *nang* and *tora*, *melmastia*, *nenawatai* and *badal*, *tiga* and *baramta*, its tribal institutions like the *khan* and the *malek*, the *jirga* and the *arbakai*,⁶ as well as the

⁵ In my first paper (see FN 1) I argued that 'reconciliation' is more than just talks between the government and the Taleban: It needs to be a broader concept that overarches the whole Afghan post- or still-in-conflict society.

⁶ Honour and courage, hospitality, seeking shelter by

Pashtuns' notorious fragmentation, embodied in the principle of *tarburwalai* (the enmity between 'cousins'), *pashtunwalai* is a complicated – and unwritten – system. The knowledge of it is preserved by the whitebeards (*spingiri*) and the *jirgadar*, those 'who have [the knowledge about] the jirga'.⁷ It is not secret knowledge and is transferred to the younger generations by example: Young boys are supposed to be present at jirgas and see how the elders do it.

Already in the 1970s, Christian Sigrist was using the term 'acephalous' and 'segmented societies' for this kind of social organisation,⁸ with its hierarchy of loyalties between relatives from the level of the family (*kor*, in Pashto, means 'house') on the bottom up to the level of nation (*millat*), country (*mamlakat*) or fatherland (*watan*).⁹ Loyalty is only extended when the particular level on the hierarchy pyramid is externally threatened. For example, if some *kor* of one tribe would be in latent conflict with other *kor* of the same tribe in one particular area – about land, forest or water use – these *koruna* would stick together and defend themselves with a higher level of loyalty when threatened by an outside group. On the top-most ('national') level this would mean that when all Afghan ethnic groups are threatened by outside aggression, they cooperate with each other. This was proven during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s.

submission and revenge, a moratorium on a conflict and the deposit to guarantee it, the tribal leader and the village elder, the tribal assembly and its reinforcement instrument. The best article on *pashtunwalai* for me is still Lutz Rzehak, 'Das Paschtunwali – traditionelle Normen, Wertvorstellungen und Bräuche der Paschtunen', *asien, afrika, lateinamerika* 15 (1987) 5, Berlin, pp 821–32. Surprisingly enough, there does not seem to be a comprehensive recent English-language book or article dealing with the types of *pashtunwalai* amongst Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan as such, apart from the colonial (and Pakistan-focussed) 'standard' books like Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans* (Oxford, USA 1984, reprint). A number of recent papers concentrate on the jirga aspect mostly and only deal with *pashtunwalai* at their periphery.

⁷ One source also refers to so-called '*nirkhi*', arbiters, in such jirgas. Christian Sigrist, 'Pashtunwali – Das Stammesrecht der Pashtunen' in *Revolution in Iran und Afghanistan: mardom nameh – Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Gesellschaft des Mittleren Orients* (Berlin 1980), p 264.

⁸ 'Acephalous' means 'with no centralised authority', also called, 'regulated anarchy'. Christian Sigrist: *Regulierte Anarchie* (Olten 1967).

⁹ *Watan* also is a blurry term. It can stand for the whole nation/country but also for the narrower area of origin (a valley, etc.).

The Pashtuns are one, if not the largest, of the tribal societies worldwide. Kinship as a principle of social organisation, nevertheless, is nothing special to the Pashtuns. Most of what is said, for example, about the Somalis¹⁰ would make sense for the Pashtuns as well:

'All Somalis are born into this social structure and because it defines a person's relationship to other Somalis and non-Somalis, kinship is a critical source of an individual's identity. Knowledge of a person's clan can enable one to identify their elders, deduce where they reside and whom they are likely to vote for in an election.... Kin groups form alliances, divide and realign in response to internal and external events and processes. The clan or sub-clan that a person identifies with (or is identified with) will depend on the prevailing context and issue at hand, such as access to environmental resources, the control of real-estate, competition for political office or a collective response to security threats. The tradition of exogamous marriage¹¹ means that Somalis can have relatives in several clans dispersed over large geographical areas.... Clans and genealogies are therefore dynamic social constructs that can be subject to different interpretations and are used to describe and validate changing social and political relationships. They are, as Luling¹² has described, "not only good to fight with (or play politics and do business with) but good to think with". . . . In the context of state collapse and in the absence of state institutions and other forms of political

¹⁰ In Mark Bradbury, *Becoming Somaliland* (London 2008), pp 13–15.

¹¹ 'Endogamous' and 'exogamous' are relative terms. As a rule, marriage amongst Afghans is endogamous, i.e., within the broader community. Often, however, cousin marriage is preferred – to save costs and to keep the property (land, etc.) together. In contrast, exogamous marriage is a means to create political and business alliances.

¹² The quoted original source is Virginia Luling, 'Genealogy as Theory, Genealogy as Tool: Aspects of Somali "Clanship"' *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* (2006) Vol. 12 (4).

organisation the kinship system provide[s] a structure for inter-group relations and governance, for organising and managing violence and for organising trade.'

All Pashtuns know their current particular place on their people's intricate genealogical chart with its hundreds of 'tribes', 'sub-tribes', 'clans', *kor*¹³ etc. which derives from (assumed) common ancestors.¹⁴ The same is true for the individual Taleban fighter. He is able to say exactly to which tribe, sub-tribe etc. he belongs – unless he decides otherwise and sidesteps to the ideological level, often in order to make a political point. One Taleban interpreter in Kandahar in late 2000 replied with emphasis when asked to which tribe he belongs: 'This doesn't matter to me. We are Muslims and do not know [i.e., recognise] tribes.'¹⁵

The place a tribe or sub-tribe occupies on the Pashtun genealogical chart can change in time and space. A 'tribe' might grow and split into 'sub-tribes' and some 'sub-tribe' might become a 'tribe' in its own right. For example, the relationship between the Barakzai and the Atsakzai¹⁶ in southern Afghanistan evolved: The latter was originally a 'sub-tribe' of the former but people in the region now often put both on the same level when asked which 'tribes' live in their particular area. The Atsakzai have grown to become a tribe in

¹³ I put some of those terms in quotation marks because these categories are fluid. A 'subtribe' here is, in a purely descriptive way, just a group of people that is considered (or considers itself) part of a larger tribe. Without going further into detail, the Pashtuns do not form a single 'tribe' ('the Pashtun tribe' as media often say) but something a category higher. Some call it a 'nation' or 'nationality', a 'people' (in German, *Volk*) or an 'ethnic group'. Afghan terms used for it (*qaum*, *millat*, etc.) are also blurred. There are different tribes *among* the Pashtuns.

¹⁴ Qais Abdulrashid as the ancestor of all Pashtuns. He and his sons Sarban, Baitan and Gharghasht as well as the 'adopted' Karlan are forefathers of the major Pashtun 'confederations'. The ones most important in Afghanistan, the Durrani and the Ghilzai, go back to Sarban and Baitan, respectively. See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Millenium and Charisma among Pashtuns: A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology* (London, Henley and Boston 1976), p 7.

¹⁵ The same line was not often taken by 'ordinary' Taleban I talked to during my stay in Kabul in 2000/2001 during the Taleban regime. They eagerly told me which tribe they belonged to.

¹⁶ Often referred to as 'Achakzai', the Dari form. The Dari language lacks the Pashtun consonant 'ts' (cf. 'tsenga ye' ['How are you?'] in Pashto or 'Cäsar' or 'Zitrone' in German).

their own right. In contrast, sometimes, a whole tribe disappears.¹⁷

A lot of this has to do with the Pashtuns' nomadic origins, as the example of the Babozai¹⁸ tribe, again in southern Afghanistan, illustrates. While in Zabul the Babozai are considered a sub-tribe of the Hotak in the Ghilzai 'confederation'; in neighbouring Uruzgan they are seen as a Nurzai sub-tribe in the Durrani 'confederation'.¹⁹ This seemingly paradoxical situation is because Babozai groups had migrated from Zabul westwards looking for greener pastures and must have been accommodated by Nurzai. There are many reports in the literature about how, in past centuries when land was still available, larger tribal groups gave land, protection or both to incoming smaller ones. Such a move would make the newcomers either clients (*hamsaya*, literally 'in the same shadow', i.e., neighbours) of the host group (mainly when non-Pashtun) or, as in the case of the Pashtun Babozai, a new sub-tribe of their benefactors. This case demonstrates how unreliable tribal categories are and how tricky it can be if outsiders start treating them as if they were set in stone (such as the Durrani-Ghilzai divide, which is treated by some 'tribal analysts' as dogma).

Today, some tribes – particularly in the Southern region (Greater Kandahar) – cover such a large area that they are simply too big to have a single leader. The Nurzai, for example, stretch from Kandahar to Herat province. How difficult it is under such circumstances to come to a political

¹⁷ Like the Sur(i) who ruled Northern India in the 16th century. They were probably absorbed by the local population.

¹⁸ The Babozai case also is of political relevance: one wife of Taleban leader Mulla Muhammad Omar reportedly is a Babozai from Uruzgan province. (Mulla Omar's family is from Zabul originally and belongs to the Hotak tribe, with the exact subtribe unknown. He himself was born in Dehrawud district of Uruzgan where the family had migrated to and from where he, with his stepfather, moved further south to Kandahar province. Most Hotak and Nurzai currently support the Taleban. See: Abdul Awwal Zabilwal, 'Taliban in Zabul: A Witness' Account' in Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, London 2009, p 180.

¹⁹ Often, these 'tribal confederations' are understood as purely genealogical. But, as the Babozai case illustrates, they are also influenced by politics. An Afghan source importantly points to the fact that also the Durrani emerged as a *political* confederation, called *gund* (party), 'put together' by a *pir* in the reign of Ahmad Shah Abdali (later: Durrani) for a concrete political reason. Muhammad Omar Rawand Miakhel, *De Pashtano Qabilo Shujre au Mene* [The Lineages and Dwellings of the Pashtun Tribes], Kabul 1999, p 217.

decision became apparent before the 2005 parliamentary elections: Some Nurzai tribal leaders convened a series of all-Nurzai assemblies aiming to field joint candidates on which the whole tribe would concentrate its votes. But no candidate was acceptable to all Nurzai. As a result, many local Nurzai candidates competed amongst each other and lost in many places; the tribe subsequently felt underrepresented in the Wolesi Jirga. Nurzai activists interviewed later described how it was impossible to overcome subtribal rivalries and personal egos.²⁰

There are, in reality, no permanently fixed places on the Pashtun genealogical tree and no eternal, unchanging tribal institutions. Much of what is told about them are myths, idealised versions of a golden past that probably never existed in a pure form and definitely not across the Pashtun areas in the same way. Versions of *pashtunwalai* differ by locale. They are locally called *nirkh* which means 'price' and refers to the different prices used to settle blood feuds,²¹ i.e., *badal*, which means exchange. Some authors stipulate

two [major] types of socio-economic organisational settings' that are reflected in the Pashtuns' 'code of honour', according to the predominant form of land tenure: the *qalang* group amongst sedentary tribes where large, irrigated private landholdings exist and which, as a result, is socially stronger stratified (it is named after the tax share-cropper tenants must pay to the landlords) and the *nang* group amongst pastoral hill Pashtuns which are socially more egalitarian (named after their central value, chivalry).²²

²⁰ Author's interviews in Kandahar, February and September 2009.

²¹ Examples of different *nirkh* systems are given in: Sigrist, 'Pashtunwali' (see FN 7), pp 264–75 (for the tribes of Paktia) and *The Customary Laws of Afghanistan, A report by the International Legal Foundation*, [Washington] 2006. When the jirga was composed of different tribal groups, it had to be decided in advance whose *nirkh* would be used. It often could be that of a third tribal group.

