IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

MASTER'S THESIS

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE COHESION OF THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN (1994-2021)

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THESIS ADVISOR
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MASTER'S PROJECT

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE COHESION OF THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN (1994-2021)

by
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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Sociology

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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Sociology.

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Date of Submission Seal/ Signature

ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

AFGANİSTAN'DAKİ TALİBAN HAREKETİNİN BİRLİĞİ İÇİNDEKİ DİNİN ROLÜ (1994-2021)

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Bu çalışma, Taliban hareketinin Afganistan'daki birlikteliğine katkıda bulunan dini faktörleri incelemektedir. Bu, modern zamanlarda, tamamen farklı koşullar altında, sosyal bir hareketin 25 yıl içinde iki kez iktidarı ele geçirdiği nadir durumlardan biridir. İlk kez, bir iç savaş bağlamında, ikinci kez ise Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin liderliğindeki büyük bir uluslararası koalisyona karşı iki on yıl süren bir savaşın ardından iktidara gelmiştir. Nitel bir yöntem kullanarak, 13 katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi görüşmeler gerçekleştirdim. Katılımcılar arasında bir Taliban lideri, İslamcılar, yabancı savaşçılar, akademisyenler, gazeteciler ve eski siyasi tutuklular yer alıyordu. Bulgular, özellikle geleneksel biçimiyle İslam'ın, Taliban hareketinin birlikteliğine sosyal, etnik veya siyasi faktörlerden daha fazla katkı sağladığını ortaya koymuştur. Çalışma, literatürde sıkça öne sürülen, Taliban ile Deobandi hareketi arasındaki ideolojik ya da politik bağlantıların abartıldığını da sorgulamıştır. Ayrıca, bazı literatürün önerdiği esneklikten ziyade, Şeriat yasalarının uygulanmasındaki tutarlılığın, Taliban'ın yüksek alım kapasitesinin ana nedenlerinden biri olduğunu vurgulamıştır. Klasik İslam Emirliği'ne dayanan lider odaklı organizasyon yapısı ve dini alimlerin kilit rolü, hareketin merkeziyetçi modelden merkeziyetsiz modele geçişine rağmen birliği korumada önemli olmuştur. Bu yapı, Taliban'ı benzer dini yapıya sahip diğer hareketlerden de ayırmıştır. Ayrıca, çalışma, yabancı mücahit organizasyonları ile Taliban arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi, destek alanlarıyla birlikte gerilimleri ve çatışmaları da vurgulamıştır. Bu dini faktörler, Ibn

Khaldun'un asabiyyah teorisi ışığında analiz edilmiş ve benzer hareketleri anlamada bu teorinin geçerliliği gösterilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afganistan, Asabiyyah, Birliktelik, Din, İbn Haldun, Taliban.

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE COHESION OF THE TALIBAN MOVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN (1994-2021)

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This study explores the religious factors that contributed to the cohesion of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. It is one of the rare cases in modern times where a social movement successfully seized power twice within 25 years under entirely different circumstances. The first time was in the context of a civil war and the second came after a two-decade war against a large international coalition led by the United States. I used a qualitative method, conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 participants, including a Taliban leader, Islamists, foreign fighters, academicians, journalists, and former political prisoners. The findings showed how Islam, specifically in its traditional form contributed heavily to the cohesion of the Taliban movement more than any other social, ethnic, or political factors. The study also challenged the common view in the literature that overemphasizes the link between the Taliban and the Deobandi movement, ideologically or politically. It also highlighted that the consistency in implementing Sharia law, rather than flexibility (as some literature suggests), was one of the primary reasons for the Taliban's high recruitment capacity. The leader-centric organizational structure, rooted in the classical Islamic Emirate, and the key role of religious scholars were vital in maintaining unity, even as the movement shifted to a decentralized model. This structure also distinguished the Taliban from other movements with similar religious structures. Additionally, the study highlighted the complex interaction between foreign mujahid organizations and the Taliban, including areas of support, along with tensions

and clashes. These religious factors were analyzed through Ibn Khaldun's asabiyyah theory, demonstrating its relevance for understanding similar movements.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Asabiyyah, Cohesion, Ibn Khaldun, Taliban, Religion.

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Karam ALHAFIAN
İSTANBUL, 2025

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Clash of Civilizations

On the afternoon of September 11th, 2001, I was watching television in Cairo, where I lived with my parents and siblings. I had just completed my high school studies a few weeks earlier and was preparing to enter university. However, I was keenly interested in political news, especially concerning the second Palestinian intifada and the escalating confrontations with Israeli forces. Suddenly, I saw news of a civilian plane crashing into one of the Twin Towers in New York City. I was puzzled but thought it might be an accident due to a technical malfunction. It didn't initially cross my mind that it was a deliberate act. About fifteen minutes later, another civilian plane struck the second tower. At this point, global news channels and agencies began reporting on a broad attack against the United States, the most powerful nation in the world.

It did not take long for then-President George W. Bush to announce that the attack was orchestrated by al-Qaeda, based in Afghanistan, and that the ruling Taliban regime should hand over their guest, the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, to the United States. This was the first time in my life that I heard about the Afghan Taliban.

The following days witnessed an extraordinary global political momentum and social unrest, along with a rapid escalation of events. The United States called on the Taliban to hand over those It accused of planning these Deadly attacks. At the same time, the Taliban demanded evidence to put the alleged perpetrators on trial under Islamic law and rejected the notion of unconditional surrender. Subsequently, the US announced a global coalition to invade Afghanistan, threatening any non-cooperating countries with designation as supporters of terrorism. Massive

demonstrations erupted in many squares and universities across the Muslim world. The American president declared it a "crusade."[1]. On the other side, the Muslim world was boiling, with masses protesting vigorously against the attempt of invasion of a Muslim country in such a manner. A clash of civilizations loomed on the horizon. Media outlets incessantly featured statements from the Taliban's Leaders and spokespeople, who, despite their humble appearances, spoke with great confidence, invoking spiritual and religious phrases about resisting this global campaign against them and expressing their faith in eventual victory. At that time, the famous words of Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founder of the Taliban and the ruler of Afghanistan, circulated widely: "I am considering two promises. One is the promise of God. The other is that of Bush. The promise of God is that my land is vast. If you start a journey on God's path, you can reside anywhere on this earth and will be protected. The promise of Bush is that there is no place on earth where you can hide that I cannot find you. We will see which one of these two promises is fulfilled"[2].

By December 2001, the Taliban was defeated, and their rule collapsed within approximately two months, with an international coalition led by the US taking control of all of Afghanistan. The New York Times published a headline on December 17th, 2001, stating "The Last Days of the Taliban," accompanied by a large image of Mullah Mohammad Omar on the magazine's cover.

[1] Vinod Saighal, "Jihad and Crusades," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 32, published by Kapur Surya Foundation.

[2] Mullah Omar in his own words, *The Guardian*, September 26, 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/26/afghanistan.features11.

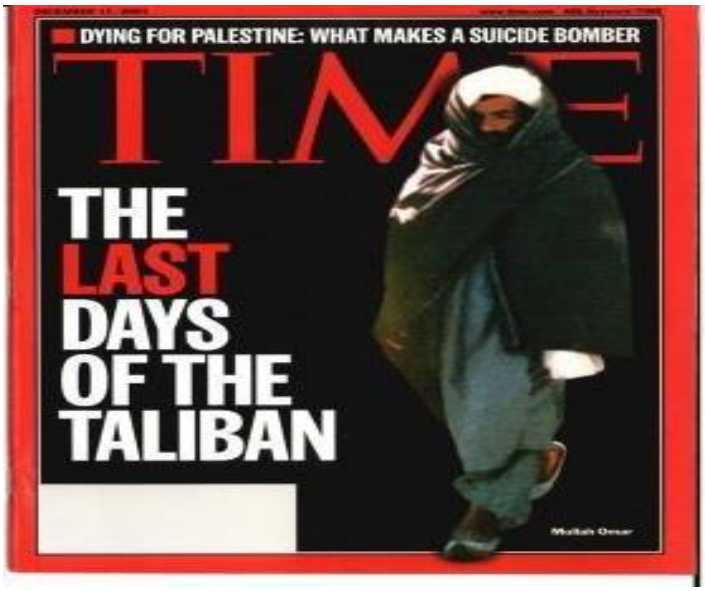

Figure 1.1. Last Days of Taliban 1

Source: New York Times, 17 Dec 2001

However, nearly twenty years later, following a continuous guerrilla war, American and foreign forces withdrew, and the Taliban returned to power in mid-August 2021.

During these two decades, my interest in the Afghan issue in general, and the Taliban in particular, fluctuated significantly. In the early years following the American invasion of Afghanistan, after the situation settled and a new political system was established under American oversight, based on regular electoral processes, competing parties, a new constitution, and a new military and administrative apparatus for the Afghan state, many (including myself) believed that the Taliban had become part of Afghanistan's modern history and would never return. Media attention on the Afghan situation diminished considerably as the situation stabilized.

Then, in April 2003, the US and its allied forces invaded Iraq, toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in less than a month. This event had a massive impact, especially in my country, Syria, which borders Iraq. Although the Iraqi regime was a nationalist secular regime, the war unfolded within the broader context of a clash of civilizations and the deep religious polarisation between the Western world and the Islamic world. I lived with my family in Egypt, but we would visit Syria each summer for vacation. The summer of 2003 was particularly heated in Iraq, and the echoes of fierce battles

and popular resistance operations were felt in Syria, alongside significant waves of Iraqi refugee influx.

In a related context, by the end of 2003, the Taliban regained initiative in Afghanistan and began launching attacks against international coalition forces. Since then, the intensity of Afghan resistance operations led by the Taliban gradually increased till the year 2006, which witnessed a dramatic rise in the violent military actions spreading across different regions of Afghanistan (Giustozzi 2007,1-6).

I began paying closer attention to the Afghan cause from 2006 to 2011, but after the Arab revolutions erupted, they captured my attention even more. By mid-2013, the political negotiations regarding the withdrawal of international coalition forces from Afghanistan became more serious, and the Taliban opened a political office in Qatar. Although I was more focused on the Arab revolutions and their significant impact, especially on Syria, I occasionally followed developments in Afghanistan. By 2018, I developed an interest in writing and researching Islamic movements, particularly revolutionary ones. I wrote and published several studies and dozens of articles for various research centers, online magazines, and platforms. Afghanistan and the Taliban were among my key areas of focus, especially after the historic agreement reached in February 2020 for the withdrawal of all foreign forces, primarily US troops, from Afghanistan.[3] This agreement included the commitment of the US not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs again, as well as the Taliban's pledge not to allow any group to use their territory to target American interests, along with other provisions such as prisoner exchanges and the removal of Taliban leaders from the US denylist.[4]

Ironically, both parties accused each other of not adhering to the terms of the agreement. Before the scheduled withdrawal of American forces on August 30th, 2021, Taliban forces succeeded in seizing control of Afghanistan, entering its capital, Kabul,

[3] Al Jazeera. Ḥarakat Ṭālibān: Maḥaṭṭāt Muhimma Ṭīlat 27 ʻĀman, August 15, 2021. https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2021/8/15/27-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B0.

[4] U.S. Department of State. "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan." February 29th, 2020. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf.

and returning to power without reaching an agreement with other Afghan political factions. They re-established a government, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), marking the return of a regime solely under their authority (Giustozzi 2022, 280-285). At that time, I was enrolled as an MA student in the Sociology Department at Ibn Khaldun University in Istanbul and was considering a suitable topic for my research. Eventually, I decided to write my thesis on the Taliban movement.

It is worth noting that the twenty-year-long war between the Taliban and the US was one of the factors contributing to the perceived decline of American hegemony globally, as argued by many, including the American strategic theorist Francis Fukuyama. Just three days after the Taliban took control of Kabul, Fukuyama published an article on August 18th, 2021, titled *"The Decline of American Hegemony,"* listing four reasons he believed contributed to what he saw as a waning of American influence globally. These reasons included the war in Afghanistan, the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economic crisis, and, notably, the diminishing appeal of the American liberal democratic model on the world stage, along with sharp political polarization within the United States itself.

What is striking about the Taliban's takeover of Kabul is how it occurred with remarkable ease and organizational discipline among its members, who seized the capital with relatively small numbers following the collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan army and the flight of former President Ashraf Ghani. Notably, there were no reports of retaliatory actions in the capital despite the collapse of the Afghan government, even amid discussions about the Taliban's decentralized nature, similar to many resistance movements worldwide (Giustozzi 2022, 283-284).

1.2. Significance of the Study

A great number of studies have explored the various aspects of the Taliban since its emergence in the 1990s, attempting to uncover the factors behind the movement's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the reasons for its initial and subsequent rise. However, many of these studies suffer from fundamental issues in their treatment of this phenomenon, which I aim to address in this research.

The first problem is that many of these studies are inherently biased against the movement and lack neutrality, particularly given that the Taliban has been classified as a terrorist organization by both the United States and the United Nations Security Council. Most of these studies fall within security studies, focusing more on the actual or potential security threats posed by the Taliban and its affiliated groups than on a balanced examination of the movement itself. Examples of such studies include those by Rashid (2000), Martin (2014), and Vahid Brown and Don Rassler (2013). The second issue is that the Taliban differs fundamentally from other revolutionary movements globally regarding Ideology, organizational structure, social dynamics, and even the strategies and tactics employed in mobilization and confrontation. This distinction has led Olivier Roy to describe them as "neo-traditionalists" (Roy 2002, 9-19). Therefore, studying the Taliban using the same methodologies applied to other movements is inadequate.

The third issue, which is related to the second, involves the theoretical frameworks used to study the movement. The problem is that this movement was built in a pre-modern setting, including its religious Ideology, organizational structure, and social milieu. This model fundamentally differs from the prevailing models of contemporary revolutionary movements, which negatively impacts many studies of the Taliban and results in an incomplete understanding of it.

This research aims to fill these gaps and offer a new approach by striving for a better understanding of the movement through the lens of classical theories by Ibn Khaldun, particularly those articulated in his renowned *Muqaddimah*, regarding revolutionary movements and their religious, social, and geographical backgrounds, as well as the trajectories they follow to achieve their radical political transformation goals. Additionally, I will draw on the crucial writings of the Malaysian scholar Syed Fareed al-Attas, who examines the applicability of Ibn Khaldun's explanatory model to the rise and fall of states in contemporary contexts (al-Attas 2014). This will be combined with modern theories on the rise of social movements in peripheral regions amid the decline of hegemonic powers, as presented by Immanuel Wallerstein and Charles Tilly's theories on the dynamics of mobilization and revolution, which explore the various forms and mechanisms of political activism among social movements (Wallerstein 2004, 59; Tilly 2006, 32-42).

By integrating the theoretical frameworks of these three scholars, I hope to achieve a more comprehensive explanation for both the initial and subsequent rise of the Taliban.

Indeed, one of the primary motivations for my interest in studying the Taliban is that it is, to my knowledge, the only Islamic movement that successfully seized power through revolutionary means and governed a country the size of Afghanistan for five years in the nineties, according to a political system based on classical Islamic jurisprudence, namely: the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan IEA, which is significantly different from the modern state model. Furthermore, after being overthrown by a Western international coalition, the Taliban was able to return to power once again through similar revolutionary means and under the same name and banner: the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan IEA.

The initial rise of the Taliban can be interpreted as a result of the political vacuum created by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, alongside the fragility of communist-aligned regimes, such as the Afghan Republic, and the deep divisions within the post-communist pre-Taliban Islamist government (Stenersen 2010, 13). Although the first rise was unexpected, given the Taliban's recent establishment in 1994 by a group of religious seminary students with no prior political experience (Zaeef 2010, 10), the second rise was even more remarkable, occurring under significantly harsher conditions and against a large international coalition led by the United States in its longest war in history.

Another reason that fueled my desire to study the Taliban is its ability to maintain a stable government since August 2021, despite the political and economic blockade imposed by the United Nations, which has not recognized it as the ruling authority of Afghanistan, nor has any country acknowledged the Taliban as the governing political system of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, many countries continue to engage with the Taliban openly. What is even more surprising is Afghanistan's relative stability and noticeable economic development over the past three years, with key indicators of

improvement including a stable currency exchange rate, reduced inflation, successful revenue collection, and increased exports, among many other factors.[5]

Lastly, one of the main reasons that the Taliban builds its legitimacy is its evident capacity to restore security and enforce order in a country characterized by significant ethnic and cultural diversity, compounded by the challenging geography that separates these various ethnic groups, all amid a backdrop of political turmoil marked by civil and international wars over the past thirty years (Giustozzi 2022, 62-67).

1.3. Methodology

One of the defining features of living in Turkey, particularly Istanbul, in recent years has been the significant presence of various political figures and activists from across the Islamic world. This phenomenon is mainly due to the major political developments, revolutions, and wars occurring in the region, especially following the Arab Spring in 2011. Such a situation has afforded me a rare opportunity to meet and engage with individuals possessing rich political experiences from different Arab countries over the past few years.

Moreover, Turkey has also seen a substantial influx of Turkic-speaking populations from Central Asia, who face persecution in their home countries. Additionally, there has been a wave of Muslim Europeans seeking a more favorable environment in Turkey for raising their children with Islamic values compared to the West. The convergence of these diverse groups, each carrying unique experiences, has provided a golden opportunity for researchers like myself to learn more and establish friendships while deeply exploring the experiences of political parties, movements, and key figures from various countries, including individuals involved in the Afghan cause. These participants hail from different nationalities, speak multiple languages, and have varied social and political backgrounds. This context has greatly influenced the methodological approach I have chosen for this study: a qualitative methodology based

[5] World Bank. *Afghanistan Economic Monitor*. August 2024. https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/2bb4dd118634eb6940eca7808a50b6ee-0310012024/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-August-2024.pdf.

on semi-structured interviews in order to explore the role of religion in the cohesion of the Taliban movement.

1.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

In my view, semi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited for this study as they allow for a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and their field experiences resulting from direct engagement with the Afghan issue over many years. Many participants have not yet documented their personal experiences, making these interviews even more valuable.

Semi-structured interviews combine predetermined questions with the flexibility to explore new inquiries that arise during the conversation. This approach enables researchers to focus on specific issues while allowing participants to express their thoughts and opinions more freely. As Bruce L. Berg explains:

> This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardised questions. (Berg 2001, 70).

Thanks to this balance, semi-structured interviews can unveil rich and complex insights, providing a deeper understanding and more abundant information regarding participants' experiences and circumstances. Through this dynamic, researchers can adapt to the flow of conversation, seizing opportunities to address new and relevant topics that emerge during discussions. This flexibility not only enhances the data collected but also fosters a rapport with participants, making them feel valued and understood, which encourages them to share important details. Consequently, insights drawn from these discussions tend to be richer, offering a more comprehensive picture of participants' experiences and the contexts that influenced them. As W. Lawrence Neuman notes, individuals cannot be adequately understood unless viewed through their own perspectives (Neuman 2014, 452).

I kept this principle in mind before and during the interviews I conducted, ensuring that I allowed participants to finish their thoughts without interruption. I took notes of

any new questions that arose from their responses, clarifications needed for unclear points, or new related topics, and posed these questions once they had finished speaking. The interaction was often remarkable, resulting in valuable information, analyses, and insights that I believe I would not have acquired through any method other than semi-structured interviews.

1.3.2. Participants

The study involved 13 interviews with individuals possessing direct experience or knowledge of the Taliban movement. The interviewee list included Taliban members, Islamists, foreign Mujahideen, academics, journalists, former political prisoners, and research center directors. Participants ranged in age from their mid-thirties to mid-sixties. Five participants were Afghan, while eight were non-Afghan; notably, ten of the thirteen had lived in Afghanistan for extended periods and interacted directly with Taliban leaders and members. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, five via Zoom, and one participant, Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed, who served on the cultural committee of the Taliban during the US occupation, submitted written responses.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, except for two conducted in English. One was with Ikram Shinwari, an Afghan journalist currently residing in Kabul, while the other involved a foreign mujahid in his late- thirties. Although Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed is fluent in Arabic, and I had communicated with him on several occasions via phone, he preferred to provide his responses written in his native Pashto language for the sake of clarity. An Afghan colleague, proficient in both English and Pashto, assisted me in translating his responses. In addition to Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed, two other participants expressed reservations about recording their interviews, and I took field notes during these interviews.

For the face-to-face interviews, I prioritized establishing a good rapport with participants I did not know well before the start of my study. I did this by engaging in phone conversations, meeting them in person, and discussing shared interests or mentioning mutual acquaintances, which proved to be fruitful. Another aspect I focused on was the interview location, recognizing its significance for the participant's comfort and the quality of the interaction. I always offered participants the option to

choose the interview location, whether it was my home, their home, or any other quiet place they preferred. As Lawrence notes:

> We recognize that a conversation in a private office may not occur in a crowded lunchroom. Often, interviews take place in the informant's home environment so that he or she is comfortable. This is not always the best. If an informant is preoccupied or there is no privacy, you move to another setting (e.g., quiet restaurant or university office). (Lawrence 2011, 467).

The process went smoothly. One interview took place at my father's house with Shaykh Sami al-Saedi, a Libyan religious scholar and politician currently residing in Tripoli, western Libya. Shaykh Sami participated in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets and was present in Afghanistan during the Taliban's first rule, where he developed relationships with the movement's founders and leaders. He even met Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's founder, in the 1990s when Omar was the ruler of Afghanistan. Another interview took place late at night in a café at the request of Dr. Ahmad Muwaffaq Zaidan, the director of Al Jazeera's office in Pakistan for twenty years (1996-2016) and an expert on Afghan and Pakistani affairs. Dr. Zaidan has witnessed the Afghan issue since the 1980s and has conducted numerous field interviews with various Taliban leaders. The café chosen by Dr. Zaidan was very quiet and nearly empty, allowing him to speak comfortably and share valuable insights regarding the Taliban, its structure, leadership, Afghan society, and the political economy of the Taliban, among other topics.

Only one interview presented some challenges. I spent time with Afghan academic and politician Dr. Fazl ul-Hadi Wazeen, searching for a suitable venue. After meeting at a metro station in the Istanbul area of Beylikdüzü, we walked together in search of a café he knew, but we were unable to locate it. We quickly found another suitable place to conduct the interview, which turned out to be lengthy and critically rich in insights regarding the Taliban, as Dr. Wazeen, who has been involved with the Afghan issue since the 1980s, spoke extensively.

The online interviews provided exceptional contributions to the study, as they allowed me to meet individuals I would not have been able to engage with otherwise, given the vast distances separating us. All interviews were conducted via video except for one, which was audio-only. The benefits of online interviews include greater scheduling

flexibility and participant comfort, as they often conduct interviews from their homes without the need to travel or incur additional expenses. However, there are usually some challenges, such as technical difficulties and occasional communication interruptions, along with a generally lower level of interaction than face-to-face interviews (Creswell 2014, 190).

One participant, a foreign Mujahid who fought against the American occupation alongside the Taliban, requested that the interview be divided into multiple parts. The interview spanned three consecutive days, with occasional internet connectivity issues. However, the participant's flexibility and cheerful demeanor facilitated matters, as he was unbothered and willing to repeat answers or continue from points I had not heard clearly. Another participant, independent Afghan journalist Ikram Shinwari, experienced slightly poor internet connectivity while providing valuable information, which required me to collect responses to some questions via WhatsApp voice messages. These messages were promptly transcribed.

I translated all face-to-face and online interviews into English and fully transcribed them before analyzing the information. I identified patterns, themes, and specific responses related to the role of religion in the cohesion of the Taliban movement, organizing this data for quotation and use in the study.

1.3.3. Ethical Considerations

The sensitivity of the study's topic is evident to many, particularly as it relates to a movement that has resisted major powers and has not yet been recognized as a governing authority. While ethical standards regarding the non-harm of participants are critical in research generally, they become even more pronounced in this politically charged context.

Academically, it is essential to fully inform participants about the study's purpose without misleading them in any way. They should be made aware of potential risks associated with their participation and reminded of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time. Additionally, confidentiality regarding sensitive information,

individuals, or events must be maintained, often through pseudonyms or other effective methods (Creswell 2014, 175-176).

I ensured that these ethical principles were upheld with all participants, clearly explaining the nature and goals of the study. Fortunately, the majority of participants were comfortable sharing their real names, with only two requesting confidentiality adjustments.

1.4. Research Questions

In this research, I will focus on the factors facilitating internal cohesion within the Taliban movement. Since its inception in 1994, and despite major challenges at local, regional, and international levels, the Taliban has maintained its unity without experiencing any significant divisions. Many studies have discussed the various reasons supporting the unity of the Taliban. Some have addressed the role of the Pashtun tribal identity, which is predominant among the movement's leaders, highlighting the Taliban's success in representing the Pashtuns, who have historically been the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and the traditional rulers of the country since 1747 (D. Crews, and Tarzi, eds. 2008, 60-90). Others have focused on the formal support from the Pakistani state, which has been keen on maintaining the Taliban's power as a non-hostile entity compared to the American-backed Afghan governments (Brown and Rassler 2013, 9-12).

While these aspects are important, I wish to investigate another dimension that I believe has not been sufficiently studied: the role of religious factors in the unity of the Taliban and its ability to remain cohesive, even when tribal support weakened or when Pakistan's stance shifted against it.

The religious factors include the beliefs and ideologies held by the founders, leaders, and members of the Taliban; the governance model characterized by the implementation of Islamic Sharia law; the religious structure of the Taliban's organizational framework; the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers; and, finally, the influence of foreign religious elements, represented by

Mujahideen organizations such as al-Qaeda and other armed groups active in the Afghan issue.

Many Islamic political movements have been established across the Muslim world since the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate in the previous century. The majority of these movements were rooted in religious beliefs and ideologies, aiming to re-establish an Islamic state. Some adopted reformist, peaceful approaches, while others embraced violent revolutionary paths. However, to this day, almost none of these movements have achieved their goals, and most have experienced significant splits and divisions. The Afghan movements that preceded the Taliban were no exception (Barfield 2010, 171; Mutmain 2019, 32-33). This led me to explore the uniqueness of the Taliban religious model in relation to this issue.

The overarching research question is: How has religion contributed to the cohesion of the Taliban? This question branches into several sub-questions pertaining to each of the religious factors mentioned earlier. Concerning beliefs and Ideology, many have discussed the unifying doctrine and Ideology represented by the traditional Deobandi school prevalent in South Asia. However, there is a significant gap in examining the specifics of this school, its foundational characteristics and principles, and its effects on the Taliban. Additionally, the nature and type of relations between Deobandi religious madrassa networks and parties in Pakistan and the Taliban movement have not been sufficiently explored.

Regarding the governance model represented by the application of Sharia law, numerous studies have highlighted how this has greatly contributed to the Taliban's popularity and its ongoing ability to attract new recruits despite the challenges and harshness sometimes associated with its application (Mutmain 2019, 113, 137-140). Conversely, there are significant studies discussing the Taliban's pragmatism in blending Islamic law with local traditions to maintain popular support (D. Crews and Tarzi, eds. 2008, 47; Martin 2014, 100-101). The critical questions here are: Is there a theoretical framework that can help us understand the religious revivalism model seen in an experience like the Taliban? How did the Taliban's attempts to challenge local customs and traditions impact its unity, particularly before 2001? After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, in what ways did their implementation of Sharia law change?

Furthermore, how did the Taliban manage situations where reconciling local customs with Islamic law proved to be impossible? What were the effects of these decisions on the movement's cohesion?