²² See: Ahmed, *Millennium and Charisma* (see FN 14), p 76; Palwasha Kakar, *Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority*, <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>. Ahmed, the original source, describes *nang* and *qalang* for *Pakistani* Pashtuns. It can be assumed, however, that the principle also works amongst Afghan

Furthermore, it is highly doubtful whether there was always *one* undisputed leader at any given time on any given level of the tribal pyramid – hence the jirga as an (ideally) egalitarian body where decisions are taken collectively and based on consensus. Rather, it was more likely that various aspirants fought each other in ongoing competition by exchanging wealth and wisdom (about the jirga) for prestige and influence (i.e., leadership). Power within a certain tribe or tribal segment likely had an ever-changing equilibrium. The southern tribes (Durrani and Ghilzai, not the Southeastern tribes of Loya Paktia) know the institution of the *khankhel*, the sub-tribe or 'clan' from which 'traditionally' the leaders of a particular segment of a tribe, or the whole tribe, often come. But this does not prevent competition nor a shift of power from 'clan' to 'clan'.

Such changes are quicker in times of crisis: For example, in the Popalzai tribe, the former *khankhel* led by Muhammad Afzal Khan (who was killed 1978 under the PDPA regime) has been replaced by the Qaranagh to which the Karzai family belongs (although not undisputedly). Other Popalzai 'clans' around Kandahar – and possibly also Taleban deputy Mulla Baradar who belongs to the same tribe – would dispute that the Karzais are *the* leaders of their tribe.²³ Among the Džadran in Loya Paktia, the most influential (royalist) Babrakzai family has been effectively replaced by the Haqqani 'clan' (the leaders of the Haqqani network, a semi-autonomous part of the wider Taleban movement²⁴) since the 1970s. But even the Haqqanis lead only parts of the tribe, with other 'clans' – such as the one of MP Pacha Khan Džadran – leading other parts.

This lack of a 'dynastic principle' amongst Pashtuns stands in the way of a coherent and continuous tribal leadership. This has been the case even at the very top of the pyramid in the Pashtun-dominated Afghan monarchy, over the past centuries. Since 1747, not many rulers were replaced by an obvious heir; most of the time, succession was determined in protracted civil wars between brothers, half-brothers, 'cousins' and other pretenders. Succession is also often less-than straightforward on a lower level, as seen recently on the side of the both

lowland Pashtuns, like many Durrani, because the pattern of land ownership is similar.

²³ Author's interviews in Kandahar, 2008 and 2009.

²⁴ For more about the Haqqani network, see Thomas Ruttig, 'Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity in the Taliban Universe' in Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London 2009).

current government and the Taleban. For example, when the leader of the Arghandab Alikozai in Kandahar province, commander Mulla Naqibullah, died in October 2007, President Karzai 'crowned' his son as the new leader of the tribe (i.e., he put an honorary turban on his head). Immediately, the Taleban attacked not only Naqibullah's house but also the district centre in a fight that was one of the most violent that year, sensing that the president's perceived interference in the affairs of a tribe that is not his own had fuelled internal support for them.

In another case in neighbouring Uruzgan, the 23-year-old Muhammad Daud succeeded his father Rozi Khan as *wuluswal* (governor) of Chora district after the latter was killed accidentally in September 2008.²⁵ Initially welcomed and even elected by the local population (although in the presence of representatives of the provincial government who, it can be assumed, no one wanted to contradict at a funeral), Daud soon ran into difficulties and was undermined by a senior uncle who thought that he had more right to the position than the young man. This rival was immediately 'adopted' and supported by a very influential local power broker who felt sidelined by the local International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops.

On the Taleban side, Mulla Dadullah, a commander who had become notorious for his extensive use of suicide bombers and al-Qaida style rhetoric, was replaced by his younger brother Mulla Mansur after he was killed by NATO forces in May 2005. Mansur then adopted the *takhallus* (by- or surname) 'Dadullah' to transfer his brother's image of a martyr to his own person. (He was later demoted by Mulla Omar for repeatedly ignoring instructions.) In other examples, the command over some Taleban fronts in Uruzgan changed to a brother or cousin after the original commander was killed.

All three cases show that sons or brothers of tribal leaders often have difficulties filling the shoes of their fathers.

3. CRUMBLING TRIBAL INSTITUTIONS

Starting with the 1973 coup, 30 years of conflict and gradual state collapse have increasingly weakened and dissolved traditional social and

²⁵ Rozi Khan had rushed to help a friend who was attacked at night by unrecognisable gunmen he thought were Taleban but turned out to be Australian Special Forces who thought that Rozi Khan was a Taleb.

political relations in the Afghan society in general and in Pashtun society in particular. Mass migration enforced higher mobility and narrowed the urban-rural gap. This gradually undermined and transformed the traditional relationships of village, tribal and ethnic communities. New elites emerged that challenged the elders and took over their places. The younger generations questioned the authority of the 'elders' whom they held responsible for these conflicts or, at least, for their inability to solve them with the traditional means.

The impact on intra-tribal cohesion was negative. Many tribal leaders were eliminated by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) regime; others lost their status to the socially upwards climbers of the *jihad* period: the armed commanders and drug barons. The Taleban continued the killings. The elders' sons were not able to follow them directly because they lacked their authority.

As a result, the *jirga* as the major conflict-resolving mechanism of the Pashtuns lost much of its authority. The powerful newcomers – on the national as well as on the local level – are able to ignore *jirga* decisions with impunity. This is illustrated by an almost 20-year-old land conflict in Chora district (Uruzgan) where a commander dug an irrigation channel and distributed the new land amongst followers without giving the first right, as tradition and *sharia* demand, to the immediate neighbours. Challenged by government courts, tribal *jirgas* and even mediation by *ulama*, he is still ignoring all decisions that went against him – thanks to superior firepower and protection from Kabul. Today, might often trumps *pashtunwali* and even Islamic law. In an intact Pashtun tribal environment, ignoring *jirga* and *ulama* decisions would have been heavily punished.

In many Pashtun tribes, the temporary, egalitarian institution of the *jirga* has been replaced by a multitude of more enduring tribal *shuras* all of which previously claimed to represent the whole tribe. While some *shuras* still represent a form of 'traditional' self-organisation, many are convened by new strongmen, either on the local or the central level, to demonstrate their own influence vis-à-vis foreigners. This makes them hierarchical in structure, a strong contrast to the egalitarian *jirga* where, ideally all male members of a certain tribe or sub-tribe (in reality all land-owning males in some areas and the *mishran*, the elders of the families, in others) find a consensus about a certain conflict. Meanwhile, a *shura* deliberates and gives advice to a leader who then decides whether make use of it or not. Many Pashtuns now confuse these

institutions and use both terms, *jirga* and *shura*, interchangeably.²⁶

Rising levels of education have changed the character of tribal representation. Beginning with the educational reforms during King Amanullah's reign (1919–29), the tribal elites sent their sons to the cities to study. As a result, diaspora communities of certain provinces or tribes emerged in the big cities and grew in numbers. Their members absorbed modern skills and began to use modern means of communication but, at the same time, maintained links to their original *watan* and tribe. This way, influences of modernism penetrated rural communities. Today, many local tribal councils are still headed by the *spingiri* ('whitebeards', i.e., the traditional elders) while educated members (engineers or teachers) often deal with 'foreign affairs', like contacts with visiting foreigners and the acquisition and implementation of projects. This diaspora-tribe relationship intensifies in times of crisis, such as regime change when rural communities re-integrate their urbanised members linked with a fallen regime – be it Khalqi or Taleban – smoothly and without too many ideological misgivings. However, in a significant number of cases tribes were unable to protect the returnees against arrest and being killed after 2001. This forced many of the former Taleban and their original tribal groups back into the movement. Today, some key support for the Taleban comes from communities who have prisoners in the Guantanamo system.²⁷

The rising population and growing tribes make it physically impossible that, as tradition demands,

²⁶ A contemporary source reports that by 1989, '[t]he word *shura* is not used in Dari-speaking areas to refer to local-level consultative bodies' and that 'more likely . . . the . . . word "majlis"' would be used, that *shuras* were mainly 'formed by commanders for the purpose of coordinating military operations' (with some expanding into administration of areas) and 'largely' consisted 'of members of *one tanzeem*' (my emphasis). That is, the word *shura* has had a rather late career. The same authors underline that *shuras*, *jirgas* and *majlis* were 'not a democratic "one man [sic!] one vote" situation' and that the 'consensus' decision often was a 'majority' vote in reality because 'some persons were more influential and/or more persuasive than others'. Lynn Carter and Kerry Connor, *A Preliminary Investigation of Contemporary Afghan Councils* (Peshawar: Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, ACBAR, 1989), pp 2–3, 10.

²⁷ While working with the UN in the Southeastern region in 2003 and during later trips to those areas, the author became aware of examples from Ghazni (Andar, Muqur) and Paktia (Zurmat).

all males gather in a *jirga*. This exacerbates the trend that participation in a *jirga* reflects growing social differentiation. While on the one hand the institution of the *jirga* is crumbling or changing its features under pressure from modernisation and conflict, on the other hand, the use of traditional institutions of conflict regulation in times of crises is being revived as a fall-back position. When the government is weak or absent, *shuras* and *jirgas* fill the local political and administrative vacuum as instruments to maintain links with the outside world. Today, '[f]or the majority of Afghans, disputes are settled, if at all, at the local level by village elders [i.e., *jirgas* and *shuras* —the author], district governors, clerics, and police chiefs'²⁸ without any government role and often without it even noticing – estimates of up to 80 per cent of all conflicts. In particular, *jirgas* and *shuras* are perceived as 'more accessible, more efficient (in terms of time and money), perceived as less corrupt, and more trusted by Afghans compared to formal state courts'.²⁹

At the same time, the Kabul government and its international allies neglected and failed to support initiatives of key Pashtun tribes that aimed at re-establishing '(inner-)tribal solidarity' or 'unity' in the post-2001 period. This left those (non-Islamist) tribal forces isolated, deprived them of funds and weakened them vis-à-vis the resurging Taleban.

For example, as early as 2003 the Mangal Central Shura in the Southeastern region of Afghanistan implemented a decision that banned poppy growing on the tribe's territory that stretches over a number of districts in two provinces, Paktia and Khost. This was completely ignored by Kabul and external donors, including the UK (then the lead country for drug control). Donors failed to reward the Mangal tribe for this unilateral decision even in the slightest way, concentrating on the Eastern region exclusively. Later, the Mangal committed themselves to defend their territory against the Taleban by a traditional Pashtun pact (*tarun*). The Mangal also played a prominent part in the Tribal Solidarity Council which brought together Paktia and Khost's major tribes in 2003/4, an initiative that was met with the same ignorant response from Kabul. The same neglect happened to the Dzadran Unity Meeting – the Dzadran being a

²⁸ Thomas Barfield, Neamat Nojumi and J Alexander Thier, *The Clash of Two Goods: State and Non-State Dispute Resolution in Afghanistan* (US Institute for Peace, Washington 2006), p 2.

²⁹ *Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007* (Center for Policy and Human Development, Kabul 2007), pp 91, 10.

particularly Taleban-influenced tribe³⁰ – with 2,000 participants in the spring of 2007 in Dwamanda, Khost province. Today, the Mangal Central Shura – left alone – barely exists anymore, a number of shuras compete for leadership³¹ and the Dzadran remain deeply split offering easy inroads for the Haqqani network. The Mangal area, peaceful in 2003/4, now is considered by the UN to be even more volatile than the Dzadran areas.

Kabul's fateful decision to pay *arbaki*³² through the provincial governors' discretionary funds considerably weakened another vital tribal institution that had stabilised Pashtun areas lacking government presence. This payment system started as early as 2001, followed by much closer cooperation in 2004 and 2005, during the first presidential and parliamentary elections when *arbaki* guarded polling stations, mainly in the Southeastern region, in cooperation with the Afghan National Police. Subsequently, it became more erratic again, depending on the availability of funds and the relationship of the particular governor with the central government. This left many *arbaki* unpaid for months at a time and lowered the enthusiasm of individual tribesmen to join this institution. When, for example, Paktia's new governor Rahmatullah Rahmat – a former UN employee who, therefore, was seen with suspicion in Kabul – took over, he was not given the same amount of operational funds by the government that his predecessor had received. Officially, the payment of these funds was stopped altogether. However, some governors with better contacts in Kabul still received them and were able to pay *arbaki*. At least in the southeast, another period of more permanent government funding of *arbaki* followed in 2007.³³

Even Afghan leaders apparently failed to understand (or purposely undermined) the character of the *arbaki* as an instrument controlled by the tribe, explained a tribal elder from the

region to this author in April 2007: 'In the King's time it was an honour to be member of an *arbaki*. Its members were provided with *e'ana* [rations, weapons and ammunition] by the *jirga*.' To pay the *arbaki* means to render it uncontrollable when payments stop. It seems that the Kabul government perceives tribal self-organisation as a threat rather than a stabilising factor and prefers a form of patronage that is not inclusive but serves only one side. This neglects the *jirga*'s inherent principle of mitigating conflicting interests and rather tends to deepen conflicts.

4. WHERE DID THE TALEBAN EMERGE FROM?

Looking at the question of where the Taleban historically emerged from as a movement contributes to understanding how strong religious ideas and concepts shape their worldview and their political aims. Are those concepts the basis of their ideology or merely a reaction to political circumstances at a certain time?

The Taleban – as a distinct movement – was not part of the first uprisings against the PDPA regime, which took place in June 1978 in the Pech valley (now Nuristan) and Pasaband (Ghor) and in 1979 in Loya Paktia, Herat, Nangrahar and elsewhere. Those were mainly spontaneous, community or tribe-based revolts³⁴ against the new regime's revolutionary land and education reforms. But from the beginning, these revolts incorporated religious motives and sometimes religious forms of organisation. Before the Christmas 1979 Soviet invasion, the initial adversary, the pre-1980 PDPA regime, was fought because it was seen as 'communist' and therefore 'godless' (*kafer*) by many Afghans. But the Soviet invasion added a strong nationalistic component: to fight a foreign occupation. This let resistance grow considerably.

The ideologically still-heterogeneous resistance was only generally re-interpreted as a jihad, i.e., as exclusively religiously motivated, while levelling other aspects of it, after Pakistan officially and exclusively recognised seven Sunni Islamist

³⁰ The leaders of the insurgent 'Haqqani network', Jalaluddin and Serajuddin Haqqani, are Dzadran.

³¹ During a visit to Gardez in August 2009, I witnessed attempts of various Mangal shuras to claim authority over the whole tribe vis-à-vis UNAMA.

³² Tribal-based self-defence groups composed of volunteers, supplied by the tribe and mandated by the *jirga*.

³³ See Ruttig, 'Loya Paktia's Insurgency' (see FN 24), pp 68–9; Susanne Schmeidl and Masood Karokhail, 'The Role of Non-State Actors in "Community-Based Policing" – An Exploration of the Arbakai (Tribal Police) in South-Eastern Afghanistan' in *Contemporary Security Policy*, 30 (2), pp 324–6.

³⁴ Interestingly, one contemporary source describes the first revolts as non-ideological but mainly driven by reasons resembling the current insurgency, i.e., arbitrary arrests and misuse of power by government official to settle personal scores. The PDPA government initially had won the support (or at least made them wait) of many tribes by organising *jirgas*. See David Busby Edwards, 'Origins of the Anti-Soviet Jihad' in Grant M. Ferr and John G. Merriam, *Afghan Resistance: The Politics of Survival* (Lahore 1988), pp 24, 32–4.

resistance movements (the Peshawar Seven³⁵) and cut off all other resistance groups from incoming Western and Arab world financial support. The latter included secular leftists (who fought for ideological reasons and reflected the Moscow-Beijing split of the communist movement) and ethno-nationalists. At their expense, the rise of the Islamist *tanzim*³⁶ was boosted. Taleban, i.e., madrassa and mosque students, were part of the various *tanzim*.

The Taleban movement emerged from religious networks that were part of the 1978–89 resistance, i.e., a broader movement that saw itself as religiously motivated. In the beginning, *taleban*, led by their teachers, organised as madrassa- or mosque-centred networks ('fronts'), mainly linked to *Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami* and *Hezb-e Islami (Khales)*. They did not constitute a movement of their own yet but were already known as 'Taleban fronts'.³⁷ Only when the mujahedin, in the eyes of the later Taleban, violated their own religious principles by not unifying to build the promised Islamic state after the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992 but fragmented (*shirk*³⁸ is considered a major deviation in Islam) in a competition for power, did they establish their own, now ultra-orthodox movement.

³⁵ The seven major Sunni *tanzim* that were officially recognised by Pakistan and therefore were exclusively entitled to receive Western and Arab aid were Hezb (Hekmatyar), Hezb (Khales), Jamiat (Rabbani), Harakat (Nabi Muhammadi), Ittehad (Sayyaf), Nejat (Mujaddedi) and Mahaz (Gailani).

³⁶ *Tanzim* ('organisation') was an Arabic term used by Afghans for the various political-military 'parties' that fought in the different periods of the civil war. They include mujahedin groups as well as the non-mujahedin *Jombesh*.

³⁷ Olivier Roy witnessed 'Tolaba fronts' in Uruzgan, Zabul and Kandahar in the summer of 1984. The former chief of Pakistan's army staff General Aslam Beg said that he was part of an 'experiment' to establish 'Taleban forces' in liberated territories of Kunar in 1985–6. Christina Lamb visited a 'Mullahs front' established a year earlier in Kandahar that involved later Taleban leaders Mulla Razzaq, Borjan and Maulawi Pasanai in 1998 and was told that it had bases in 'Arghandab, Malajat and Zabul'. The first ever Taleban front is reported by Zabolwal from Zabul already in 1979. See Olivier Roy, 'Die Taleban-Bewegung in Afghanistan', *Mahfel* No. 45 (March-April 1995), Berlin, p 8, translated from Afghanistan-Info No. 36 (February 1995), Neuchatel; 'Taleban schon seit 1985/86?', *Mahfel* No. 45 (March-April 1995), p 5, translated from *The News* (Pakistan), 3 March 1995; Christina Lamb, *The Sewing Circles of Herat* (London 2002), pp 51–65; Zabolwal, 'Taliban in Zabul' (see FN 18), p 181.

³⁸ Originally, *shirk* stood for idolatry and polytheism but, in a figurative sense, is also used for factionalism.

Significantly, those mujahedin commanders that later became the major Taleban leaders stopped fighting after the collapse of the Najibullah regime and went back to their madrassas to study. As one early Taleban activist related, 'Many of us...withdrew after Dr. Najib's defeat because we were not interested in the war booty....When we saw that things became worse day by day and factional fighting increased, our central commander Mulla Muhammad Omar Akhund started from Quetta to bring together the Taleban in order to establish peace in Afghanistan.'³⁹

The primary motivation of the mujahedin, and therefore of the first-generation Taleban of the 1980s, can be described as political, based on a religious infrastructure. Religious motives – the fight of the Muslim true believers against the infidel invaders – were part of their political-military campaign but generally gained an upper hand only in the wake of the Pakistan-induced and Western-supported domination of the anti-Soviet resistance by militant Islamists. When the Taleban emerged as a movement after the Soviet withdrawal in 1992, it became more strongly shaped by religious motives. At its beginning stood a moral reaction against the atrocities and what it saw as a 'betrayal of Islam' by the post-Najibullah mujahedin regime, the so-called Islamic State of Afghanistan. Only after its initial moves, was the Taleban movement 'adopted', supported and instrumentalised by the Pakistani military establishment.

While the madrassas or mosques at the centre of those original taleban (i.e. madrassa student) networks were located on the territory of certain tribes, those tribes were not the primary reference of these fighting Taleban.⁴⁰ Mullahs in particular often did not 'serve' in their own community or tribe and therefore were considered *pradai* (stranger, outsider) amongst the strongly in-group-oriented Pashtuns. Socially, as religious service-providers, mainly for births, weddings and burials, and without land and status and therefore economically dependent on the local *khans*, mullahs and even higher-ranking ulama were of inferior status.⁴¹ When rulers like Amanullah (ruled 1919–

³⁹ *The News* (Pakistan), 3 March 1995, quoted and translated from 'Taleban schon seit 1985/86?', *Mahfel* No. 45 (March-April 1995), Berlin, p.5.

⁴⁰ In Zabul, an early Taleban front seems to have fragmented along tribal lines (coinciding with *tanzim* lines) fairly soon, however. See Martine van Bijlert, 'The insurgency in Uruzgan and Zabul' (forthcoming).

⁴¹ The rank given to mullahs differs, though, from tribe to tribe. In many Pashtun tribes, they participate in the *jirga*. While in some, they even act 'as custodians of

29) and later Muhammad Nader and Zaher Shah, President Muhammad Daud and even the PDPA regime started paying salaries to a substantial number of clergymen⁴² and gave them control over religious foundations (*waqf*), only the character of dependence changed. They became state bureaucrats in the eyes of the society.

Because of their role in the anti-Soviet resistance, the Islamic clergy – particularly the *mullas* – rose from social inferiority to a position of political power. This position was strengthened further when the Taleban regime made them its ‘eyes and ears’ in the villages and emphasised the collection of religious taxes, i.e., *ushr* and *zakat*, traditional income sources for the mullas. This built on the unofficial power a mulla already had: He was often the only literate person in a village and had ‘the power of the sermon’.⁴³

After the Taleban regime’s fall, some ulema – those at the top of mujahedin *tanzim* – gained quasi-sacrosanct status as ‘Jihad(i) leaders’. Under the Karzai government, they serve as an unofficial ‘supreme advisory council’ gathered by the president in crucial moments to obtain their support and ‘blessings’ for key policy decisions. This is starting to resemble the functions of Iran’s Council of Guardians, without being an official institution. The High Council of Ulema, headed by the former chief of the Supreme Court, Maulawi Fazl Hadi Shinwari, plays a second-tier role in this influential clerical lobby.⁴⁴

Today, many Taleban activities in Afghanistan’s southeast and south are still centred around networks of ulama-led madrassas and mosques. For the southeast – where the Haqqani network, a semi-autonomous entity within the broader Taleban movement operates – the insurgent networks are largely based on ‘old or newly created’ Deobandi networks. They are particularly strong in Pashtun areas of Ghazni and other Ghilzai areas to the East, like Katawaz in Paktika and

pashtunwalai’, in others they are ‘careful not to interfere in these matters’. See Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (London 2007), p 68; Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, (Cambridge 1986), p 36.