Moreover, the organizational structure within the movement has been extensively discussed in the existing literature. At the top of the leadership hierarchy is the position of Amir al-Mu'minin, who combines religious and political leadership, possessing extensive powers, and whose commands must be followed in all decisions unless they involve religious prohibitions. Directly beneath this leader are the shura (advisory) councils, which manage administrative, military, and political matters and advise the Amir al-Mu'minin; ultimately, however, his commands are authoritative in all decision-making processes. The role of religious scholars is also pivotal, as they are responsible for socially legitimizing and promoting the movement, as well as for the critical leadership of the legislative and judicial apparatus and overseeing adherence to religious tenets within the movement (Semple 2014, 16-18; Stenersen 2010, 47; Mutmain 2019, 98-99, 145). Additionally, the characteristics and backgrounds of the ordinary members and fighters of the Taliban, who represent the "muscles" of the movement, have also been addressed (Giustozzi 2022, 198).

While these details have been widely discussed, certain aspects require further investigation: What are the differences in the leader-follower relationship within the Taliban compared to other groups? What about movements that also proclaimed their leader as Amir al-Mu’minin? In what ways did the Taliban differ? What were the primary threats faced by the Taliban during the leadership periods of its three successive top leaders (Mullah Omar, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, and Mawlawi Hibatullah) from 1996 to 2021? How did these leaders respond to these threats? How did the different structures within the movement interact with these challenges to maintain cohesion? What role did religious scholars play in shaping the movement’s main strategies and political decisions? Addressing these questions can provide a deeper understanding of the Taliban's organizational structure, its evolution, and its resilience. Such a discussion may clarify the differences between the theoretical aspects of the movement's structure and the practical applications observed on the ground.

The final religious factor affecting the Taliban is the involvement of foreign Mujahid organizations. The interaction of foreign fighters with the Afghan issue began long before the emergence of the Taliban. Their role in training and enhancing the military capabilities of Afghan fighters, as well as providing financial and media support for the Afghan jihad, in addition to participation in the battlefields, dates back to the 1980s during the Soviet occupation and continued with the rise of the Taliban and its hold on power, persisting through the resistance against the American occupation (Martin 2014, 175-210; Brown and Rassler 2013, 216-217). While changes have undoubtedly occurred over this extended period, what interests us here is examining how the inclusion of foreign fighters and Mujahideen groups in the armed struggle in Afghanistan, both before and after 2001, has impacted the Taliban's military tactics and battlefield efficiency, religious and political Ideology, economic and financial situation, international relations with both state and non-state actors and overall, the internal cohesion within the Taliban movement.

1.5. Limitations

Every study faces certain constraints. In my case, two key issues emerged. The first was language; I do not speak Pashto, the native language of most Taliban leaders and Afghan participants I interviewed. The challenge extends beyond understanding the language and abstract terms to grasp the cultural nuances that the language carries. Berg cites Becker and Geer on this important issue:

> Although we speak one language and share, in many ways, one culture, we cannot assume that we understand precisely what another person, speaking as a member of such a group, means by any particular word. In interviewing members of groups other than our own, we are in somewhat the same position as the anthropologist who must learn a primitive language, with the important difference that, as Icheiser has put it, we often do not understand that we do not understand, and are thus likely to make errors in interpreting what is said *to us.* (Berg 2001, 77).

I was able to mitigate this issue to some extent because all the Afghans I interviewed knew Arabic and were familiar with Arab culture, having graduated from religious schools that taught Arabic language and literature. They were generally multilingual, with one participant speaking six languages. The only participant who did not speak Arabic was fluent in English. Other non-Afghan participants were also proficient in either Arabic or English, or both. Additionally, I reviewed many studies and books on

the Taliban that explored cultural aspects of Afghan society and Pashtun ethnicity before conducting the interviews.

The second challenge was my inability to travel to Afghanistan, despite my strong desire to do so due to issues with legal documentation and visas. To compensate, I read extensively from field studies and personal memoirs related to the Afghan situation and the Taliban in both Arabic and English. I also watched numerous documentaries focusing on Afghanistan, particularly during the Taliban era and in regions under their control. As mentioned, most interviewees had lived in Afghanistan and maintained deep connections with the movement's leaders, fighters, and even its founders.

1.6. Overview of the Thesis

Approximately thirty years have passed since the emergence of the Taliban, a movement born in the wake of the global Cold War and amidst a raging civil war. The Taliban arose during a period of international system change, shifting towards a unipolar American hegemony and amid the fragmentation of the Afghan state and society, which was characterized by ethnic polarization and discussions of potential division, as seen in many countries during that time. The movement grew rapidly, and within two years, it restored security, entered the capital, Kabul, and announced a new central authority based on classical Islamic political theories. While the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan, certain northern regions remained outside their grasp. Since then, the movement has faced economic sanctions, international political isolation, and a global military campaign that led to its fall in 2001. Following this, the Taliban began to resist occupation, and after two decades of continuous conflict, they returned to power, stronger and more centralized than ever, now controlling all of Afghanistan without a single area remaining outside their rule.

The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons for the movement's cohesion and lack of fragmentation, despite the relentless efforts and significant warfare waged against it, which many believed would lead to its complete and permanent eradication.

In the next chapter, I will outline the most significant literature related to the research topic, drawing from key studies, reports, and memoirs written about the movement in both Arabic and English. I will identify research gaps and address them based on the

information I collected and analyzed from the interviews, comparing them with existing literature. The second section of this chapter will present the theoretical framework I will utilize, primarily relying on Ibn Khaldun's theories regarding the role of religion in the cohesion of revolutionary movements. Additionally, I will discuss Wallerstein's theories on the decline of superpower hegemony and the gaps it creates for peripheral movements to mobilize and achieve their objectives. I will also benefit from Charles Tilly's theorizing on the internal dynamics of social movements, examining how they operate and evolve to achieve their goals.

In the third chapter, I will discuss in detail the religious roots of the Taliban, particularly the Deobandi school, as some Taliban leaders have stated. I will present the history of this school's emergence, its key founders, its geographical distribution, and its influence in the religious sphere of Afghanistan and its surroundings, as well as its global impact. Furthermore, I will delve into its foundational principles, which have significantly shaped the Ideology, behavior, structure, and operational methods of the Taliban.

In the fourth chapter, I will explore the context in which the Taliban rose to power in the 1990s, discussing the primary reasons behind their sudden and robust ascent. Here, I will examine Ibn Khaldun's theories, focusing on the nuanced details related to the role of religion in the cohesion of revolutionary movements and their capacity for effective, sustained mobilization that ultimately leads to the removal of a ruling authority and the establishment of a new one. Additionally, I will outline the key characteristics of the Taliban's first rule.

In the fifth chapter, I will analyze the data collected from the interviews, synthesizing the valuable insights, analyses, and experiences shared by participants. This analysis will be compared with the existing literature to evaluate how well it aligns with the theoretical frameworks I have employed.

Ultimately, in the sixth and final chapter, I aim to draw conclusions about the central themes and religious characteristics within the Taliban that have played a crucial role in maintaining its unity, strength, and cohesion from its inception through its initial rise and subsequent fall, to its recent return to power under the same Ideological and organizational framework.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After two decades of fighting a broad international coalition led by the United States, the Afghan Taliban managed to regain control of Afghanistan once again under the same name against which the global campaign was waged: the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). Over these twenty years, and even before that, numerous significant studies, books, and articles have emerged addressing the reasons behind the Taliban's cohesion and strength. Many have examined the relationship between various religious factors and the unity of the movement despite fierce wars and substantial internal and external challenges since its birth in 1994. Some studies have focused on the ideological unity represented by the traditional Deobandi school, which is widely spread in South Asia. Others have concentrated on the governance system and the application of Islamic Sharia law, through which the movement established its presence in the public sphere, enhancing its mobilization and avoiding fragmentation.

Additionally, there has been research into the structure of the movement, including the central role of its leader, Amir al-Mu'minin, and the leader-follower relationship and characteristics. The crucial role of the *Ulama* (religious scholars) and their status within the movement has also been explored. Finally, some studies have addressed the relationship between the Taliban and transnational foreign *mujahid* organizations and their impact on the movement's power and cohesion, both before and after September 11^{th}.

In this section, we will present and discuss the most important books and works, highlight key observations and criticisms in the existing literature, and identify the research gaps that this thesis aims to address.

2.1. Doctrine and Ideology

An important contribution that cannot be overlooked when discussing the historical roots of the Deobandi movement and its links to the Taliban is the work of Barbara Metcalf, a professor of history at the University of California specializing in South Asian history, particularly during the colonial period. In one of her critical studies, Metcalf confirms that many Taliban members have studied at Deobandi schools and identify themselves as part of the Deobandi school of thought. One Taliban spokesman even stated, "Every Afghan is a Deobandi" (Metcalf 2002, 1). The Deobandi movement, born in colonial India during the late nineteenth century, is based on the Idea of spreading traditional religious education that advocates adhering to Islamic fundamentals according to the Sunni Hanafi tradition and returning to pure Islam, in contrast to secularism and modernist interpretations of Islam. This broad focus on religious education and the continuous production of scholars has significantly contributed to the ideological unity among Deobandi adherents, as Metcalf explains in her significant book, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Metcalf 1982, 100, 140-144).

Additionally, among the most significant works on the Deobandi movement are those by the renowned Indian Islamist scholar Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi, a prominent graduate of its schools. Notable among his works are *Muslims in India* (1999) and *The Conflict Between the Islamic Idea and the Western Idea in Islamic Countries* (1968). al-Nadwi, as a traditional scholar and Islamist intellectual, is esteemed for his extensive transnational connections with a diverse range of traditional scholars, Islamist movements, and prominent figures across the Islamic world, particularly in South Asia and the Arab region[6]. His writings focus on the foundational phase of the Deobandi movement, addressing its founding principles, the reasons behind its establishment, and the characteristics of its leaders. In his analysis, he concludes that:

> The most important religious institute in India that deserves to be called India's Azhar is the great Deoband Institute. This institute started as a small madrassa that did not attract much attention, still it continued to expand and enlarge, thanks to the efforts of its teachers and those in charge, their sincerity, and their asceticism in the wreckage of the world until it became not

[6] For more information about Abu Al Hasan al-Nadwi, see Euben, Roxanne L., and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds. *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to bin Laden*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, 107.

> only a large religious university but also the greatest religious school on the Asian continent. (al-Nadwi 1999, 129).

Further enriching this discourse, Brannon Ingram, a specialist in the Deobandi movement, has made valuable contributions through his recent field study published in 2018, which examines the global spread of the Deobandi movement. His research extends from its stronghold in South Asia to South Africa, the UK, and even other Western countries. Ingram highlights a crucial aspect contributing to the unity of Deobandi adherents: the emphasis on behavioral practices derived from the religious texts studied over many years rather than merely memorizing and reciting texts. This approach fosters a shared unity of conduct and practices beyond just a unity of thought and perception. As Ingram notes, "Knowledge was never meaningful in and of itself, but only insofar as it was applied to self-reform (islah-inafs) and implemented in practical life (a'mal)" (Ingram 2018, 138). He also demonstrates the Deobandi influence on the Taliban by citing Sheikh Sami ul-Haq, the head and director of Darul Uloom Haqqania, one of the most significant Deobandi schools in Pakistan, who remarked, "Nearly 90 percent of Taliban leadership graduated from Darul Uloom Haqqania" (Ingram 2018, 208).

Another crucial ideological aspect is examined by Dietrich Reetz, a researcher specializing in Islam outside the Arab world, with a focus on South Asia. In his significant study, *The Deoband Universe* (2010), Reetz underscores the emphasis on jihad against colonial powers and the pursuit of establishing a state governed by Islamic law. He illustrates how these concepts are vital in solidifying incentives for sacrifice and power among the Taliban movement and fostering a sense of belonging between the Taliban and other Deobandi parties, institutions, and organizations, highlighting a clear and profound aspect of Deobandi heritage and history (Reetz 2010, 141-142, 152-153).

This anti-colonial jihad spirit traces back to the inception of the Deobandi movement. al-Nadwi illustrates that the aim of Mawlana Muhammad Qassim Nanautawi (1833-1880) in establishing the Deobandi madrasa was not merely to open madrassas and spread Islamic education; it was also intertwined with the indoctrination of students to resume the Islamic anti-colonial struggle (al-Nadwi 1968, 75-76).

While these doctrinal and ideological aspects have been well-explored and extensively discussed by the scholars mentioned above and many others, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the impact of the Deobandi movement on the Taliban's cohesion. The question is whether these aspects are exclusive to the Deobandi school or if they are also present in other traditional streams in Afghanistan. Additionally, the differences between the Taliban and the Deobandi networks, institutes, and parties, especially in Pakistan, as well as the nature of the relationship between the Taliban and the Deobandi movement as a whole, have not been well explored. Addressing these research gaps will provide a better understanding of the influence of Deobandism on the Taliban movement and its relationship with it.

Moreover, despite these points, history shows that the Deobandi movement has experienced numerous splits and resulted in various political factions since the mid-twentieth century, despite doctrinal and ideological unity.[7] Therefore, it seems that additional factors must have contributed to the Taliban's ability to maintain its unity from its establishment to the present.