⁴² This practice actually was started, but on a much lower level, by Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (reigned 1826–63). See Haroon, *Frontier of Faith* (see FN 41), p 38.

⁴³ Haroon, *Frontier of Faith* (see FN 41), p 89.

⁴⁴ Thomas Ruttig, *Institutionen ohne Demokratie: Strukturelle Schwächen des Staatsaufbaus in Afghanistan und Ansätze für eine politische Stabilisierung*, SWP Research Paper 2008/S 17, Berlin, pp 18–21.

Western Paktia as well as in areas of the Dzadran tribe (the border triangle of Paktia, Paktika and Khost provinces).⁴⁵ Often, these networks are linked to similar ones on the Pakistani side of the border. The Haqqani network’s supply infrastructure in Pakistan was based on madrassas – at least until many of them were destroyed by drone attacks. Trives’ finding from Southeastern Afghanistan – that religious networks are stronger in flat areas while the tribal ‘encapsulation’ is stronger in mountainous areas⁴⁶ – can possibly be applied to southern Afghanistan, as well. Here, the role of clerical networks in reviving the Taleban after 2001 is reported, at least from Northern Helmand and Zabul.⁴⁷

5. HOW TRIBAL ARE THE TALEBAN?

Most of today’s Taleban fighters – in particular the ‘discontent’ and ‘forced’⁴⁸ ones in the south who are mainly motivated by local grievances rather than ideology and constitute the movement’s bulk – are undoubtedly Pashtuns.⁴⁹ This justifies a look at the questions: How rooted are the Taleban in Pashtun tribal society? Are they a ‘Pashtun’ movement, or even *the* movement of the Pashtuns?⁵⁰ Like the Pashtuns in general, the

⁴⁵ Sébastien Trives, ‘Afghanistan: Tackling the Insurgency, the Case of the Southeast’ *Politique Étrangère* 1 (2006), pp 5–6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 3.

⁴⁷ Tom Coghlan, ‘The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History’ in Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London 2009), p 137; Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taleban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York 2001), p 44–5.

⁴⁸ My AAN colleague Martine van Bijlert has introduced these local Afghan terms into the literature: *majburi* (forced) and *na-raz* (discontent) Taleban. See ‘Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban networks in Uruzgan’ in Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban* (see FN 47), pp 160–1. I prefer them to Kilcullen’s ‘accidental guerrillas’ and Naylor’s ‘auxiliary’ Taleban. See David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford 2009); Sean D. Naylor, ‘The Waiting Game: A Stronger Taliban Lies Low, Hoping the U.S. Will Leave Afghanistan,’ www.afji.com/2006/02/1404902.

⁴⁹ In areas with growing Taleban influence in the North-East, they increasingly attract non-Pashtuns, particularly Uzbeks and perhaps even Tajiks.

⁵⁰ Officially, the Taleban refer to themselves as the Islamic Movement of the Taleban (*De Talebano Islami Ghurdzang* or *Tehrik*) and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (*De Afghanistan Islami Emarat*). In these terms, there is no reference to Pashtuns.

Taliban movement both as a whole and in its constituent elements, is segmented.

Organisationally, the Taliban is a network of networks. Its major networks are the 'Kandahari'⁵¹ (or mainstream) Taliban and those of the Haqqani, Mansur and Khales 'clans' in the Southeastern and Eastern regions. The network of late commander Dadullah (although weakened after his death) in a much stronger way than others cuts across tribes and regions. All these networks, though, are associated with the Taliban mainstream, recognise Mulla Omar as their spiritual guide⁵² and its leaders (except possibly Khales Jr), and are represented in the Taliban's Leadership Council (*rahbari shura*). This representation, however, seems to be rather symbolic.

The three Southeastern and Eastern networks are more regional than 'tribal'. Although their core leadership groups are relatively static and mainly recruited from one tribe, i.e., that of the network leader (the Haqqanis from the Dzakran,⁵³ the Mansurs from the Andar and smaller 'allied' tribes and the Khales from the Khugiani), since 2006, the Haqqani network managed to expand beyond classical tribal boundaries to Wardak, Logar and Kabul provinces. Also, the Dadullah network expanded into Ghazni province and further north, beyond the Kandahari realm.

On the local level, the Taliban fronts are firmly based in tribes or their smaller subgroups. Recruitment, operations and succession patterns follow tribal lines in a majority of cases. These local networks have different levels, a hierarchy depending on how much area they cover, from a village or a cluster of villages (*delgai*) to a whole wuluswali (*jabha*). Only in exceptional cases – as in the Southeast – are those boundaries crossed and the networks become regional. Today, it is estimated that some 80 to 90 per cent of Taliban fighters operate in or close to their own communities, not least because most Taliban fighters are part-timers. (Besides, there are also 'roving' units and a degree of mobility – often

'Kandahari' Taliban are moved in when local groups behave too 'softly' with the population – but those are exceptions.) The number of fighters one local commander is able to mobilise also defines his position and influence in the movement. During the IEA period – when different networks competed for positions in the government – Taliban commanders tried to save their own fighters by not sending them to the frontlines.

Local populations tend to see 'external' fighters (those from other provinces and sometimes even districts) with suspicion and support their own. In 2009 for example, in Uruzgan province, Tokhi groups on the so-called Westbank of Tirinkot decided not to allow 'external' fighters to operate in these areas. One major reason is that local fighters tend to avoid exaggerated violence that could create cycles of revenge. Also, the Taliban *layha*⁵⁴ does not encourage 'out of area' activity and regulates it heavily: Front commanders on the provincial or district level who want to 'carry out jihad' outside their area of origin must notify the commanders in the particular province or district and must 'obey their orders'.⁵⁵

Significantly, strong tribal fissure lines plague the Taliban movement. The major one is the Kandahari-Paktiawal⁵⁶ rivalry. From the beginning, the Taliban *rahbari shura* was dominated by members of the 'Kandahari' Pashtun tribes, with a somewhat equal representation of the two major Pashtun confederations, the Durrani and Ghilzai, and smaller groups like the Kakar.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, southeastern, eastern and northern Pashtuns are only marginally and symbolically present in the Taliban leadership.

Former Taliban report a high level of mutual mistrust. Mainstream Taliban did and still do not allow anyone from the southeast or elsewhere to join their inner leadership circle. (Even the only Uzbek in the pre-2001 original Taliban leadership

⁵¹ That is, they are from the Southwestern region of Afghanistan, centred in Kandahar but including the provinces of Helmand, Zabul and Nimruz.

⁵² The same goes for the hitherto independently acting, local Wahhabi groups in Kunar and Nuristan. They reportedly have recently sworn allegiance to Mulla Omar. See Thomas Ruttig, 'On Kunar's Salafi Insurgents' *AAN Blog*, 14 January 2010, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=570>.

⁵³ Although the Haqqanis were known for recruiting commanders and fighters from other tribes during the anti-Soviet resistance period.

⁵⁴ The *layha* is a book of rules for Taliban fighters, issued by the movement's leadership (now in its 3rd edition) in mid-2009. De Afghanistan Islami Emarat Dar-ul-Ensha, *De Talebano lepara layha*, not dated (circa May 2009).

⁵⁵ De Afghanistan Islami Emarat Dar-ul-Ensha, *De Talebano* (see FN 54), articles 37, 38 and 39, pp 41–3.

⁵⁶ *Paktiawal* is a general term for the tribes from Greater Paktia.

⁵⁷ Some authors inadequately describe the Taliban as a predominantly Ghilzai movement, probably a projection bolstered by government-linked Durrani strongmen in Southern Afghanistan. See e.g., Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, 'Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan', *Orbis* (Winter 2007), p 4.

has not been replaced.) The two exceptions are Jalaluddin Haqqani and Abdullatif Mansur, both from Paktia and leaders of their own semi-autonomous networks. Haqqani, a Southeastern Dzakran, had reportedly been appointed commander of all Taleban troops by Mulla Omar immediately after 9/11. Currently, he is often counted amongst the *rahbari shura* members – but this is far from certain. Haqqani's commander role was extremely limited in time and some interpret his appointment as one in which he was handed an impossible mission. Earlier, when he was an IEA minister, he did not have much influence on decision-making and was intentionally kept at the sidelines by the Kandahari Taleban leaders.⁵⁸ Mansur's appointment as head of the Taleban's political committee⁵⁹ – the one theoretically responsible for 'talks' – in early 2009 was inconsequential and does not seem to represent a change in attitude. Mansur's name was not mentioned once in any report or Taleban statement linked to the reconciliation issue. Probably, the committee has been downgraded at a time when there is not much chance for dialogue.

Even in their core southern region, despite relatively strong 'tribal' integration, the Taleban leadership has been unable to prevent tribal conflicts from emerging on the local level. In Uruzgan, Durrani and Ghilzai commanders have already 'traditionally' been competing for the post of provincial commander. Structurally, this is underpinned by the existence of two larger separate Taleban networks active in the province: one mainly Durrani-based operating from the Helmand and Kandahar in the South and another mainly Ghilzai (Hotak, Tokhi) that operates from Zabul in the east. For the time being, the Durrani have the upper hand with the appointment of Rohullah Amin, a Helmand Khugiani. But the fact that he is from a minor tribe might be a sign of compromise. In the same province, a major blunder in 2008 – the killing of a local Sufi leader, Pir Agha of Pattan, in Chinartu district – set a spiral of traditional revenge (*badal*) in motion and led to a deepening Durrani-Ghilzai enmity. This cost the Taleban access to a strategically important area after the local (Durrani) population strongly reacted against the atrocity committed by a Ghilzai commander. It even established a local anti-

Taleban community force under a younger brother of the victim which was at that time completely unfunded by the government and managed to keep the Taleban out of this area for a while. This was a clear case where the parochial interests of a local commander overrode the non-tribal attitude of the leadership.

At the core of the Taleban movement, in its Kandahari mainstream from which its leadership is recruited, the *andiwali* (comradeship) factor plays a decisive role in keeping the networks together. Amongst today's Taleban, there are three different types of *andiwal* networks: religious (their original madrassas and mosques), political (their original *tanzim*) and tribal (their ancestry and *watan*). In any given situation, individual Taleban – leaders as well as fighters – can choose from these networks in any given situation, when mobilisation, support, solidarity, etc. is needed. But the common experience that unifies the Kandahari mainstream was gathered during the jihad against the Soviets.

Meanwhile, the tribal character of the Taleban becomes more visible at the periphery, distant from the Taleban strongholds in the south, its bases in Pakistan and wherever the leadership's influence is weaker. This was the case in Badghis prior to the elections in which three tribal groups competed for leadership and the Afghan government and the international forces temporarily made some inroads. The Taleban leadership, however, reacted more effectively and regained its influence there, mainly by appointing a strong figure, Abdul Mannan Niazi, as its Herat governor. He already held this position in the 1996–2001 period and wields strong influence all over in the North-Western region.⁶⁰

In 2008, a tendency to 're-tribalise' was observed in core Taleban areas like Helmand, Zabul and Uruzgan: Local Taleban retook control in their particular original areas from 'out-of-area Taleban' who were accused of being heavy-handed towards the local population. This was possibly a response to Mulla Omar's (earlier version of the) *layha* that emphasised keeping friendly relations with the local population: Atrocities like killing 'spies' and influential local leaders who worked with the government alienated the population. Significantly, this tendency occurred at the same time that some groups within the Taleban tried to reach out to the

⁵⁸ Maulawi Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, *Afghanistan au Taliban* [Afghanistan and the Taliban] (Kabul: Baryalai Pohantun, 1384/2005), p 33; author's interview with his former deputy, in Kabul, May 2008.

⁵⁹ Previously, Agha Jan Mo'tassem, a Kandahari Seyyed, was in this position.

⁶⁰ 'Afghanistan "agrees Taliban deal"' BBC, 27 July 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8170003.stm>; Ben Arnoldy, 'Short-Lived Cease-Fire with Taliban Dims Prospects for Broader Deals' *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 July 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/0727/p06s04-wosc.html>; author's interviews, Kabul, August 2009.

Afghan government or international actors, indicating that they did not believe in a military victory either and were concerned about indiscriminate slaughter of Afghan civilians.

6. THE TALEBAN AS 'NEO-NATIONALISTS'?

Recently, some observers describe the Taleban propaganda as increasingly 'nationalist': 'The Taliban are becoming, or indeed have become, the standard bearers, the champions, of the Afghan-Pashtun vendetta against the Americans. It's a new development, a new political and historical force. It's not for nothing that the struggle against foreign occupation and humiliation is the one theme their propaganda hammers on and on.'⁶¹ A newspaper article confirms: 'The latest refrain of Taliban commanders, their Internet magazine and from surrogates is that the insurgency represents Afghanistan's Pashtuns, who are portrayed as persecuted by the Afghan government. "Pashtuns are suffering everywhere; if you go and check the prisons, you won't find any prisoners except Pashtuns; when you hear about bombings, it is Pashtuns' homes that have been bombed," said a Taleban commander from Kandahar Province who goes by the name Sangar[y]ar.'⁶²

In addition, for many years, some Pakistani authors have described the Taleban as a 'Pashtun' movement. In particular this comes from a school close to the military establishment but anti-US at the same time. It includes figures who had helped create the Afghan Taleban like Pakistani chief of the army staff Gen. Aslam Beg and former ISI (Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence) chief Hamid Gul as well as Taleban apologists like columnist and former head of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, Shireen Mazari. They argue the 'the resurgence of the Taliban . . . now has become enmeshed with the resurgence of the Pashtoon type of nationalism against the occupying powers'.⁶³ From there, it is a small step to labelling the Taleban *the* movement of the Pashtuns and ruling out any viable government in Afghanistan without their participation, in order to secure Pakistan's influence on any future government in Kabul.

⁶¹ Email conversation with analyst Carlo Calabrese, January 2010.

⁶² Alissa Rubin, 'Taliban Overhaul Their Image in Bid to Win Allies', *New York Times*, 20 January, 2010.

⁶³ From an interview on an Indonesian website, *The Leaders*, dated 13 February 2007, <http://www.spf.org/the-leaders/library/15.html>.

Indeed, the argument that the US-led intervention of late 2001 took away power 'from Pashtuns' and that Pashtuns have been its main victims – originally expressed in Pashtun exile communities – can be heard in many Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. Following a series of US Special Forces operations that claimed civilian casualties or, in one case, the lives of a family of an active Afghan National Army (ANA) officer in Khost, even local former left-wingers stated that they would be bound to tribal solidarity if their tribe 'decided to join the uprising against the Americans'.⁶⁴ From Chak district in Wardak province it is reported that the Taleban's

mobilization of foot soldiers . . . rests largely on an Islamic and nationalistic discourse against "foreign occupiers" . . . Thus, the decision of Taliban foot soldiers to support the Taliban insurgency in Chak is much more similar to the jihad against the Soviet occupiers, only now the US, the former supporter of the mujahideen, is seen as the enemy.⁶⁵

Another element often mentioned in conversations is the perception that the government in Kabul had been dominated by the Northern Alliance (NA), or 'the Panjshiris', in the post-2001 years – and still is. This perception had been fuelled not only by manipulations of intra-Pashtun tribal rivalries by local NA-affiliated government office holders and commanders in the armed forces in an attempt to maintain their dominant position in the centre⁶⁶ but of late also by members of the Karzai government.

It has been widely observed that Pashtun grievances indeed have translated into sympathy

⁶⁴ For example, see my article from Khost: 'US-Truppen machen, was sie wollen' *tageszeitung* (Berlin), 24 February 2009.

⁶⁵ Ghulamreza Fazlinaiem and Nick Miszak, 'Mullah Omar Wants You! Taliban Mobilisation Strategies or Motivations of Joining the Insurgency' in *Afghanistan 1979–2009: In the Grip of Conflict* (Middle East Institute e-book, Washington 2009), <http://www.mei.edu/Publications/WebPublications/Viewpoints/ViewpointsArchive/tabid/541/ctl/Detail/mid/1623/xmid/831/xmfid/11/Default.aspx>.

⁶⁶ Examples witnessed by the author were (1) the role of the Ministry of Defence commander for the Southeastern zone, General Gul Haidar – an ally of then Defence Minister Fahim – during the Ahmadzai-Dzadran rivalry over the Paktia governorship and (2) difficulties in obtaining funds for schools in Paktia – locally interpreted as purposely holding back money by then Education Minister Qanuni, another NA leader, in 2002–3.

and even recruitment for the Taleban. But this is less due to Afghans' sympathies for the Taleban than to the lack of any significant political middle ground either in the current polarisation between the Taleban and the deeply corrupt and therefore unattractive Kabul government or in the Kabul political landscape with its tainted mujahedin *tanzim* and marginalised new political parties. With more political space, Pashtuns could meaningfully identify with other existing political currents – from nationalism (Afghan Millat), leftism (PDPA successor groups) and Islamism (ex-mujahedin *tanzim*) to new pro-democratic parties.

The Taleban face a few major hurdles that prevent them from becoming a 'nationalist movement' of the Pashtun or all-Afghan variety. They lack appeal for non-Pashtun groups, despite some local inroads. This is bolstered by non-Pashtuns' negative experiences under the Taleban regime with its curbs on education, freedoms and local traditions (also shared by many Pashtuns) and elements of ethnic cleansing. As for a Pashtun nationalist movement, the Afghan Taleban have never shown any inclination to identify with the irredentist demand for the creation of an independent Pashtunistan that existed on both sides of the Durand Line (the border not recognised by most Afghans and many Pashtuns inside Pakistan) between the late 1940s and the 1970s. This is clearly due to the fact that the Afghan Taleban still rely on Pakistani support to a significant extent and are not in a position to irritate this relationship. The Afghan Taleban would probably be better described as a 'national-Islamist'⁶⁷ movement that limits its activities to Afghanistan and is not involved in either irredentist campaigns or internationalist Jihadism (more on this issue in the next section).

7. THE TALEBAN'S IDEOLOGY: HOW ISLAMIC ARE THE TALEBAN?

The term *taleban* hints at the movement's religious character and impetus. In its self-perception and self-presentation, it is an Islamic movement that does not recognise tribal, ethnic or linguistic boundaries. This reflects the orthodox, conservative Islam of the Hanafi school (*mazhab*)

⁶⁷ The term National-Islamist is used in analogy to the term 'national communists' in literature for the pre-1989 Yugoslav or Romanian communists, with their ideological congruence with 'Moscow' that did not preclude divergent national interests.

to which most Sunni Afghans belong.⁶⁸ Mulla Omar stated in 2008: 'Our religion enjoins on us to avoid from indulging in any kind of activity involving prejudices based on ethnicity. The only bond, which binds us, is the bond of Islam.'⁶⁹ This is repeated in the *layha*, a handbook with a code of conduct for the Taleb in the field issued by the IEA leadership in May 2009. Article 60 states that the 'Mujahedin should refrain from tribal/ethnic (*qaumi*), linguistic and local (*watani*) discrimination'. A *hadith* of Abu Huraira is added to religiously bolster this instruction.⁷⁰ An additional interesting aspect is provided by Wahid Muzhda who had worked as a Taleban emirate official and is now a political commentator in Kabul: 'Being an ethnic Tajik myself, I have been with the movement for half a decade. They listened to a Chechen national more raptly than the hearing they gave me or a Pashtun for that matter.'⁷¹

In reality, the Taleban's ideology is much less clear-cut. A leading scholar described it as an 'eclectic ad hoc' mixture full of 'contradictions, breakouts, gaps, alterations and highly idiosyncratic interpretations'.⁷² It stresses 'the importance of ritual and modes of behaviour', including outside appearance (clothes, haircut, shape of beard, etc.).⁷³

But in the day-to-day activities of the Taleban, theological intricacies do not matter much. It is unclear how much of a religious debate is really going on within the Taleban movement or the ulama close to it. If there is any, it remains invisible in its publications. Also, no such debate is

⁶⁸ One former high-ranking Taleb and '*alem* replied in 2009 when asked about the religious base of the movement with emphasis: 'We are not Wahhabi, we are Hanafi.'

⁶⁹ 'Taleban leader urges Afghans to boycott "deceptive elections"' *Afghan Islamic Press* (Peshawar), 7 December 2008.

⁷⁰ De Afghanistan Islami Emarat Dar-ul-Ensha, *De Talebano* (see FN 54), p 57.

⁷¹ 'Taliban can't be bracketed with Pashtuns: Analysts' *Pajhwok Afghan News* (Kabul), 2 November 2007.

⁷² Translated from Bernt Glatzer, 'Zum politischen Islam der afghanischen Taliban' in Dietrich Reetz (ed.), *Sendungsbewusstsein oder Eigennutz: Zu Motivation und Selbstverständnis islamischer Mobilisierung*, Zentrum Moderner Orient, Studien 15 (Berlin 2001), pp 173–82.

⁷³ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (see FN 47), p 12. See also Ruttig, *The Other Side* (see FN 1), pp 18–20.

occurring on the internet as in the case of al-Qaida.⁷⁴

Some analyses claim that there is a Taleban Ulema Council, parallel to the leadership council (*rahbari shura*).⁷⁵ Indeed, ulema 'shuras' gathered at various times in Kandahar while the Taleban were in power. For example, Mulla Omar was proclaimed the *amir ul-mo'menin* in March 1996 by a gathering of 1,200 religious scholars called a 'shura'.⁷⁶ After 9/11, another ulema shura met and 'decided' to request Mulla Omar to persuade Osama bin Laden to leave the country 'voluntarily'.⁷⁷ But already the numbers of participants in both events seem to indicate that this was not a standing body. Under the current circumstances, with expected drone attacks and ISI snatches, it is even more doubtful whether such a body could regularly meet. Inside Afghanistan, sharia courts – consisting of one *qazi* and two ulema each – are part of the Taleban parallel administrative structures on the provincial and district levels. Their responsibilities are to solve disputes that 'the district and village ulema have difficulty in solving', but apparently not to interpret sharia.⁷⁸ It is unclear how much authority the province or district sharia courts really wield vis-à-vis the military commanders on their level. Anecdotal reports confirm that instead the *rahbari shura* itself (or its members) occasionally involves itself in dispensing justice.

If there really is a Taleban Ulema Shura, it has never published any document, *fatwa* or statement. It rather can be assumed that individual ulama are involved in advising Mulla Omar or the *rahbari shura* under Mulla Baradar⁷⁹ but that both take the final decision. This relationship between the *amir ul-mo'menin* and the Ulema is 'really' Islamic; it reflects the hierarchical shura principle – in contrast to the Pashtuns' jirga egalitarianism based on consensus.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ In *Lettre International* No. 84, (Spring 2009), Berlin, p 72.

⁷⁵ Documents of UNAMA and PAG, seen by the author.

⁷⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, London/New York 2000, p 41.