2.2. Implementation of Sharia Law

Many studies have examined the issue of governance and the implementation of Islamic Sharia law within the Taliban and its impact on the movement's ability to mobilize and maintain unity. Among these studies is the work of Antonio Giustozzi, a specialist in Afghan affairs since the 1990s, particularly in his well-known book *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Taliban Neo-Insurgency in Afghanistan* (2007). In this foundational work on the study of the Taliban, Giustozzi emphasizes that the Taliban's governance model primarily relies on the implementation of Islamic Sharia law in the public sphere. This is not only a model of governance and a form of authority in the regions under Taliban control during the conflict with coalition forces but also

[7] The first noted division was in the 1940s, Where JUI (Jamiat Ulama Al Islam) split from JUH (Jamiat Ulama Al-Hind). The former pushed towards the establishment of Pakistan state as a Muslim state, while the latter rejected the Idea and preferred to remain Indian citizens while retaining Islamic cultural autonomy (Muhammad Rizwan- Manzoor Ahmed- Saima gul. Ideology and politics of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (1947-1973). Global Social Sciences Review (GSSR), Vol. III, No. I (Winter 2018). 46-7). JUI also witnessed several divisions in the 1980s in Pakistan. For more information, see Fida ur Rahman, *Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World* (Malaysia: IAIS International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, 2018), Chapter 11, 212-214.

a religious obligation related to the movement's legitimacy in the eyes of broad sectors of Afghan society. Giustozzi elaborates on this by stating: “Many villagers were also attracted by the Taliban’s courts because they were exclusively based on Sharia, a fact that also earned them the active endorsement of the clergy.” On the other hand, Giustozzi notes that although “The Taliban judicial system was quite rough… nonetheless, the system offered a greater degree of predictability and reliability than the arbitrary behavior of government security forces” (Giustozzi 2007, 111). This shadow government structure played a crucial role in the movement's cohesion by providing a clear and unified goal for its members and gaining popularity within society.

This is reminiscent of the Taliban's first rise, where the narrative of restoring or maintaining order through the implementation of Sharia law was at the forefront of the reasons that led to the Taliban’s successful mobilization and control of around 90% of Afghanistan, as the Norwegian specialist in Islamic militants, Anne Stenersen, explains (Stenersen 2010, 15). However, Umar Abd al-Hakeem, also known as Abu Musab al-Suri, a well-known Arab Mujahid figure who was in Afghanistan, had close relations with the Taliban and witnessed their rule in the 1990s, pointed out that some actions of the Taliban were flawed and illegal from an Islamic perspective. He states:

“Some enforcers of that which is accepted and prohibitors of that which is rejected would also deal with women whose faces were showing or who spoke for too long with street vendors by hitting them in a manner that I do not consider legal or justified. A group of bearded men, who were apparently waiting for their beards to grow even longer [sic: sarcasm intended], once stopped and smashed a computer because they thought it was a television set. These are just some of the examples, and even though they are few in number, they nevertheless became widely known.”

Abu Musab concludes that “these examples are the result of the ignorance, crudeness, or Bedouinism of some of the younger members of the Taliban” (Abd al-Hakeem 1998, 37).

Another aspect highlighted by Giustozzi in his informative work *The Taliban at War* (2022) is the role of Sharia law in providing a common framework and in resolving

internal disputes within the highly polycentric Taliban movement, especially during the years of war against the international coalition forces between 2001 and 2021. The unified governance system also helped bind these factions together through an independent judicial system, operating separately from the military leaders on the ground.

This does not mean that there were no challenges. For example, Giustozzi describes part of the governance dilemma in the first years following the American invasion in 2001. He explains that the judiciary served as an essential mechanism for the central leadership to maintain order and discipline among Taliban fighters. Judges, while officially independent, relied heavily on commanders for their safety and support. This created a complex relationship, as commanders supplied fighters to enforce the judges' decisions, highlighting the intertwined nature of authority and dependence within the organization. However, by 2006-2007, after the Taliban regained control over most provinces, judges backed by the central leadership became more autonomous, limiting any opposition from local Taliban commanders and ensuring a higher level of unity and cohesiveness (Giustozzi 2022, 201-202).

Furthermore, several studies explored the impact of blending Islamic Sharia law with local customs. One study is very important in this area, which is a joint study written by several authors named the Taliban and the crisis of Afghanistan (2009).

This book highlights the Taliban's efforts to reconstruct governing institutions and gain legitimacy by engaging with local populations and accommodating some local practices with Sharia law on the one hand. However, on the other hand, the Taliban insisted on applying other social and legal measures regardless of whether they fit customs or not. The partial flexibility is noted as a factor that helped the Taliban maintain control and reduce opposition, as they positioned themselves as a movement that represented both religious authority and local Afghani traditions. For instance, in Pashtun majority ethnicity areas (to which most Taliban belong), The Taliban achieved their goals by effectively navigating local Pashtun politics. In their initial rise in the post-Cold War era, they succeeded in gaining support from influential rural Pashtun leaders and their followers, a pattern they repeated in the post-2001 period. They achieved this by either working with or sidelining tribal elites and recognizing local

traditions and customs that don't contradict religious values at the same time. Through this policy, they aimed to ensure the satisfaction of, or at least to prevent, dissatisfaction among the local Pashtun communities while simultaneously enforcing the Islamic order they espoused (D. Crews and Tarzi 2008, 47-54).

However, on other occasions, especially during their first rule in the nineties, The Taliban adhered strictly to a list of measures whether it fit the local customs or not, such as daily ritual prayers at mosques were made obligatory for men, the men's beards should be at least a hand's length, music, TV and filming were forbidden. Women were obliged to wear the burqa face veil and were generally confined to private spheres, with numerous behavioral restrictions imposed in public spaces. While these measures of female segregation were customary for many Afghans, particularly Pashtuns, they were viewed as problematic by some urban societies (D. Crews and Tarzi 2008, 118- 40- 45).

Regarding the status of women under Taliban rule, Mullah Omar, the founder and first leader of the Taliban, issued a decree criminalizing two tribal customs as part of one of his many revolutionary decisions, whether related to social issues or political affairs. In The first, a woman or several women will be given as compensation from the tribe of a killer to the tribe of the victim. The other custom forbids a widow from marrying a man from outside her late husband's clan. Both customs were banned, and anyone who enforced them would face severe punishment (Huwaydi 2001, 70-1). The decree included a striking point that represented the highest degree of contradiction between some religious rulings and domestic tribal culture. Mullah Abdul Hai Mutmain, the poet and spokesman of Mullah Omar, stated:

> Adult girls were allowed to marry of their own will based on Hanafi jurisprudence. This stirred up the anger of the cultured class against the Taliban, and many incidents took place involving girls who secretly visited courts and married men of their choice without the consent of their families. The police stations formally informed those families about these marriages and called on them to accept this decision (Mutmain 2019, 205-206).

While these studies have approached the governance and implementation of Sharia from different angles throughout the history of the Taliban, several critical research areas require further exploration, such as: Is there a theoretical framework that can be applied to this kind of religious revivalism? Additionally, did the previous measures

opposing local customs affect the movement's unity during the pre-2001 phase? In what areas did the Taliban's implementation of Sharia change after its regime was toppled in 2001? How did the movement handle situations where reconciling local customs with Islamic law was impossible? Finally, what was the impact of the movement's decisions in both cases on its cohesion?

2.3. The Structure of the Movement

The Taliban movement, officially known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), has evolved significantly since its inception in the 1990s. This part of the literature review synthesizes key insights regarding the organizational structure of the Taliban, focusing on the roles of the Amir al Mu'minin (Leader of the believers), shura councils, the Ulama: religious scholars, and ordinary fighters. Understanding these roles is crucial to comprehend how the Taliban has maintained its coherence and influence over more than two decades and a half of continuous conflicts.

At the top of the Taliban's organizational structure is the Amir al Mu'minin, a title that signifies the highest politico-religious authority in Islam. The Amir's role is crucial for the movement's legitimacy and operational effectiveness. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founding leader, and his successors embodied this authority, strongly expecting that all members would show obedience as a significant religious duty. Mullah Abdul Hai Mutmain, the poet and former spokesman of Mullah Omar, mentioned when and how exactly the Taliban shifted from a movement to an Islamic emirate (state). He describes in detail the great public meeting, which continued for days in April 1996 and ended with many religious scholars pledging allegiance to Mullah Omar as the Amir Al Mu'minin of Afghanistan (Mutmain 2019, 98-99- 145).

As Mufti Rasheed emphasized in his guidance to the Taliban, “It is established in the Koran and the hadith and religious consensus that obedience to the order of the Amir is obligatory as long as he does not give an order counter to sharia. Otherwise, Obedience to none of God’s creatures justifies disobedience to the Creator”. (Ludhianvi 2015, 48). This quote comes within one of the earliest foundational texts written by Mufti Rasheed, a prominent Deobandi Pakistani scholar who has shown

support for the Taliban since the movement's inception. This document confirms that the leader of the Taliban is no longer a leader of a social movement or the head of a political party; however, he is Amir al-Mu'minin in Afghanistan, a title that embodies a higher level of obedience among those who regard him with this extremely high religious status. It underscores the vital importance of the Amir's religious position in ensuring unity and discipline within the Taliban.

Beneath the Amir lies a network of shura councils that serve as advisory bodies, facilitating decision-making and governance. The shuras are composed of senior leaders and veterans who provide counsel on military, political, and social issues (Stenersen 2010, 47). However, as mentioned in the obedience to Amir text, the shura's role is primarily advisory; ultimate decision-making authority rests with the Amir: "Just as Shariat has commanded the Amir to take advice, Shariat has also given the Amir full authority to select the shura and to make the final decisions" (Ludhianvi 2015, 70). Stenersen argues that the mentioned structure facilitates a blend of consultation and centralized command, enabling the Taliban to respond effectively to changing circumstances while preserving the Amir's supremacy (Stenersen 2010, 47).

Another vital feature regarding the structure of the Taliban stressed by Micheal Semple, the former deputy of the EU representative for Afghanistan, in his important report: Rhetoric, Ideology and Organizational Structure of the Taliban, is the consistency in the dominance of specific ethnic and spatial components in the Taliban structure and leadership, He states: "Obviously, before, during and after the rule of Taliban, a two folded fact remained fixed: the dominance of the Pashtun ethnic component and taste in the Taliban structure as well as the exclusive character of core and high-rank leadership being bonded with madrassa scholars and students from greater Qandahar (Semple 2014, 18).

In a related context, the Taliban's identity is deeply intertwined with its religious foundation, which is upheld by its cadre of religious scholars. These scholars have played a crucial role within the Taliban's structure, particularly in their central role within the judicial governance system, overseeing the administration of Sharia courts in areas under Taliban control. Their interpretations of Sharia law, which are often

steeped in the conservative Deobandi school of thought, are not only necessary for guiding the Taliban commanders' practices and social policies. However, those scholars' on-the-ground presence and influence derived from the supreme Taliban leadership are essential in monitoring Taliban's field military commanders' actions, correcting mistakes, and sometimes solving disputes between the local Taliban leaders. Additionally, the role of the Ulama is not limited to the previous roles, yet they also act as community leaders who mediate between the Taliban fighters and the local populations. This relationship is crucial for the movement's recruitment and retention of support, particularly in rural areas with strong religious adherence (Giustozzi 2022, 4, 200-1).

At the heart of the Taliban movement are ordinary fighters, who make up the bulk of its ranks. These individuals are motivated by many factors, including deep-seated religious beliefs, anti-colonial sentiments, revenge, local grievances, and challenging socio-economic conditions. Mike Martin, a former British officer in Afghanistan and an insightful author, points out that while a shared commitment to jihad is a unifying force, many of these fighters are also influenced by personal and community interests. They are often driven by the desire to protect their livelihoods and families from perceived environmental threats. This intricate blend of motivations reveals the diverse realities contributing to the Taliban's appeal among its members. The Taliban has effectively mobilized these fighters by embedding them within local communities, often using village mullahs to facilitate recruitment and to promote the movement's objectives. By tapping into existing social networks and local dynamics, they create a sense of belonging and purpose for these individuals, reinforcing their commitment to the cause. This approach not only strengthens the Taliban's influence but also fosters a sense of collective identity among the fighters, making them feel integral to a larger mission (Martin 2014, 172- 73).

In conclusion, the Taliban's organizational structure is defined by a distinct hierarchy, with the Amir al-Mu'minin at its core, complemented by advisory shura councils, endorsed by religious scholars, and upheld by the support of ordinary fighters. This complex framework has allowed the Taliban to preserve internal cohesion and operational efficiency throughout decades of conflict. The interaction between these

various roles is crucial for understanding the Taliban's capacity to adapt to the shifting political dynamics in Afghanistan.

These studies provide a solid overview of the Taliban's structure and its impact on unity. However, several areas require further exploration and clarification. How do the leader status and the leader-follower relationship within the Taliban differ from other groups, including those that declared their leader *Amir al-Mu'minin*? What made the Taliban's approach unique in this regard? Can it be analyzed through the lens of specific socio-political classical theories? What were the key challenges the three successive top leaders of the Taliban faced? How did they respond to these threats, and how did the movement's internal structure react or adapt itself during times of crisis and hardships? Additionally, what role did the *Ulama* (religious scholars) play in shaping the movement's strategies and political decisions?

2.4. Foreign Mujahid Organizations

The Afghan conflict has long been a focal point for regional and international actors, attracting both state and governmental involvement and engagement from various non-state actors, institutions, and organizations. Among these, the role of foreign fighters and transnational Mujahid groups is significant, particularly in the context of the Taliban's resurgence post-2001. This section of the literature discusses the dynamics of foreign involvement in the Taliban movement, highlighting the contributions of foreign Mujahideen and the implications for the cohesion and operational effectiveness of the Taliban.

Within the Taliban's first rule period, months prior to the US invasion in 2001, The Taliban Leader Mullah Abdul Hai Mutmain mentioned a piece of important information showing the critical on-the-ground contribution made by the Arab and other Foreign Mujahideen in supporting the Taliban against the US-backed Afghan opposition in their efforts to topple the Taliban regime at that time, He states that: "The Taliban were also preparing effectively against this internal US alliance. Arab and foreign mujahideen were good supporters as well, and this support was much needed" (Mutmain 2019, 211).

A similar incident happened a few years earlier, in 1998, as Umar Abd al-Hakeem, also known as Abo Musab Al Suri, mentioned: "On Thursday the 5th of September….That night, the Arab Mujahideen and the Pakistani, Uzbek, Turkmen, and other brothers with them held fast until new groups of Taliban arrived, plugged the existing holes, and broke up the attack" (Abd-al-Hakeem 2013, 5).