⁷⁷ 'Afghan Clerics' Decisions Delivered to Osama: Taliban Envoy', *People's Daily* (China), 28 September 2001, http://english.people.com.cn/english/200109/28/eng20010928_81241.html.

⁷⁸ De Afghanistan Islami Emarat Dar-ul-Ensha, *De Talebano* (see FN 54), pp 37–8.

⁷⁹ Arrested in Pakistan in February 2010.

⁸⁰ According to Taleban ex-Foreign Minister Mutawakkil, there needs to be consensus in the *Rahbari shura* itself

It has been stated repeatedly, that the Taleban have – at least for while – increasingly used internationalist Jihadist rhetoric in their propaganda and even 'became much more integrated in the international jihadist movement after 2001'.⁸¹ This, however, seems to have been a rather transitional period during which Mulla Dadullah, killed in 2007, copied az-Zarqawi's tactics from Iraq by training a large number of suicide bombers⁸² and, even more significantly, using this as an effective propaganda tool given the West's terrorism fears. (The Haqqani network which is known for its long-standing special Arab connections follows the same line.⁸³) Dadullah's course, though, triggered a rather extensive discussion within the Taleban in 2007 about whether the use of suicide bombers – which, as a rule, cause more casualties amongst Afghan civilians than amongst those seen by the Taleban as 'legitimate' targets, i.e., foreign troops and people linked to the Afghan government – was 'Islamic'. Some Taleban were citing the Quran that killing Muslims is *haram* (forbidden, i.e., a sin) and subsequently called 'pious Taleban' by some Afghans – in contrast to 'terrorists' like Dadullah. The anti-Dadullah line also seems to have support within the mainstream Kandahari Taleban: When Mansur Dadullah took over his elder brother's place and tried to follow the same line he was reprimanded by Mulla Omar and even expelled from the movement for a period of time.⁸⁴ There were also rumours that the killing of Dadullah was enabled by information from within the Taleban ranks.

In addition, the *layha* seems to be a reaction to this period as it regulates the use of suicide bombers, ruling to avoid alienating the local population through causing 'unnecessary' civil casualties. In article 41(3) it stipulates: 'During suicide attacks, the best attempts must be undertaken to avoid the killing of ordinary people and casualties.' Mulla Omar reiterated this

when decisions are taken.

⁸¹ See, e.g., Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (FN 47), p 13.

⁸² Dadullah even stated that he wanted to take revenge for Zarqawi's death. See 'Mulla Dadullah vows to avenge Zarqawi's death' *Afghan Islamic Press* (Peshawar), 9 June 2006.

⁸³ See Thomas Ruttig, 'Loya Paktia's Insurgency (see FN 24), p 75.

⁸⁴ 'Taleban sack military commander' *BBC*, 29 December 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/7164277.stm.

instruction in a message on the occasion of a religious holiday in October 2008:

[B]e very careful when you face the general people and your innocent countrymen. Do not go for an attack which has a possibility of harming the general people. . . . Every act which is not in harmony with the teachings of Islam or is not according to the Islamic civilization or does not look good with the Muslim Ummah . . . like blasts in [mosques] and where there are gathering[s] of the general people, looting of the properties on the highways, cutting noses and ears in the name of [sectarian] differences which Islam forbids...or the burning of Islamic books must be strongly countered.⁸⁵

Furthermore, internationalist jihadist rhetoric has not translated into action among the Afghan Taleban. 'There are no Afghans in al-Qaeda's hierarchy and no Arabs in the Taliban command structure'⁸⁶ nor has there been a single case in which an Afghan Taleb had participated in a terrorist attack outside the movement's 'area of operations', i.e., Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan. (This is different from the Pakistani Taleban which, via allied Punjabi sectarian groups, are more closely linked to al-Qaida.) There were no Afghans amongst the plane hijackers on 9/11. On 7 October 2009, Mulla Omar officially stated that the Taleban 'did not have any agenda to harm other countries, including Europe, nor do we have such agenda today'.⁸⁷ In a statement on the occasion of the international Afghanistan conference in London in January 2010, the Taleban Leadership Council stated that '[t]he Islamic Emirate want[s] to have good and positive relations with the neighbouring countries in an atmosphere of

⁸⁵ De Afghanistan Islami Emarat Dar-ul-Ensha, *De Talebano* (see FN 54), p 45; *Ameer Al-Mu'meneen Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid about the pleasure of Eid al-Fitr*, <http://www.afghanvoice.com/index.php/news/news-in-english/237-ameer-al-mumeneen-mullah-mohammad-omar-mujahid-about-the-pleasure-of-eid-al-fitr>.

⁸⁶ Jason Burke, 'Misreading the Taliban' *Prospect Magazine* No. 152 (November 2008), <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2008/11/misreadingthe-taliban/>.

⁸⁷ *Statement of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on the Occasion of the Eighth Anniversary of the American Attack on Afghanistan* (7 October 2009), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefaTalib8anniv1009.pdf>.

mutual respect and take far-reaching steps for bilateral cooperation, economic development and prosperous future.'⁸⁸

Apart from some individuals, the Afghan Taleban have not bought into al-Qaida's jihadist agenda. When they use jihadist language, their primary target is fund-raising amongst their major donor group: private citizens or groups organising mosque collections in Arab Gulf countries for them.

The Afghan Taleban's agenda is exclusively Afghan. They want to force the Western 'occupant forces' to withdraw and to re-establish their Islamic emirate. For this, they need Arab money, sometimes channelled through al-Qaida connections, and – perhaps decreasingly – military know-how. As a result, the cooperation between these groups is a pragmatic symbiosis, but one in which al-Qaida needs the Taleban more than vice versa.⁸⁹ Therefore, Osama bin Laden gave an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to Mulla Omar, not the other way around. This must not be misinterpreted: Al-Qaida did not become 'subservient to the aims and methods of the Afghan Taleban. On the contrary, this purported subservience is a useful illusion that obscures al-Qaida's fundamental conflicts with the Afghan Taleban's agenda.'⁹⁰ There is plenty of anecdotal evidence about mutual racist prejudices between al-Qaida's Arabs and the Pashtun Taleban which further limit the potential for cooperation.

The Taleban's lack of enthusiasm for global jihad is founded on their intention not to repeat their pre-2001 mistakes: to risk isolating themselves (or be isolated again) from the international community. Many in the Taleban blame al-Qaida – which planned the terrorist attacks of 9/11 most probably without the Taleban's knowledge – for the fall of their emirate and the loss of power in 2001. This latent conflict also might cause a break between the Taleban and al-Qaida under certain circumstances.

⁸⁸ *Statement of the Leadership Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan regarding the London Conference*, <http://www.alqimmah.net/showthread.php?t=13721>.

⁸⁹ After heavy losses on the leadership level and the transition to what some authors call 'leaderless jihad', i.e., with quasi-autonomous 'national' groups that, as 'franchises', copy al-Qaida's ideology and strategy and only occasionally have real contact with its leadership, al-Qaida's main approach is to 'hijack' national movements, like the Pakistani and Afghan Taleban and al-Shabaab in Somalia. Without them, al-Qaida only can carry out limited operations of its own.

⁹⁰ Vahid Brown, 'The Facade of Allegiance: Bin Ladin's Dubious Pledge to Mullah Omar' *CTC Sentinel* (January 2010), pp 4–5.

However, the Taleban's Islamist ideology provides an instrument that creates cohesion amongst the fighters from segmented Pashtun tribes. One of the most important leadership instruments is the *layha*, published first in 2006 and updated in the spring of 2009. It is a code of conduct that reflects the Islamic principles the Taleban's ideology is based upon and tries to rule out certain behaviour that is linked to Pashtun customary law like the right to make booty when fighting. As reality shows, the Taleban leadership is unable to implement it fully. This is determined by the network character of the Taleban movement that allows local commanders a degree of autonomy.

8. HOW 'NEO' ARE THE 'NEO-TALEBAN'?

The Taleban went through considerable changes in how they presented themselves to Afghans and the world: from segmented networks within a larger guerrilla movement into a movement of their own into a government and back into an insurgent movement with elements of a shadow government.

This development can be divided into four phases:⁹¹

- (1) 1979–1994: the 'proto-Taleban phase'. 'Taleban fronts' linked to different mujahedin *tanzim* emerged, but had not yet formed an integrated movement.
- (2) 1994–1996: the 'popular movement phase'. This phase went from its emergence as an integrated movement to the capture of Kabul in 1996, when major parts of the Afghan population pinned their hopes on the movement's ability to end the factional war created by the mujahedin (before the capture of Kabul, the Taleban also dropped initial pro-monarchist tendencies).
- (3) 1996–2001: the 'state phase'. During this phase, its Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) ruled over most of Afghanistan's territory. It consisted of two sub-phases which cannot be dated because they cannot be clearly divided from each other by one event:
 - the 'early state phase' in which the IEA tried to accommodate the international community, engaging in pipeline

⁹¹ I owe the inspiration for 'phasing' the Taleban to Boris Wilke who presented his own one at the annual conference of the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft Afghanistan in Bonn on 27 March 2010.

diplomacy (some countries as well as the UN sent back positive signals⁹²) but the IEA was only recognised diplomatically by three countries (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE)⁹³ and

- the 'isolated state phase', started by the first set of UN sanctions and the US cruise missile strikes against al-Qaida camps after the terrorist attacks on two US embassies in East Africa in 1998 and continued by the second set of UN sanctions, including a unilateral weapons embargo, spanning the time after al-Qaida's attack on the USS Cole in Aden in 2000 up to the events of 9/11. (During this phase, a UN mission existed that was mandated to bring together Afghan factions and groups in order to end the civil war.)
- (4) from 2001: the 'resurgent guerrilla phase'. This phase saw the return and consolidation of the Taleban as an organised armed movement. It also had three sub-phases:
- the 'post-9/11 reprieve' in 2002/03, with the Taleban leadership in hiding, watching events in Afghanistan and contemplating a possible political inclusion, rebuffed by the US 'no talks with terrorists' policy, followed by its first recruitments in Afghanistan;
 - the 'resurgence phase' from 2003 to 2005/06, with the gradual re-emergence of the Taleban in most areas of Afghanistan and
 - the 'consolidation phase' from 2005/06 onwards, with a consolidated presence all over Afghanistan and parallel administrative structures.

For the fourth phase, a number of authors use the term 'Neo-Taleban'. Giustozzi, who makes the most

⁹² During those years, two international consortiums, led by the US company Unocal and Argentinian Bidas, competed to establish pipelines connecting Central Asian oil and gas fields with ports in South Asia through Afghanistan. Half-official Taleban delegations visited the US, Germany, Switzerland and other countries. Charlie Santos, a UN representative in Afghanistan who also was a consultant on energy questions, said on 15 February 1995: 'The advance of the Taleban positively influences the peace process.' Quoted in: Thomas Ruttig, 'Taleban stehen vor Kabul, UN-Plan in Scherben', Mahfel No. 44 (1/95), Berlin, p 3.

⁹³ Saudi Arabia and the UAE later withdrew the recognition.

developed argument for this, writes that the Neo-Taleban differ from 'the old Movement on a number of issues. . . . They seem to have absorbed from their foreign jihadist allies a more flexible and less orthodox attitude towards imported technologies and techniques. . . . More important, the Neo-Taliban became much more integrated in the international jihadist movement after 2001 . . . and [undertook] first, shy attempts to court educated constituencies.'