Despite this cooperation on the ground, there were serious disagreements between the Taliban and some foreign Mujahideen organizations, especially Al Qaeda and their leader Osama bin Laden, and more specifically, regarding the political strategy and the global jihadi agenda. The impact on the Taliban can be traced in Mutmain's words:

> While regular Taliban strongly supported Osama, Taliban officials were against his activities even though they liked him. Everyone said that we should respect him as a Muslim refugee, but he shouldn't threaten the world from our land because We aren't strong enough. We are only capable to control our country and of Islamic rule. (Mutmain 2019, 152).

This disagreement did not lead to cutting relations between the Taliban and foreign fighters. In the post-2001 era, Antonio Giustozzi, in his work "The Taliban at War," explored the complexities of the Taliban's relationships with foreign fighters, particularly emphasizing the role of the Haqqani Network, one of the most important elements of the Taliban movement.[8]. The Haqqani Network's extensive connections to international Mujahideen groups have not only served as a conduit for military and financial support but have also reinforced the ideological framework of local Taliban fighters. The ideological infusion brought by foreign fighters has been significant, according to Giustozzi. This suggests that foreign Mujahideen have not merely supplemented the Taliban's operational capabilities; they have also redefined its ideological landscape. Giustozzi points out:

> The Haqqanis have been linked to al-Qaeda (AQ) throughout the post-Taliban regime period. They are, in fact, the only Taliban network that received uninterrupted support from AQ from 2002 until at least 2017. In 2017, sources inside the Haqqani network estimated the level of this support to be $20 million. This is because, of all the Taliban networks engaged in

[8] An armed Afghan Mujahideen group was established by Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani long before the birth of the Taliban, in the late 1970s in southeastern Afghanistan, with extensions in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan. Since then, it became known for its connections and relationships with foreign Mujahideen who participated in the anti-Soviet war. The group joined the Taliban, like many other local factions, upon its rise in the 1990s. After 2001, it gained more power within the Taliban structure. See more: Brown, V., and D. Rassler. *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

> supporting global jihad, the Haqqanis are the most resilient and active. (Giustozzi 2022, 91-92).

Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, through their notable study on the Haqqani network named “The fountainhead of jihad,” argue that the presence of foreign fighters has inspired and uplifted local fighters' morale while simultaneously enhancing the Taliban's broader Islamic legitimacy. They confirm that the Haqqani network has historically provided access to training camps and operational resources, attracting foreign fighters and strengthening local forces. This influx of international volunteers not only boosts manpower but also brings new tactics and technologies that improve the effectiveness of local operations (Brown and Rassler 2013, 216).

Furthermore, the involvement of global Mujahideen has lent legitimacy to the local fight against perceived enemies, including the Afghan government and foreign troops. By positioning itself as an essential part of a broader jihad movement, the network has gained respect within local communities, fostering pride and commitment among its members (Brown and Rassler 2013, 217).

Moreover, as observed by Giustozzi, the integration of foreign fighters has reduced internal conflicts among various Taliban factions. He argues that "the ideological and cultural exchange between Taliban members and foreign fighters led to reduced conflicts and greater unity within the movement" (Giustozzi 2022, 93). This points to an intriguing dynamic in which the shared jihad narrative has fostered unity among disparate factions, enabling a more organized and effective insurgency.

In An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, Mike Martin supports this view by stating that the "shared religious factor and jihadist narrative contributed to unity among Taliban members and foreign jihadists" (Martin 2014, 175). His observations in Helmand Province also reveal how support from Arab and Pakistani Mujahideen, mainly through training and weaponry, "significantly increased the Taliban’s strength and cohesion" (Martin 2014, 210). This highlights the critical role that external support plays in enhancing the Taliban's military and operational effectiveness.

On the other hand, Mutmain discusses the challenges and dangers posed by Daesh (ISIS), which included many foreign fighters, and the threats it represented to Taliban unity starting in 2014. During this time, some Taliban leaders and commanders defected and joined ISIS, participating in the battles between the two sides (Mutmain 2019, 309-314).

Verily, the interplay between the Taliban and foreign Mujahideen groups presents a complex narrative that underscores the impact of external intervention in shaping the Taliban's path since its rule era in the 90s and throughout the insurgency and its development, transformations, and fate. The added value the foreign fighters presented throughout decades militarily, financially, and even in the pro-Taliban propaganda can't be denied. On the other hand, the impact of the ideological and strategic variances between the Taliban and Foreign Mujahideen and the challenges and risks brought by the foreign Mujahedeen on the Taliban's unity and even existence is also apparent. The overall outcome of the foreign Mujahideen engagements with the Taliban needs further exploration.

This review aimed to outline the significant works that addressed the role of religion in the cohesion of the Taliban from 1994 to 2021, spanning its initial rise in the nineties, the fall of the Taliban's rule at the end of 2001, its resistance against the American-led coalition, and its return to power in August 2021.

The review began by exploring the influence of the global Deobandi stream, which is widely spread, especially in South Asia, to which many Taliban leaders and members belong. While previous studies have extensively covered this aspect, they have not explored whether there are certain specialties in Ideology and structure related to Deobandis or if it is similar to other streams. Also, the similarities, differences, and relations between the Taliban and the Deobandi movement, especially in Pakistan, have not been well addressed.

The discussion then shifted to governance, the implementation of Sharia law, and the clear connection between these aspects and the movement's unity. The application of Sharia has contributed significantly to the movement's unity and mobilization since its inception, as well as to gaining public support and resolving inner conflicts. It also

discussed how the Taliban integrated Islamic Sharia law with local customs and what decisions it took against local customs which contradicted Sharia law. However, some research gaps were not explored efficiently. Can a classical theoretical framework help us understand the religious revivalism model in movements like the Taliban? Did earlier measures against local customs impact the unity of movements before 2001? After the Taliban was overthrown in 2001, what changes did they make to the implementation of sharia during the war against the coalition forces? Moreover, How did they address situations where local customs clashed with Islamic law and reconciliation was not feasible? Lastly, how did these decisions affect the movement's internal cohesion?

The Taliban's structure emphasizes the central role of the **Amir al-Mu'minin** (leader), who holds both religious and political authority and commands strong loyalty from members, comprised mainly of tribal youth and men. Below the Amir is a network of **shura councils** advising on governance and decision-making. Religious scholars also play pivotal roles, overseeing the judiciary and ensuring the movement's adherence to Islamic rulings. Despite significant discussion on the Taliban, key areas remain underexplored: How does the leader-follower relationship within the Taliban differ from other groups, including those claiming the title of Amir al-Mu'minin to their leader? What challenges did the Taliban face under its three leaders (Mullah Omar, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, and Mawlawi Hibatullah), and how did they respond? What influence did religious scholars have on its practices and strategies? Addressing these questions will deepen our understanding of the Taliban's organizational dynamics, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The final religious factor influencing the Taliban is the involvement of foreign mujahid organizations. The participation of foreign fighters in the Afghan conflict began long before the Taliban emerged. Their role in training Afghan fighters, enhancing military capabilities, and providing financial and media support for the Afghan jihad, as well as fighting alongside them, dates back to the 1980s during the Soviet occupation. This involvement continued with the rise of the Taliban and persisted through the resistance against the American occupation. While there have been significant changes over this period, the focus here is on understanding how the inclusion of foreign fighters and mujahideen groups in the Afghan struggle (both before and after 2001) has influenced

the Taliban's military tactics, battlefield effectiveness, religious and political ideology, economic situation, international relations with state and non-state actors, and, finally and most importantly the effect of all the previous points on the internal cohesion of the Taliban movement.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

Social movements are not isolated phenomena; they emerge, evolve, and may ultimately transform into political parties or governing authorities within broader political, economic, and social contexts. These movements arise from complex dynamics, including global power structures, the transcontinental flow of economies and trade, regional and international political conflicts, and local social interactions. To comprehensively understand the motivations and trajectories of such movements, especially those rooted in entrenched political or religious ideologies, engaging with the theoretical frameworks established by key scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Charles Tilly, and Ibn Khaldun is essential. These thinkers have made significant contributions to political sociology, providing interpretive models that elucidate social movements' origins, strategies, and impacts across various local and global contexts.

2.5.1. Social Movements and its Types

Before delving into the theories proposed by scholars regarding social movements and political sociology, it is essential to provide simple definitions of social movements and their most essential types. A straightforward definition of a social movement is offered by Paul Wilkinson, as cited by Charles Tilly: "a deliberate collective endeavor to promote change in any direction and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution, or withdrawal into a 'utopian' community" (Tilly 1978, 39). Another definition, as cited by Tilly from Weber, is: "a group of people who orient themselves to the same belief system and act together to promote change based on this common orientation" (Tilly 1978, 40).

Initially, social movements can be divided into old and new social movements. Old movements refer to those that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily aimed at gaining state control, often represented by labor or

national liberation movements and specific identity movements (religious or ethnic). In contrast, new movements emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, including human rights movements, feminist movements, and environmental protection movements. New movements arose as a reaction to the older movements, which were perceived to have lost their effectiveness in addressing contemporary social issues from the perspective of the new social movements (Arrighi, K. Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989, 55-62).

Furthermore, social movements can be classified into anti-systemic movements and integralist movements. Anti-systemic movements strive to challenge and reform the global capitalist system, which they perceive as unjust and perpetuating inequality. These movements are typically characterized as socialist or nationalist, focusing on the acquisition of state power as a mechanism for enacting broader social change. In contrast, integralist movements seek to promote a unified approach to social organization, often emphasizing cultural and national identities. In some instances, integralist movements endeavor to reclaim or uphold traditional values and a robust national identity, frequently at the expense of pluralism (Arrighi, K. Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989, 24-35).

2.5.2. Immanuel Wallerstein

A. The Centre, Semi-periphery, and Periphery: The Global Hierarchy

Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory is centered around the concept of a global division of labor structured according to states' political and economic power. In this framework, the world is classified into three distinct categories: the core, the periphery, and the semi-periphery, which occupy an intermediary position between the two. Core nations, primarily the United States and Western Europe, dominate the global economy by controlling the most advanced industries and technologies. These nations maintain their hegemony over peripheral regions, typically in the developing world, through military and political supremacy.

In his significant work, "The Modern World-System I," Wallerstein outlines the mechanisms that sustain the dominance of core nations, arguing that “What capitalism does is offer an alternative and more lucrative source of surplus appropriation (at least

more lucrative over the long run). An empire is a mechanism for collecting tribute... In a capitalist world economy, political energy is used to secure monopoly rights" (Wallerstein 2011, 40). This dynamic perpetuates the economic underdevelopment of peripheral regions, whose roles are largely confined to supplying raw materials and cheap labor to the core. Although semi-peripheral regions also experience exploitation, they benefit from a certain degree of industrialization due to their proximity to the core. Wallerstein further emphasizes that the self-sustaining nature of this system arises from the fact that "the division of a world economy involves a hierarchy of occupational tasks, in which tasks requiring higher levels of skill and greater capitalization are reserved for higher-ranking areas." He highlights the crucial role played by semi-peripheral nations, which absorb some of the pressures experienced by the periphery while enjoying certain advantages due to their closer ties to the core. This intermediary position allows the semi-periphery to function as a buffer, preventing direct conflict between the core and the periphery (Wallerstein 2011, 592). In this manner, inequality and exploitation are maintained through the hierarchical organization of the world system.

B. Peripheral Movements as Responses to Exploitation

Wallerstein further examines the implications of this deliberately engineered systemic imbalance, demonstrating how it fosters conditions conducive to the emergence of anti-systemic movements that contest the global order. While these movements can arise in both peripheral and semi-peripheral regions, they are more prevalent in peripheral areas due to the heightened levels of political and economic marginalization experienced there. According to Wallerstein, peripheral movements frequently emerge as direct responses to the economic inequalities perpetuated by the world system. These movements may manifest in various forms, such as anti-imperialist, ethnic, nationalist, or religious, yet they share a common objective: to resist the dominance of core nations (Arrighi, K. Hopkins, Wallerstein 1989, 51-57).

Accordingly, various anti-colonial movements across Africa and Asia in the first half of the twentieth century can be analyzed through this lens, as can Islamic movements in the Middle East and South Asia that seek independence and national sovereignty in opposition to Western imperialism. Wallerstein's theory also provides a framework

for understanding the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. This quintessentially peripheral state has endured repeated foreign invasions and economic dependence while simultaneously mounting sustained resistance against external hegemony, particularly Western dominance. By advocating for the establishment of an Islamic government and firmly rejecting Western political, military, economic, and cultural interventions, the Taliban has crafted its narrative of sovereignty and mobilized support accordingly (Martin 2014, 78, 186). As Wallerstein notes, such movements often frame their struggles in cultural or religious terms, drawing on the broader discontent of marginalized groups (Wallerstein 2004, 68).

C. Conflicts Among Great Powers

A critical aspect of Wallerstein's theory is the cyclical nature of changes in global power. These shifts inevitably lead to a decline in international hegemony, marked by significant economic crises, intensifying competition between rival powers, and political transformations. Such changes create opportunities for movements in the periphery and semi-periphery to challenge global dominance and pursue their agendas. As Wallerstein explains, "As a hegemonic power declines, there are always others who attempt to replace it, but such replacement takes a long time and ultimately results in another "thirty years' war." (Wallerstein 2004, 59).

This theory can be applied to the United States in Afghanistan, particularly towards the end of the twenty-first century's first decade. The global economic crisis, widespread U.S. military involvement in multiple regions (especially Iraq), and the inability to maintain full control over Afghanistan collectively contributed to the decline of U.S. hegemony on a global scale. These factors gave the Taliban a strategic opportunity to regroup, reorganize, and gain territorial advances. As Wallerstein (2004) notes, "The use of "imperial" force undermines the hegemonic power economically and politically and is widely perceived as a sign, not of strength but of weakness, first externally than internally" (Wallerstein 2004, 59). Thus, the resurgence and consolidation of the Taliban can be understood through Wallerstein's framework, highlighting how peripheral movements rise amidst the decline of global hegemonic powers.