He further notes that 'old Taleban' were mainly represented in their top leadership while the Taleban foot-soldiers represent a new generation.⁹⁴

It has already been shown above that the 'integration' in the international jihadist movement – if it ever happened – was a very limited, temporary phenomenon. Only a very few, although prominent, Afghan Taleban commanders had played the global-jihadist card. It was virtually over with the killing of Mulla Dadullah. It also is doubtful whether it ever went beyond rhetoric and some techniques. With regard to the latter, one could equally argue that al-Qaida had 'integrated' with the Tamil Tigers who used suicide attacks first. Up to now, the Afghan Taleban follow purely Afghanistan-oriented aims and have not subscribed to al-Qaida's internationalist jihadi agenda. This gap seems to have deepened over the past years. In 2007, in an interview with the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*, Mulla Omar said: 'We have never felt the need for a permanent relationship [with al-Qaeda].' In May 2009, Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed stated in an interview that the Taleban are 'one thing and al-Qaeda is another. They are global[,] we are just in the region.'⁹⁵

The more flexible Taleban attitude towards communication technologies as well as their highly effective and technically sophisticated propaganda machine (using the internet, SMS, videos, DVDs, etc.) seem insufficient to constitute a clear-cut difference between the 'old' Taleban and the 'Neo-Taleban'. This merely signifies a change on the

⁹⁴ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (see FN 47), pp 13–14, 38, 236.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Anne Stenersen, *Blood Brothers or a Marriage of Convenience? The Ideological Relationship between al-Qaida and the Taliban*, paper presented at ISA's 50th Annual Convention, 'Exploring the Past, Anticipating the Future' (New York 15–18 February 2009), http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/3/1/2/5/2/pages312525/p312525-1.php; 'Transcript: Afghan Taliban spokesman discusses war' *CNN* (online, 5 May 2009), <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/05/05/afghan.taliban.transcript/>.

tactical level and has no visible implications for the Taleban strategy. It signals, however, that the Taleban movement is responsive to negative attitudes that some of the population – including Pashtuns – held against it during its regime and that it is able to change positions. The ban of TV and videos (as of most forms of entertainment) and even of popular games at what the Taleban considered un-Islamic festivals (like the New Year festival Nauruz) alienated many in its 'natural' recruitment base.

The ability to change attitudes also shows in the case of the central issue of girls' education and, perhaps also, female employment. On entertainment, local Taleban groups still react differently to music at marriages or the use of audio cassettes; in some areas and at some times they are banned, at other times they are tolerated. Furthermore, communication technologies have only significantly spread through Afghanistan since 2001. Dropping its suspicions about TV, mobile phones and the internet⁹⁶ in favour of utilising them for propaganda purposes only shows the Taleban movement's adaptability towards technological progress. With such an approach, it reflects positions that earlier pan-Islamist modernisers like Seyyed Jamaluddin Afghani (1838/39–97) held who argued that Muslims should adapt 'Western' technology while sticking (or returning) to the 'original' values of Islam in order to withstand the (Western) European colonial expansion.⁹⁷

One of the main features of the movement is that it has shown more continuity than discontinuity between the pre- and post-2001 phases in its organisational structure, including the composition of its leadership, ideology, political aims and programme. Most importantly, the movement still adheres to its undisputed and single most important leader, Mulla Muhammad Omar, the *amir ul-mo'menin*. Although the exact composition of the Taleban's second highest body, the Leadership Council, still remains unclear,⁹⁸ it can

⁹⁶ The ban on TV, satellite phones and the use of computer during the Taleban regime could be explained as an attempt to control information rather as a rejection of these technologies. (Taleban watched TV and Foreign Minister Mutawakkil operated a computer in his office.)

⁹⁷ Rudolph Peters, 'Erneuerungsbewegungen im Islam vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert und die Rolle des Islams in der neueren Geschichte: Antikolonialismus und Nationalismus' in Werner Ende/Udo Steinbach, *Der Islam in der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), p 120.

⁹⁸ The latest publicly available compilation can be found here: Bill Roggio, 'The Afghan Taliban's Top Leaders' *The*

be assumed that it changed to an extent after 2001. However, this was not the result of changes in the Taleban's political or ideological course but of physical losses, by killing or arrest. It seems to be clear that the shura's core still is mainly Kandahari and stems from the pre-2001 time. With both Mullas Muhammad Hassan, Mulla Jalil, Qudratullah Jamal, Mulla Akhtar Muhammad Mansur, Amir Khan Muttaqi, Abdulhai Mutma'en, and – until recently – Mulla Obaidullah, Mulla Baradar, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir and Agha Jan Mo'tassem, the founder generation that occupied key positions in the pre-2001 Taleban emirate is still strongly represented. Most newcomers – like Hafiz Abdulmajid and Mulla Abdulqayyum Zaker⁹⁹ – are drawn from the southern provinces; non-Kandaharis still seem to have difficulties in getting into the core group.

Indeed, 'relatively few of the "old Taleban"' responded positively to Mulla Omar's early recruitment drives and 'rushed to join the new jihad' in the initial phase, in 2002 and 2003.¹⁰⁰ But later their number rose, as a result of threats (by Afghan intelligence, Western troops in Afghanistan and their minders in Pakistan) to be arrested and deported to the Guantanamo system.¹⁰¹

The Taleban foot-soldiers are obviously mainly recruited from the younger generation. Their influence on strategic decision-making, however, can be assumed as minimal. This generational change only becomes significant when representatives of the younger generation rise into leadership positions. This is becoming more likely now after the arrest of many 'old generation' Taleban. The announcement that Mulla Omar has appointed two new deputies – Akhtar Muhammad Mansur¹⁰² and Abdulqayyum Zaker – indicates that

Long War Journal (23 February 2010), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/02/the_talibans_top_lea.php. This list, however, contains 19 names as 'known active members of the Quetta shura' (i.e., the Rahbari Shura) while most other sources speak of 10 to 12 members.

⁹⁹ Those names do not appear on Ahmed Rashid's lists of the original Leadership Council and of the original members of the Taleban movement. See: Rashid, *Taliban* (see FN 76), pp 220, 222–5.

¹⁰⁰ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (see FN 47), pp 37–8.

¹⁰¹ In some cases those who did not comply with ISI instructions were handed over to the US as 'irreconcilable'. There seem to be similarities of approach in the recent arrests in Pakistan of Mulla Baradar and others.

¹⁰² Mulla Akhtar Muhammad Mansur is not related to Abdullatif Mansur from Paktia.

now both the old (Mansur) and the new generation (Zaker) are represented on this level.¹⁰³

Information about whether the Taleban really made inroads into 'educated constituencies' remain too sketchy.¹⁰⁴ It can be assumed that their massively increased media production must be run by members or sympathisers who are 'internet literate' and supposedly young. Anecdotal reports from Wardak province indicate that university students or dropouts join insurgents there in significant numbers, to some extent as part-time fighters. However, it is unclear whether these are Taleban or *Hezb-e Islami* recruitments.¹⁰⁵ Even if recruitment amongst the educated is true, it remains open – and doubtful – whether this has impacted significantly on the movement's general political and ideological outlook.

The major physical change in the Taleban is that up to late 2001, they were a quasi-government with a state-like structure, ministries, sub-national administration, a security apparatus, etc. After 2001, they were forced to reorganise as an insurgent or guerrilla movement without much of a 'liberated zone' as a seat of a parallel government. More recently, the Taleban have succeeded in gaining influence or control over large parts of Afghanistan's territory, operating in all 34 provinces. On parts of this territory, the Taleban have established a parallel administration, with provincial and district governors, judges, police, intelligence commanders and even a system of taxation. According to NATO sources, Taleban provincial governors exist in 33 of 34 provinces.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ 'Afghan Taliban Name New Deputy Leaders after Arrest' *BBC*, 23 March 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8583018.stm.

¹⁰⁴ Here, even Giustozzi cannot point to many examples. See Antonio Giustozzi, *Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan*, AREU Briefing Paper Series (February 2010), p 13. In another incident, after an attack against a NATO convoy in Kabul, a teacher was amongst the arrested. Rahim Faiez, 'Afghans: 7 Arrests in Deaths of Army Colonels,' *The Associated Press* (24 May 2010), http://www.armytimes.com/news/2010/05/ap_afghanistan_arrests_052410/.

¹⁰⁵ *Hezb* is traditionally more active on campuses than the Taleban. Giustozzi speaks of no organised Taleban activity amongst students in Kabul and Herat while there is some at Nangrahar University in Jalalabad, mainly carried out by students 'from Wardak Province, Logar Province and the southern region'. See Antonio Giustozzi, *Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan*, AREU Briefing Paper Series (Kabul, February 2010), p 13.

¹⁰⁶ 'Taliban have expanded their influence across Afghanistan: NATO official', *Daily Times* (Pakistan), 28

Even if much of these structures do not exist permanently on the ground outside the Southern region and many functionaries are temporary absentees in their designated areas (and many have been killed of late), they constitute a 'shadow' or parallel government. This 'government' is embodied in the Leadership Council.¹⁰⁷ Its different committees and councils, for military, cultural, financial and political affairs, etc., resemble rump ministries and copy the pre-2001 Taleban government (and the current one in Kabul) but as a scaled-down version. Furthermore, the systematic use of the name and insignia of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on official correspondence, 'night letters' and online publications shows that the Taleban consider themselves a state-like entity and the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan – even more so after the self-delegitimation of the Karzai government by the faulty 2009 presidential poll. They demand that journalists and aid organisations obtain permits to enter areas controlled by them, issue statements and correspond with foreign states and international organisations, pledging 'good and positive relations with all neighbours based on mutual respect' and 'constructive interactions...for a permanent stability and economic development in the region'.¹⁰⁸ By this, the Taleban claim the continuity of their emirate that, in their eyes, has been unlawfully removed by a foreign intervention and replaced by a 'puppet administration'.

Neither during their regime nor currently, have the Taleban developed a sophisticated political programme. Their main aims can be distilled to

December 2009, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009%5C12%5C28%5Cstory_28-12-2009_pg7_37. This means that shadow governors exist in all provinces. A lack in one province may be because the Taleban may not recognise all of the newly established provinces.

¹⁰⁷ Only that the Rahbari Shura seems to be exclusively Pashtun now, after the disappearance from it of Seyyed Ghiasuddin, the only non-Pashtun in the original leadership council, an Uzbek from Faryab who was a commander – and this is the *andiwali* link – of *Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami*.

¹⁰⁸ See their 'Open Letter of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to Shanghai Summit,' 14 October 2009, http://www.revolutionmuslim.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=306:open-letter-of-the-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-to-shanghai-summit&catid=11:revolutionary-media&Itemid=15. See also an interview with Agha Jan Mo'tassem, 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: Dialogue with an Official of the Political Committee of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan,' 29 March 2009, <http://www.blogfrommiddleeast.com/?new=52984>.

two points: independence (through withdrawal of all foreign troops) and establishment of an Islamic system. In their own words: '[W]e want to gain independence of our country which is our natural right and establish an Islamic system as a panacea for all our economic and social problems.'¹⁰⁹ This echoes the approach of Islamist movements elsewhere who simply claim that 'Islam is the way' and Quran and sharia make further programmatic explanations superfluous.