D. Cycles of Resistance and Continuity

Wallerstein's theory explains how the decline of hegemonic powers presents new opportunities for peripheral movements and how these movements sustain themselves despite severe military repression and continuous political pressure from both global powers and local governments allied with them. According to Wallerstein, "Opposition to oppression is coterminous with the existence of hierarchical social systems. Opposition is permanent, but for the most part latent" (Arrighi, K. Hopkins, Wallerstein 1989, 29). In the case of the Taliban, decades of military pressure from both Soviet and American forces failed to suppress or weaken the movement. Instead, the Taliban capitalized on changing global dynamics, formulating a complex strategy that blended its religious ideology with local grievances concerning economic conditions and foreign intervention (Martin 2014, 97). This enabled the Taliban to remain a formidable and entrenched force in the Afghan landscape.

2.5.3. Charles Tilly

While Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory provides a global framework for understanding how social movements in the periphery emerge as predictable consequences of international structures and policies of domination, Charles Tilly's approach takes a different path. Tilly focuses more on the local political dynamics that either facilitate or hinder the actions of movements within individual states. His theories are particularly noted for analyzing the specific political conditions that enable the emergence of social movements, explaining their mobilization mechanisms, and addressing the reasons for their persistence despite their challenges.

A. Political Opportunity Structure

A key contribution of Tilly's work is the concept of the political opportunity structure, which refers to the changing political circumstances that either create opportunities for the emergence or continuation of social movements or restrict their development. The success or progress of any movement often depends on the openness or weakness of the political system, as Tilly argues in his work "From Mobilisation to Revolution" (1978). He emphasizes that when a state is internally divided, experiencing conflicts,

or weakened by poor governance, social movements are more likely to seize these opportunities, rise, and potentially achieve their larger goals. Tilly cites a significant text from Huntington: "The rates of social mobilization and the expansion of political participation are high; the rates of political organization and institutionalization are low; the result is political disorder and instability." He extrapolates from this that "the larger the discrepancy between institutionalization and modernization, the greater the disorder; at the extreme lies the revolution" (Tilly 1978, 20).

This political opportunity structure theory is particularly relevant to the Taliban's initial rise in the 1990s. Following the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the Soviet-backed Afghan communist government, the Islamist Mujahideen pre-Taliban government took power. However, internal conflicts within this new government, alongside chaos, civil war, and a weak central authority, enabled the Taliban to ascend. The Taliban overpowered the warlords and the divided government structure militarily, restoring security and stability to a large extent, which earned them widespread popularity among the Afghan population (Stenersen 2010, 14-15).

A similar political opportunity emerged for the Taliban after their removal from power in 2001, following a significant international military campaign led by the United States. In the aftermath, the U.S. established a new Afghan government under Hamid Karzai, which it sought to strengthen. However, this government failed to provide essential services such as security, food, and healthcare, and it became notorious for widespread corruption. These conditions fostered an environment conducive to the Taliban's resurgence (Stenersen 2010, 29). As Tilly noted in the Peruvian context: "The inefficiency and inaccessibility of Peru's justice system, coupled with local government corruption and lack of transparency, have contributed to outbreaks of violence in rural areas" (Tilly 2006, 121). The Taliban adeptly mobilized, particularly in rural areas, by positioning themselves as a legitimate alternative to the corrupt and ineffective government.

B. Repertoires of Contention

Another significant contribution by Tilly to the field of social movements was his exploration of the factors that lead movements to adopt specific methods for achieving

their goals, what he termed "repertoires of contention." Tilly argues that these choices are not arbitrary but are shaped by the historical and cultural contexts in which the movements operate. Tilly explains that movements vary in their tactics and sometimes mix between them, stretching from public meetings, press statements, petitions, demonstrations, and some kinds of violence, which may include suicide bombings and taking hostages; he states: "Repertoires vary from place to place, time to time, and pair to pair. However, on the whole, when people make collective claims, they innovate within limits set by the repertoire already established for their place, time, and pair" (Tilly 2006, 35).

In the case of the Taliban, their repertoire of contention is built on two primary pillars: military action and religious justifications. The Taliban consistently combined military tactics such as guerrilla warfare, assassinations, and bombings with religious rhetoric that framed these actions as part of a broader struggle to defend Islamic principles and establish an Islamic government (Giustozzi 2022, 36-37). The Taliban's ongoing religious mobilization and their framing of military actions as sacred jihad enabled them to garner widespread support in a society where religion is central to both identity and daily life.

C. Identity and Social Movements

In this context, Tilly asserts that social movements do not arise and sustain themselves solely based on economic and social grievances or the availability of political opportunities. Instead, he highlights the essential role of shared identities as fundamental drivers behind the formation and longevity of these movements. He argues that the genesis of social movements is often deeply rooted in identity (whether religious, ethnic, or social) and that active participation in protests and collective actions significantly strengthens this shared identity among participants.

Tilly elaborates that the mechanisms through which social movements operate, termed "repertoires," draw heavily from the identities, social ties, and organizational structures that constitute the fabric of everyday social life. He explains that it is from these identities and social connections that collective claims are formulated, along with the means for articulating them. He notes, “Repertoires draw on the identities, social

ties, and organizational forms that constitute everyday social life. From those identities, social ties, and organizational forms emerge both the collective claims people make and the means they have for making them". This underscores that the very foundation of social movements is built upon the individuals involved' communal ties and shared experiences, empowering them to express their demands and aspirations effectively. Furthermore, Tilly posits a hierarchy of claims that evolve in a particular order: "The three sorts of claims build in rough order: without a recognized identity, it is hard to demand political standing; without standing, it is hard to voice support for a program" (Tilly 2006, 32- 42). This suggests that establishing a recognized identity is a prerequisite for asserting political claims, as it provides the legitimacy and foundation for individuals to seek recognition and advocate for specific agendas. In this way, Tilly emphasizes that without a solidified identity, the ability to engage politically and mobilize support becomes significantly hindered.

In the case of the Taliban, the shared religious identity among its members and a significant portion of the Afghan population played a crucial role in rallying support under the banner of defending Islamic values and national sovereignty (Semple 2014, 8). Tilly notes, "Identity claims declare that 'we' (the claimants) constitute a unified force to be reckoned with. Such claims commonly include a name for 'us,' such as 'Cherokees,' 'Diamond Cutters,' 'Southsiders,' or 'Citizens United against X'" (Tilly 2006, 184). This shared identity, combined with deep social ties and a robust organizational structure, may help explain the Taliban's ability to withstand large-scale military campaigns, sanctions, and repeated challenges from a wide array of external and internal forces since 1994, relying on the deeply rooted collective identities shared by the movement's members and supporters.

D. Contentious Politics and State Repression

Regarding how movements respond to state repression or occupation forces, Tilly reviewed various models in "Regimes and Repertoires," demonstrating that repression does not always lead to the movement's demise. In some cases, movements adapt and modify their strategies in response to state repression. The martyrdom of members, for example, can generate sympathy for the movement while at the same time intensifying

confrontations, potentially leading the movement to evolve from direct clashes with the state and even adopt more radical tactics. Tilly notes:

> Early successes of demands for independence in such places as Estonia and Latvia encouraged further demands across a wide range of republics, which increased violence as unsuccessful claimants faced competition and repression. What began as a peaceful process soon radicalized and escalated. (Tilly 2006, 202-203).

This theory can also be applied to the Taliban, who, when faced with significant military pressure from both the U.S. and the Afghan government, escalated their resistance by employing unconventional military tactics such as "suicide bombers." Despite the military pressure, the Taliban managed to maintain their presence and capacity for mobilization (Brown and Rassler 2013, 124).

Thus, Tilly's theories provide valuable insights into the local and internal dynamics through which social movements operate. These include political opportunity structures that emerge from state weakness or division, creating openings for movements to advance their agendas. Tilly also elaborates on repertoires of contention, explaining how movements select their methods based on the historical and cultural context in which they arise and the adaptations they make to endure state repression. He places significant emphasis on the role of collective identities in sustaining and perpetuating social movements.

2.5.4. Ibn Khaldun

In a related context, Ibn Khaldun's foundational theories offer profound historical and philosophical insights into the dynamics of social movements, the nature of states, governance, and the patterns of declining hegemony. In his masterpiece, "The Muqaddimah," Ibn Khaldun presents his philosophy of history, explaining the conditions and mechanisms underlying the rise and fall of states and civilizations. His theory centers around the concept of "asabiyyah" (social solidarity or group feeling), which he considers the primary condition for the success of any social movement, mainly when the goal is to overthrow an existing political regime or establish a new one. Ibn Khaldun's theories are especially relevant for understanding the genesis and

development of social movements, particularly in peripheral regions and in the context of weakening states or the decline of a civilization's dominance.

A. Asabiyyah

For Ibn Khaldun, “asabiyyah” symbolizes the social solidarity, group feeling, and deep loyalty that unite individuals within a society and drive them to work together toward achieving common objectives. He argues that “asabiyyah” is most potent in tribal and nomadic societies due to the bonds of kinship, blood ties, and shared lineage or whatever replaces it. Additionally, the typically harsh geographical and climatic conditions in which these societies exist imbue them with resilience and strength. As Ibn Khaldun observes, "Man is more a product of his customs and habits than of his innate nature and temperament." (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 477). According to Ibn Khaldun, these characteristics make such social groups the only ones capable of effectively challenging established authorities. He explains that political systems and states are usually robust in their foundations, and “nothing can dismantle their structures except a forceful challenge supported by the asabiyyah of tribes and clans." While tribal “asabiyyah” is crucial during the early stages of state formation, it may replace traditional “asabiyyah” with professional armies and organized military forces once the state is well established.

In addition, one of the most crucial dimensions of the concept of asabiyyah, as consistently elaborated by Ibn Khaldun, is the idea that the presence of an external threat targeting a social group or state acts as a powerful catalyst for the internal cohesion of that group. The external pressure, whether in war, invasion, or any other form of existential danger, creates a unifying force within the group, compelling members to set aside their differences and rally together in defense of their common goals, shared interests, and survival. However, Ibn Khaldun highlights an important dynamic: once the external threat recedes or disappears, the unifying force of asabiyyah begins to wane. With the absence of a common enemy, the internal cohesiveness of the group is inevitably tested, and previously latent divisions, tensions, and conflicts within the group start to surface. These divisions, which were temporarily suppressed or overlooked in the face of the external threat, begin to erode the unity that once held the group together, leading to a gradual disintegration of asabiyyah and,

in many cases, the eventual decline or fragmentation of the social structure or state (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 503-21).

B. Cycles of States and Civilizations

Ibn Khaldun posits that fundamental change often originates from peripheral or remote regions rather than from mobilizations within cities or capitals. Such change requires a highly cohesive and resolute form of social solidarity, typically found in “asabiyyah,” rooted in blood ties, kinship, common lineages, or whatever replaces it. These different forms of “asabiyyah” can only be unified under religious leadership and a cause that transcends worldly desires. In general, religion serves as a unifying force, fostering social cohesion and eliminating the causes of division and discord. Ibn Khaldun cites verse 63 of Surah Al-Anfal: "And if you had spent all that is on the earth, you could not have united their hearts," to illustrate that the foundation of large political entities, "the great states of conquest and empires," is religion. However, he concludes that "religious leadership without asabiyyah cannot be sustained," even for prophets. Ibn Khaldun asserts, "This was the case for the prophets in their call to God with the clans and tribes, despite being supported by the entirety of existence if they had so wished, but God ordained matters to follow the established natural order" (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 515-22). Stemming from this critical classical theme, some studies analyzed the initial rise of the Taliban due to the ability of the movement to mobilize and lead the most powerful tribes in Afghanistan, who are the Pashtun tribes (D. Crews and Tarzi 2009, 75-76).

The ability of tribal forces to defeat established states stems from their strong “asabiyyah” in contrast to the weakening “asabiyyah” of the state, which tends to deteriorate due to luxury and indulgence. However, once these tribal forces assume power, their “asabiyyah” begins to erode as their leaders and members become immersed in luxury, gradually making way for new, cohesive, less decadent tribes to repeat the cycle. Thus, according to Ibn Khaldun, the rise and fall of states and civilizations follows a cyclical pattern.

C. Khaldunian Islamic Revival

Interestingly, the contributions of Malaysian sociologist Farid al-Attas regarding the practical application of Ibn Khaldun's theories are highly relevant to the case of the Taliban, which this thesis examines. Al-Attas argues that Ibn Khaldun's theories on asabiyyah (social cohesion) and the rise and fall of states are also theories of Islamic revival or reform. According to al-Attas, Islamic revival is not merely a modern phenomenon or a reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism; it is a recurring occurrence that has occurred since the early centuries of Islamic history. Thus, al-Attas believes it is possible to formulate a contemporary Khaldunian model for Islamic revival (al-Attas 2014, 98).

Al-Attas argues that, according to Ibn Khaldun, the fundamental driving force behind the revival cycles in Islamic history is the concept of "Taghyir al-munkar" (forbidding evil). This principle addresses practical issues, such as injustice and immorality, and doctrinal concerns, including innovation and polytheism. Injustice tends to accumulate and thrive in major urban centers and capitals, compounded by wealth, a luxurious lifestyle, and persistent oppression. Periodically, groups (often arising from rural areas) mobilize to correct these religious deviations, perpetuating this cyclical process. According to this Khaldunian interpretation, Islamic reform occurs in the context of radical political change, which involves alternating ruling systems, elites, and associated entities. This process follows the dissemination of a religious call that unites and consolidates powerful societal forces characterized by homogeneity, courage, solidarity, and a simple lifestyle (such as nomads or tribes), which Ibn Khaldun refers to as asabiyyah. These forces then confront and overcome the ruling authorities. The religious call represents a comprehensive asabiyyah encompassing subordinate asabiyyahs (tribal, ethnic, and class-based). Al-Attas states, "Islamic asabiyyah transcended all tribes, yet it relied on the stronger asabiyyah of those tribes, with religion serving as its driving force" (al-Attas 2014, 99- 219).

The primary motivation for the establishment of the Taliban movement in 1994, as will be discussed in Chapter V, was the Islamic principle of "Taghyir al-munkar." This was in the context of addressing widespread social insecurity, moral crimes, and the weakness of central authority, as noted by various studies on Afghanistan (Mutmain

2019, 50-53). Given its emergence in the Pashtun tribal areas of southern Afghanistan, the Taliban relied on mobilizing these tribes, which are among the strongest belonging to the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan: the Pashtun ethnicity.

D. Peripheral Resistance Movements

Ibn Khaldun's theoretical framework also provides significant insights into understanding resistance movements like the Taliban. Firstly, the Taliban emerged from peripheral regions, characterized by a distinctly tribal society. Secondly, the movement successfully seized power two times through military force during periods of declining global hegemony, which reflects Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of civilizations. Thirdly, the centrality of religious asabiyyah to the social cohesion of the movement is evident. Applying Ibn Khaldun's concepts to the internal dynamics of Afghanistan, whether between 1994 and 2001 or in the post-2001 era, reveals that despite significant military, logistical, and financial support from various regional states and superpowers, the anti-Taliban Afghan governments, parties, and communities failed to establish a strong asabiyyah. In contrast, the Taliban, despite originating from marginalized peripheral areas, successfully built a powerful asabiyyah during its initial mobilization in 1994. Even after losing power following the U.S. and international military campaign, the Taliban managed to regroup, remobilize its religious and tribal asabiyyah, and continue its resistance. This persistence ultimately enabled the Taliban to overcome both the occupation and the Afghan government, allowing them to return to power after nearly two decades.

2.5.5. Conclusion

Wallerstein's world systems theory centers on the global capitalist structure and the inequalities it perpetuates. He interprets the rise of peripheral movements as a response to the economic exploitation and political marginalization imposed by great powers or core nations. He also emphasizes that cyclical conflicts among great powers weaken the dominance of core nations over peripheral regions, creating repeated opportunities for peripheral movements to sustain their struggles.

By contrast, Ibn Khaldun's theories delve deeper into the internal dynamics that contribute to the cohesion of peripheral movements and enhance their capacity for sustained mobilization. His concept of "asabiyyah" manifests in various forms, including religious identity, ethnic background, or shared historical grievances. However, the strongest form of "asabiyyah" arises from integrating religious leadership with tribal structures. Religious unity serves to eliminate causes of division, such as rivalry and envy, thus intensifying the "strength of their "asabiyyah" through insight and self-sacrifice" (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 520). This dynamic is evident in the Taliban's experience, whether during their struggle against the Soviet Union, Their first rise in the post-Cold War era (1994- 2001), and later in their confrontation with the United States and its allies (2001-2021).

Tilly's theories intersect with Ibn Khaldun's in their shared focus on the internal dynamics of social movements. As Tilly has demonstrated, shared identities play a crucial role in continuous mobilization, and each region's historical and cultural context shapes repertoires of contention. Tilly also examines how movements adapt to overcome state repression, enabling them to re-emerge and persist until their objectives are achieved.

In conclusion, the theoretical frameworks of these three scholars are highly pertinent to my thesis on the role of religion in maintaining the cohesion of the Taliban movement. However, I will rely more on Ibn Khaldun's theories, as their detailed nuances more closely align with the Taliban's case than the frameworks offered by Wallerstein or Tilly.

CHAPTER III

THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF THE TALIBAN: THE DEOBAND STREAM

"Many of the Taliban had indeed studied in Deobandi schools, but one spokesman for the movement in its final months went so far as to declare: 'Every Afghan is a Deobandi'" Barbara D. Metcalf, a historian and professor specializing in South Asian Islam, made this statement at a time when the Taliban was believed to be nearing the end of its rule (Metcalf 2002, 1). Indeed, it is essential for thorough research on the Taliban to delve into the fundamental principles, structure, and characteristics of the Deobandi stream.

3.1. Historical Background

Upon the collapse of the six-century rule of Islamic states in South Asia and the subsequent fall of the entire Indian subcontinent under British occupation, coupled with the failure of the armed uprising led by many ulama (religious scholars) in 1857, which was under the leadership of the last Muslim Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Muslim scholars recognized the dire situation that Muslims reached in those regions (al-Nadwi 1999, 178-179). They saw the spread of Western culture and Christian missionary activities as significant threats to Islamic identity. In response, they contemplated ways to preserve and protect the religious and cultural heritage. Here came the idea of passive resistance, which was achieved by boycotting British colonization and its public spheres. In parallel to that, it established madrassas (Islamic religious schools). These madrassas aim to act as “fortresses” of Islamic culture by continuously graduating scholars and a human “reservoir” to open new fronts against colonialism (al-Nadwi 1968, 75-76).

In this context, three names were very crucial: the theologian, thinker, and debater Mawlana Muhammad Qassim Nanautawi (1833-1880), the hadith scholar Mawlana

Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1828- 1905), and the Sufi master Haji Imdad Allah al Makki (1817-1899). These three pioneer figures later became the founding fathers of the globally well-known revival of Muslim phenomena, the Deobandi movement. The socio-religious roots, bonds, and relations connecting these scholars are perfectly described by Professor Branon Ingram, the author of "Revival from below: Deoband movement and global Islam," he says:

> They hailed from a cluster of closely knit qasbahs north of Delhi—Nanautawi, Gangohi, Thana Bhawan, Ambetha, Kandhla—situated in the fertile plains between the Yamuna and Ganges Rivers, often separated by only a few miles. Their families were interconnected by scholarship, marriage, and Sufi discipleship.

Nanautawi, Gangohi, and Imdad Allah Al Makki became very close to each other. They were not only students of the same well-known prominent Islamic scholar, Mamluk Ali, at Delhi College. Instead, the former two were also Spiritual followers of the third, who was, in addition to his Sufi mastery position, an important participant and leader in the armed rebellion against the British in 1857. Notably, despite being a Sufi disciple of Imdad Allah Al Makki, the founding visionary of the Deoband movement and its mother seminary madrassa, Dar Al-Uloom Deoband was Muhammed Qassim Nanautawi. His revival program Goal "was an educational movement through which rays of divine knowledge would shine across India and beyond" (Ingram 2018, 36-38).

3.2. The Seven Main Characteristics of the Deobandi Movement

First, as mentioned earlier, one of the most important characteristics of the Deobandi movement since the establishment of its first institution, Dar al-Ulum Deoband, is its anti-colonial and anti-modernist ideology. This foundational madrasa, established by Mawlana Nanautawi, was not limited to educational and scholarly purposes; it was designed to serve as a center for producing religiously educated Muslim fighters and advocates who would open new anti-colonial fronts in response to the devastating defeat suffered by Muslims across India by the British colonialism (al-Nadwi 1968, 75-76).

Dar al Uloom Deoband started with one teacher and one student in 1866. Later, it expanded, and new branches were opened in other areas. Interestingly, the first graduate from Dar al-Uloom Deoband, known as Shaikhul Hind Mawlana Mahmud Hassan, was a highly politicized anti-British colonization scholar who led and orchestrated several freedom movements against the British presence in India, on top of them the "silk letter movement," which aimed to liberate India from British rule by forming alliances with Ottoman Turkey, Imperial Germany, and Afghanistan. Named after the "Silk Letters" written by Mawlana Obaidullah Sindhi (Mawlana Mahmud Hassan's deputy), the movement was thwarted when British authorities intercepted the letters. Mawlana Mahmud Hassan, or Shaikhul Hind, was the key leader, advocating for armed resistance and organizing revolutionary activities. His efforts, which included building connections with influential Islamic figures across the Muslim world, ultimately led to his arrest due to the movement's covert nature (Miyan 2012, viii-x). So, the first feature of the Deoband movement, linked to its historical early stages, is the anti-imperialist armed resistance orientation.

The second characteristic stressed by Nanautawi and mentioned intensively and repeatedly in the list of eight founding principles of the Deobandi movement (discussed in five out of 8 principles) is financial independence and refusal of any governmental support. Nanautawi considered this issue dangerous and a threat to the autonomy of the educational process and the movement. He was also warned about endowment support or any other fixed resources funding the madrassas. For him, this will weaken the concept of tawakkul (reliance on Allah). After strengthening the tawakkul creed, the reliable side on which Nanautawi depended in the madrassa funding process was the ordinary members of the Muslim society, whom he was keen on activating their role in public affairs by motivating and involving everyone in building and protecting an Islamic independent educational system.[9].

The result was astonishing, as the experience of Dar al-Uloom Deoband was reproduced, and its graduates played a great role in establishing new madrassas wherever they left. Consequently, the Deobandi movement became the largest

[9] Sayyid al-Mahboob al-Razawi al-Deobandi, *Tarbiyyat wa Ta'leeq: Muhammad Arif Jameel al-Qasmi al-Mubarakpuri*, *Nashat al-Jami'ah al-Islamiyyah: Dar al-'Uloom Deoband*, *Majallah al-Da'i al-Shahriyah Sadirah 'an Dar al-'Uloom Deoband*, 37th Year, Issue 9-10, July-September 2013.

religious institution in Asia, the greatest reform movement outside the Middle East, and the most important university in the Islamic world after al-Azhar in Egypt (Smith 1946, 295).

There are no accurate statistics for the number of madrassas founded by graduates of Dar Al Uloom Deoband (because many of them are not officially registered). However, the number has exceeded two hundred thousand 200,000 madrassas around the world, according to the official website of Dar Al Uloom Deoband.[10], starting from the Deobandi movement's place and headquarters in south Asia (India- Pakistan- Bangladesh- Afghanistan), passing through their second strong presence in South Africa and extending to the west, especially Britain[11] (Ingram 2018, 4).

The fourth characteristic embodied in the Deobandi movement is the repositioning of scholars as patrons of The Muslim society and guardians of its values. The collapse of the Muslim Mughal state at the hands of the British left a political and legal vacuum in the leadership of society. A shift followed this in the role of scholars from taking over Governmental jobs in the time of the Muslim Mongol state to the leadership of the society scholarly, spiritually, Morally, and judicially. The last was the establishment of independent courts that did not belong to the English authorities in the British colonial era (Metcalf 1982, 138-145, 196-197; Ingram 2018, 40,55).

That is religious education and scholarship have been stripped of their worldly beneficial and functional aspects and have become limited to the eschatological missionary aspect of preserving the Islamic identity of the people (Ingram 2018, 50).

The fifth fundamentally significant characteristic is the structure of the madrassas based on the non-governmental informal popular model from one side, as these madrassas are usually established by local popular initiatives and funding, away from the government’s supervision and control, and on the non-hierarchical network model from the other side.

[10] Darul Uloom Deoband. *Official Website*. Accessed December 10, 2024. https://darululoom-deoband.com/arb/
[11] Dietrich Reetz, The Deoband universe,153.

The German researcher Dietrich Reetz, who specialized in Islam outside the Arab world, pointed out that this network operating model “has reached the stage of an independent self-propelled mode of operation and growth” apart from Dar al-Uloom Deoband in India and its graduates.

In each country, all Deobandi madrassas are organized into one Deobandi scholarly association, for instance, Wifaq al madaris al Arabiya (the Arab madrassas association) in Pakistan. These associations define curricula and exams, award certificates and licenses, and, most importantly, represent and defend these massive madrassa networks against hostile government policies (Riaz 2008, 80).

The last two characteristics shaping the Deobandi identity are closely related and concern the educational and tarbiyyah (upbringing) paradigm adopted by Deobandis. The Deobandi educational system is twofold. The first is composed of the medieval, classical Islamic sciences texts and curricula known as Ders Nizami.[12] The second is connected to the heart purification methods stemming from the traditional Sufi chains, With a strong criticism of "folk mysticism" and its practices and rituals (Metcalf 2002, 5-6).

The tarbiyyah (upbringing) aspect appears fundamental in the Deobandi educational system, and its philosophy is based primarily on the concept of sohbat (companionship) in the Islamic heritage. Classical texts must be conveyed with their moral burden embodied in living human beings through continuous interaction between teachers and students during the long years of study, involvement in the practical application of religious texts, and continuous purification and treatment of oneself in order to get rid of immoral morals and to acquire good morals (Ingram 2018, 20- 120- 123-124-147).

To sum up, these previous pages tried to shed light on the birth and characteristics of one of the most important Islamic revival movements in the last two centuries. This movement was born in Deoband town, northern Delhi, in British India 1857. Its primary program was reviving Islam in the Indian subcontinent and beyond via an

[12] İbıd, 112-113.

epistemologically and economically independent traditional transnational religious anti-colonial educational network movement. Its achievements were unique and noticeable as it became the most important religious educational and cultural center in Asia and all over the Islamic world outside the Middle East. It gave birth to plenty of movements and parties in different fields of Islamic activism, including Tablighi jamaat, an international dawah (calling for Islam) organization, Jamiat Ulama al-Islam political party in Pakistan, and South Asian armed resistance groups.

3.3. Deobandi Movement Manifestations

Just as the birth of the Deobandi movement and its approaches were unique in the length and breadth of the Islamic world, it is also noticeable that its results and societal manifestations were and are still exceptional and unprecedented in the modern postcolonial eras.

The largest and most holistic manifestation that we will touch on during the presentation of the partial manifestations in the coming pages is the formation of a new, broad social identity that crosses political borders and ethnic nationalities and includes groups, parties, and social movements with different practical programs and agendas (educational, scholarly, advocacy, political, Jihad). The center of this identity is the Deobandi religious scholars.

If we want to go into details, we can divide the manifestations of the Deobandi movement into Five main manifestations: 1- Religious scholarly renaissance, 2- spiritual educational system, 3- Global missionary activism (calling for Islam), 4- political parties, 5-Jihad movements.