The Taleban's currently stated pre-condition for any negotiations is a complete Western troop withdrawal. During their pre-2001 reign, the Taleban showed that, inspired by their urge for political recognition, they are capable of political compromise on issues of importance for the international community, such as terrorism and drugs. Indications are that this is still the case on issues of terrorism (e.g., they are distancing themselves from international jihadi terrorism, although an open declaration of such would be difficult to obtain). They accept some degree of political pluralism, and are open-minded on girls' education issues, some human and women's rights, etc. With their frequent positive responses to vaccination campaigns, the UN Peace Day and even access to 'prisoners', i.e., victims of kidnappings, the Taleban already are responding to aspects of international humanitarian law.¹¹⁰

9. CONCLUSIONS

Today's Taleban movement is dualistic in nature, both structurally and ideologically. The aspects are interdependent: There is a vertical organisational structure, in the form of a centralised 'shadow state'. This reflects its supra-tribal and supra-ethnic Islamist ideology which appears to be 'nationalistic' – i.e., refers to Afghanistan as a nation¹¹¹ – at times. At the same time, the Taleban movement is characterised by horizontal, network-like structures that reflect its strong roots in the segmented Pashtun tribal society. Religious, tribal

¹⁰⁹ 'Open Letter' (see FN 109).

¹¹⁰ See also their contacts with the International Committee of the Red Cross that, among others, provides first aid training to insurgents. 'Red Cross in Afghanistan gives Taliban first aid help', *BBC*, 26 May 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/south_asia/10161136.stm.

¹¹¹ This term is not specific enough. In Europe, this has a chauvinistic undertone. 'National' would fit better, and many Afghans therefore often refer to 'national' (*melli*) almost synonymous with 'patriotic', another word disliked by many in Europe.

and regional components overlap even when it comes to the organisational principles of the Taleban. Recruitment in the local commanders' own tribes seems to be the general rule. There, madrassas or mosques can become focal points. But when the organisation expands, it tends to become regional, as the example of the Haqqani network shows. Those networks, on all levels, are further stabilised by *andiwali*. Here, participation in the anti-Soviet jihad provides a strong common basis. This is particularly reflected in the Taleban's Kandahari mainstream and its core leadership group around Mulla Omar.

Individually, the Taleban are deeply rooted in their tribal societies and would have difficulty disconnecting from them. It would mean loss of status, identity and protection, as tribal backgrounds serve as a fallback in times of crises. The balance in the relationship between being Pashtun and being Muslim in their self-identification has changed, primarily as a result of the jihad, as is the case with many Afghans. While, according to the colonial and pre-1978 literature, Pashtuns generally have identified as Pashtuns first and Muslims second, now Muslim-ness has come to the foreground. Islam and *pashtunwali*, however, have never been seen as contradictory by Pashtuns. For them, the two concepts perfectly integrate, despite certain objective contradictions, such as their judicial aspects.

Politically, the Taleban – as a movement – aspires to aims larger than its individual members' tribal realms: political power on the 'national' Afghan level and the re-establishment of its emirate. (This does not rule out, though, any ability to compromise, temporarily or for good.) To an extent, it is nationalistic but not in the sense of Pashtun irredentism, i.e., it does not strive for a 'reunification' of all Pashtun areas in a 'Pashtunistan'. This would not go down well with Pakistan, its main ally. In addition, personal motivations play a role: honour and respect; access to services, power and resources; living undisturbed and in peace. These motivations might indeed lead many Taleban back to their places of origin in Afghanistan – but only when the conditions are satisfactory. Surrender does not seem to be an option.

The Taleban's supra-tribal ideology, i.e., Islamism, keeps the door open for non-Pashtun elements to join the movement. This has allowed it to systematically expand into non-Pashtun areas of the north and west. The reference to 'Islam' provides an umbrella that creates cohesion in an otherwise – ethnically and politically – heterogeneous movement.

As a result of the political upwards mobility of the Afghan clergy in the wake of post-1978 conflicts, mullas and, to a lesser degree, ulema play a key role in the movement's organisational structures. Most commanders use the religious title 'mulla' in their names. Among them, there is only an *ulema* minority (the *maulawis*).¹¹²

The system of reference individual Taleban or their leaders allude to – tribal, nationalist or Islamist – depends on the circumstances under which certain decisions are taken and on the particular tactical or strategic aim at stake.

The combination of vertical (religious/ideological) and horizontal (tribal) structures give the Taleban movement a degree of cohesion that is relatively high for the standards of Afghan political organisation while maintaining organisational elasticity. This elasticity in its horizontal dimension – based on Pashtun individualism – allows discussion, dissent and sometimes a cacophony of different voices in the Taleban movement, a sufficient degree of autonomy of decision-making and action on the part of local commanders, and prevents them from feeling over-controlled.¹¹³ Subsequently, none of the splits within the Taleban have seriously weakened the organisation.¹¹⁴

The Taleban movement has shown more continuity than discontinuity between the pre- and post-2001 phases in the major aspects that characterise such armed insurgent movements: the organisational structure including the composition of its leadership, ideology, political aims and programme. Most significantly, the movement still adheres to its undisputed and single most important leader, Mulla Muhammad Omar, the *amir ul-mo'menin*. The Taleban Leadership Council continues to be mainly

¹¹² In a strictly religious hierarchy, *Maulawi* Kabir (the now arrested former IEA acting 'prime minister' in Kabul) would occupy a higher position than Taleban leader *Mulla* Omar.

¹¹³ One author states that 'political and social segmentation' was one factor for the *stability* of the 'Afghan empire' enabling it to withstand colonialist onslaughts. He also points to the fact that segmentation does not contradict the emergence of a central government. See Jan-Heeren Grevemeyer, *Afghanistan: Sozialer Wandel und Staat im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1990), p 11.

¹¹⁴ An example of a minor break-away group is the 'moderate Taleban party' *Jamiat-e Khuddam ul-Forqan*, founded in January 2002, which was blocked by Kabul and remains at the political fringes. Another group that temporarily split off (in 2003) was *Jaish ul-Muslimin*, which, in fact, was more of a criminal franchise and has returned to the Taleban's fold in June 2005.

Kandahari and stems from the pre-2001 time. The presence of non-Kandahari Taliban leaders in this council is more symbolic than significant. The influence of newly recruited, younger-generation Taliban foot soldiers on strategic decision-making is still minimal, although Mulla Omar's two new deputies (after the arrest of Mulla Baradar) indicate that now both the old and the new generations are represented on this level. The major physical change in the Taliban movement is that up to late 2001, it was a quasi-government with a state-like structure, while after 2001 it was forced to reorganise as an insurgent or guerrilla movement that runs a parallel administration. Based on this, the Taliban claim the continuity of their emirate which, in their eyes, a foreign intervention has unlawfully removed and replaced with a 'puppet administration'.

There is no organised or recognisable 'moderate' (or any other 'political') 'faction' in the Taliban – to counterbalance the 'religious' hardliners. These categories have proven unsatisfactory to explain differences of opinion within the Taliban movement. It appears to be more useful to differentiate between currents, represented within the Taliban leadership and the commanders of lower levels. On one side, there are pragmatic, politically thinking, pro-talks Taliban who understand that a political solution is desirable but who still are conservative Islamists. On the other side are those who favour a purely military approach, often combined with a hypertrophic recourse to terrorist means. The former would include the so-called 'pious Muslims' who think it against Islam to indiscriminately kill scores of fellow Muslims. Both groups compete for the allegiance of the non- or less-political *majburi* and *na-raz* foot-soldiers.

The fact that a large majority of the Taliban leaders and fighters are Pashtuns does not make their movement *the* 'representative' of *all* Pashtuns. Since the late 1940s, with the emergence of the reformist movement of the Wesh Zalmian that originated in Kandahar,¹¹⁵ there was always a pluralist political choice in Pashtun society. The armed conflicts of the past 30 years, however, have narrowed the political space. Poor post-2001 decisions that marginalised the role of political parties have further aggravated the problem. In today's violent atmosphere, between

¹¹⁵ Z. Zewar, *De Pashto adabiato tarikh: Osenei daura* [History of Pashto Literature: The Current Period] (Kabul 1360/1981), p 83; Habibullah Rafi', 'De Pashto tserene au palene markazuna' [Centers of Pashto Studies and Preservation] in *Jumhuri Palwasha* (Kabul 1355/1976), pp 5–7.

the anvil of the Karzai government that often signals its 'pashtun-ness' and the hammer of the Taliban, there are no viable political alternatives for Pashtuns, besides marginal groups.

Tribes cannot assume the role of independent actors. Rather, a tribe is an 'arena in which political competition takes place' as Bernt Glatzer had remarked.¹¹⁶ This insight should discourage attempts to make 'tribes' instruments for stabilisation, as has been done with 'local defence initiatives'.¹¹⁷ Rather, alternate Pashtun political and social organisations should be given more scope and resources.

At the same time, it is not too late to strengthen the internal cohesion of certain tribes and their particular institutions by supporting their ability to re-establish functioning, legitimate decision-making bodies (jirgas, shuras).¹¹⁸ Forcing the Taliban into competition with forces of a different political character in the arena of their own major recruitment base might break their spell. External actors should simply provide a relatively even playing field, a framework of security and – where requested – a role as a neutral arbiter. However, they should refrain from being seen as taking decisions on Afghans' behalf and be aware that interference often deepens, instead of remedies, existing rifts.

The Afghan government's draft 'Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program' – as well as the Western-dominated creation of an artificial division between 'reconciliation' and 'reintegration' – still treats the Taliban problem

¹¹⁶ Quote from his presentation at the Wilton Park Workshop 'Understanding the Pashtun Context: Afghanistan and Pakistan' (London, 15 October 2009). See also Bernt Glatzer, 'The Pashtun Tribal System' in G. Pfeffer and D. K. Behera (eds.), *Concept of Tribal Society*, Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol. 5 (New Delhi 2002), pp 265–82.

¹¹⁷ For further details see: Mathieu Lefèvre, *Local Defence in Afghanistan: A Review of Government-backed Initiatives*, Afghanistan Analysts Network (Kabul 2010).

¹¹⁸ Bradbury (see FN 9) argues that this has worked in Somaliland. However, in Afghanistan, the utilisation of pseudo-tribal mechanisms, such as the Community/Local Defence Initiative (CDI/LDI) and, earlier, the Afghan Auxiliary National Police (ANAP) and the Afghanistan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP) show a poor understanding of the highly heterogeneous Pashtun society. Rather, they are an expression of the desperate search for an exit strategy caused by the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. These mechanisms run the risk to exacerbating existing inner-tribal conflicts rather than remedying them, not least because they are usually linked to lavish funding.

mainly as a technical one. Based on the hypothesis that most Taleban fighters are motivated by poverty and economic exclusion, it supposes that the Taleban problem can be solved by economic and social incentives. This underestimates the political motives that drive the Taleban insurgency. Furthermore, the US approach (using the 'surge' to weaken the Taleban before any talks) and President Karzai's approach (favouring immediate direct contacts) are not congruent. Part of the question is whether there will be a genuine Afghan lead – but based on a national consensus – or a continuation of the de facto US lead. Only when these hurdles are removed can a mechanism and process be designed to address the different layers and currents within the Taleban.

The June 2010 peace jirga in Kabul has not brought this clarification process forward. It was not preceded by a broad consultation and lacked genuine representativeness. The discussions, however, showed that there is a broad potential for ideas for a genuine reconciliation process. Only an approach to reconciliation that is based on genuine broad participation and buy-in of Afghans can lead to an outcome in which the Taleban can be absorbed into the political mainstream and Afghan society. An approach imposed from top down, even if covered with rituals of surrogate participation, will always be vulnerable from spoilers.

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