3.3.1. Religious Scholarly Renaissance

Though it relied only on public donations and avoided official funding Since its inception, as we mentioned previously, Deobandi scholarly institutes and madrassas grew until they became the most prominent beacon of religious and Arabic sciences, not only in India and neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and

Bangladesh but in the entire Asian continent. The great well-known Indian scholar Abo Alhassan al Nadwi stated:

> The most important religious institute in India that deserves to be called India's Azhar is the big Deoband Institute. This institute started as a small madrassa that didn't rush attention. Then it continued to expand and enlarge, Thanks to the efforts of its teachers and those in charge of it, their sincerity and their asceticism in the wreckage of the world until it became not only a large religious university, but rather the greatest religious school in the Asian continent. (al-Nadwi 1999, 129).

It is difficult to arrive at an accurate statistic about the number of Deobandi madrassas. This is because of their abundance and because many are officially unregistered. However, there is no doubt that its numbers today are in the tens of thousands, and its students are in the millions. Some reports indicate that by the end of 2015, the number of Deobandi school students in its main strongholds in South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India) reached about six million.[13]!

Interestingly, Former Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf described the religious schools in his country as "the largest charitable organization in the world." All stages of education, from its inception to graduation, with all Its requirements such as books, food, clothing, and accommodation, are provided to students free of charge, and the financiers are the people who consider themselves the owners of these schools[14].

This is regarding the number of schools and students. As for the quality of religious knowledge provided in Deobandi madrassas, what distinguished them is the care and combination of the principles of jurisprudence, theology, and the sciences of the Prophet's hadith. Regarding the latter, we quote here the phrases of the Egyptian scholar Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida after his visit to Dar Al Uloom Deoband in 1912 A.D., where he said: "Had it not been for the attention of our brothers, the scholars of India in hadith sciences in this era, it would have been eliminated from the regions of the East, as It became weakened in Egypt, the Levant, Iraq and the Hijaz

[13] Victor Mallet, Financial Times, Madrassas: behind closed doors (Are South Asian madrassas causing a surge in extremism? OCT 30 2015. https://shorturl.at/F4Azx

[14] Mahyūb Khiḍr, al-Jazīrah Net, "Madāris Pākistān al-Dīniyyah.. Māḍin Zāhir wa-Mustaqbal Majhūl," 10 Yūliyū 2007. https://shorturl.at/L3ugP

since the tenth century AH until it reached its utmost weakness in the early fourteenth century" (al-Nadwi 1995, 24-25).

From his side, Wilfred Cantwell, the Canadian great comparative religions scholar in the twentieth century, decided that Dar Al Uloom Deoband was the most important religious institution in the Islamic world after Al-Azhar in Egypt (Smith 1946, 295).

Another distinguishing and very important character of the Deobandi scholarly orientation, related to the vision of the founder Sheikh Nanotawi and the foundation moment, is that the goal behind establishing this educational movement after being defeated by the British was not only graduating jurists and religious teachers but also creating centers for producing fighters and callers for Islam (al-Nadwi, 1968, 75-76).

This important foundational aspect in the history of the Deobandi movement (in addition to its financial independence from any government or authority) has a visible imprint (throughout the life of this movement for nearly a century and a half) on the personality and performance of several armed resistance movements, as we will see later.

3.3.2. Spiritual Educational System

In the same context, and in harmony with its position rejecting the culture and values of Western modernity, the Deobandi scholars were keen on resisting materialistic, utilitarian, and individualistic values by preserving the traditional spiritual educational system. On the other hand, they launched their reformist call, criticizing some of the ritualistic practices prevalent at that time. The Deobandi educational model promoted simplicity and asceticism as one of its basic rules. This applies to both teachers and students[15], as according to the Deobandi vision, the effectiveness of the transmitted is inseparable from the application of the transmitting teacher: "Do you learn Sufi asceticism from someone who is not an ascetic? Do you study hadith of a scholar who doesn't live according to it?!" (Ingram 2018, 21).

[15] Dietrich Reetz. From Madrassa to University- The Challenges and Formats of Islamic Education, the sage handbook of Islamic Studies, edited by Akbar s. Ahmed and Tamara Sonn, (London: Sage. Publications Ltd: 2010).115.

Proceeding from this comprehensive traditional conception of the process of acquiring and practicing religious knowledge and behavior. The Deobandi movement cared about the moral and spiritual aspects accompanying abstract theoretical education and considered them a practical process of Continuous treatment of the soul. This aims to get rid of bad morals, such as love of the worldly life, prestige, hypocrisy, and envy, and to acquire good morals, such as piety, reverence, and asceticism. In This way, the Islamic morals, spirit, and character were built in the Deobandi madrasas through the concept of "sohbat." (Ingram 2018, 21, 147). Sohbat points to the long companionship and continuous interaction between the teachers and students, including their co-practicing of certain behavioral patterns derived from prophetic sayings and teachings. In addition to sharing Sufi bonds and chains of transmission extending from the student to his direct teacher until it reaches the prophet, peace and blessings upon him. As a result of the foregoing, deep and solid spiritual bonds and continuous affection arose between teachers and students (Metcalf 2002, 5).

On the other hand, Deobandis expressed their criticism of the anti-Sharia practices common at the time, such as pilgrimages to the graves of saints and the celebration of the annual anniversary of their deaths. They sought to redirect Sufi practice towards self-reform and re-conceptualize the veneration of saints by centering on their virtues, not their miracles (Ingram 2018, 2-3).

3.3.3. International Islamic Missionary (Tablighi Jamaat)

From spiritual education, we move to the universal missionary. Many may not know the nature of the relationship between the Deobandi scholarly movement and the largest Islamic missionary group in the world, the Tablighi Jamaat. Verily, the relationship is exciting and complex, complementary in one dimension, symbiotic in the other, and independent from a third dimension.

The Tablighi Jamaat was primarily born at the end of the twentieth century from the womb of the Deobandi movement. Its founder, Sheikh Muhammad Elias al-Kandhalawi, is one of the graduates of Dar al-Uloom Deoband. As we have seen before, the heart of the work of the Deobandi institutes was religious education and

the graduation of scholars and teachers. So, what about the broader Muslim masses? How will they be invited to abide by the teachings of Islam?

From here came the idea of establishing a missionary group that would hold the dawah (call of Islam) to all Muslims and motivate them to practice dawah in groups, even if they are unqualified in Islamic knowledge. This call for Islam focuses on reforming individual Muslims, avoids discussing jurisprudential and theological disputes, and eschews politics and armed action (Metcalf 2002, 8-12).

Despite the initial opposition and hesitation of the leaders of the Deobandi scholarly movement and their fear of assigning the mission of dawah and preaching to unqualified individuals. However, after balancing the harms caused by the dawah from non-specialists with the need for general reform of the Muslim masses. The Deobandi scholars preferred the second choice and considered the Tablighi Jamaat an extension of the Deobandi movement in terms of the common philosophy of reforming individuals via pious sohbat (companions).

Here emerges the complementary relationship between the two parties, which has developed to bear the character of mutual service. Indeed, one of the most important reasons for expanding the Deobandi movement to internationalism is the rise of the Tablighi Jamaat, which has been a global phenomenon since the mid-twentieth century. Interestingly, Brannon D. Ingram, in his study "Revival from Below: the Deobandi Movement and Global Islam," perfectly describes the relationship between the Deobandi movement and Tablighi Jamaat. According to him, Tablighi Jamaat is "an engine of Deoband's presence in public life, one energized by Deobandi's network of seminaries but functioning independently of it" (Ingram 2018, 158).

3.3.4. Political Participation

Returning to the strongholds of the Deobandi movement in South Asia, and by extrapolating the broad outlines of the various political roles of the Deobandi scholarly associations and parties historically and currently, we will have a look at a different phenomenon regarding the structure of Islamic movements different than the

mainstream Islamism spread throughout the Islamic world since the establishment of nation states in the post-colonial era.

The structure of the Deobandi political parties and blocs comprises the leaders, the Ulama (religious scholars), and the cadres and followers, who are generally the students of religious knowledge. What concerns us here is to shed light on the most important blocs of Deoband scholars, namely the Association of Scholars of India Jamiat ulama al hind JUH and the Association of Islamic Scholars in Pakistan Jamiat ulama al Islam JUI. Historically, the Deobandi scholarly movement was first represented in a political entity called the Jamiat Ulama al hind JUH. This entity arose in the context of what was known as the “Caliphate Movement” after the defeat of The Ottoman Empire in World War I, and it aimed to prevent British colonialism from eliminating the Ottoman Caliphate. Furthermore, After the fall of the Caliphate, JUH became involved in the Indian independence national struggle against the British crown and worked closely with the Indian National Congress party led by Gandhi. With the emergence of a serious tendency to establish an independent state for Muslims in a part of India, most of the JUH rejected the partition project. At the same time, some of them defected and established the "Association of Islamic Scholars" JUI, which pushed powerfully towards the establishment of Pakistan. Those who rejected the partition believed that after India’s independence from Britain, Muslims would not be deprived of their rights, as they were a substantial minority. They would retain their Islamic cultural identity in the newly independent Indian state as Gandhi promised, in addition to their fear of the fate of the Muslim minority in the Hindu regions if partition occurred. Whatever the case, the JUH retired from politics after India's independence and partition, and its activities were limited to cultural and educational aspects (Muhammad Rizwan- Manzoor Ahmed- Saima gul, 2018, 45-47; Mian, 1957, 93,117,136, 584).

In the opposite direction to the Indian scenario, the political situation of the Deobandis in Pakistan witnessed a Quantum leap. Since the establishment of the state of Pakistan in 1947 AD, the Association of Islamic Scholars in Pakistan JUI has emerged as an effective political force in the Pakistani arena. Its roles varied between parliamentary work and administrative executive governance in some regions. However, its primary

role was robust social mobilization and acting as a pressure group that influenced the internal and external decisions and policies of those who governed Pakistan.

JUI organized repeated and widespread popular campaigns with other Islamic forces to push the government to Islamize the Pakistani constitution, and it partially succeeded in the movements of the years 1949, 1951and 1972. In 1949, the pressure resulted in establishing the principle of sovereignty for God in the constitution, and the authority would be exercised within this significant principle. In 1951, twenty-two principles were agreed upon For the Islamic State, including building the state based on creed, not race or geographical affiliation, and imposing state laws based on the Quran and Sunnah. In 1972, an agreement was reached between the authority and JUI, according to which the applicable laws would be amended by Islamic law (Muhammad Rizwan- Manzoor Ahmed- Saima gul 2018, 49-53).

In the seventies, during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, the former president of Pakistan, and with the program of laws Islamization that was launched (before the Afghan jihad and the Iranian revolution) in four spheres: the judiciary, the penal code, economic activity (imposing zakat) and education. Previous Measures led to the general rise of the Deobandis officially (by appointing them to various government positions) and popularly (through the expansion of madrassa networks)[16]. Ten years after Zia-ul-Haqq's era, more especially in the late nineties, during the reign of General Pervez Musharraf, and with his efforts to "reform" madrassas and impose government control over them and to replace some of the Islamic legislation applied in the Islamic Criminal Code (Hudud), tensions re-escalated between the military authority and religious parties in Pakistan, especially the Deobandi, who clung to the independence of their educational institutions (Riaz 2008, 109- 204).

Another aspect of the JUI's political activism is its leadership of mobilization to topple or oppose some governments, whether because of legislative or legal issues, as was the case of the recessive president General Ayyub Khan in the '60s.[17], Or for reasons of political dependence on the United States of America in its wars, as was the case

[16] C. Christine Fair, Islam and politics in Pakistan. The Muslim world after 9/11, Rand corporation, 2004, 275.
[17] Ibid, 51.

with General Pervez Musharraf at the beginning of the new millennium[18], or due to the deteriorating economic and living conditions, in addition to the accusations of fraud, favoritism, and support from the military establishment, as are the accusations leveled against Imran Khan, a famous former cricketer and prime minister since 2018[19].

It should be noted here that the history of the JUI in Pakistan witnessed several Divisions until the matter settled on two groups: JUI (Fazlur Rahman Branch), which is more concerned with Pakistani internal affairs and described as a flexible and pragmatic entity in its political positions and party alliances, and a strong sticker to the democratic process even in the face of fierce military establishment pressure, and at the same time a strong opposer of any political violence in Pakistan (Fida Ur Rahman 2018, 212-214). While The JUI (Sami al-Haq branch) is more concerned and active in the Afghan issue, to the extent that its leader, Mawlawi Sami al-Haq's extensive educational network, with Dar al-Ulum al-Haqqiyyah at its heart, is described by some researchers as the Harvard of Taliban, "Darul Uloom Haqqania is to the Taliban as Harvard was to the Kennedy administration," Being the institution from which nearly ninety percent of Taliban leaders studied or graduated (Riaz 2008, 31; Sami al-Haq 2015, 31).

Regardless of evaluating the performance of the two JUIs and their leaders in different eras, and what is being raised about the Corruption of some leaders Or functional roles in favor of the Pakistani military establishment (the de facto ruler) against the mainstream secular and socialist political parties in Pakistan, or forming a strategic alliance with the military while prioritizing mutual interests over any other rights[20] (Metcalf 2002,13). However, what concerns us more here is to draw attention to the political roles played or may be played in the future by the Deobandi madrasas' networks. These intellectually, financially, and structurally independent social groups from the modern state and its institutions. These madrassas constituted and are still constituting an effective socio-political force that is resistant to cultural dissolution or

[18] Maulana Fazl, Samiul Haq under house arrest, Dawn, 8 October 2001. https://www.dawn.com/news/506/maulana-fazl-samiul-haq-under-house-arrest.
[19] Al-Jazeera Net. "Mubārah 'al-Miḍrab' wa-'al-'Imāmah' fī Bākistān... Khān fī Muwājahat Faḍl al Raḥmān." November 2, 2019. Accessed December 15, 2024. https://surl.li/quyfoc.
[20] International Crisis Group, *ICG Asia Report No. 49*, March 20, 2003, I-19.

structural dismantling despite the many soft and complex challenges, both locally and internationally.

3.3.5. Deobandi Jihad Movements

Some may think that the jihad of the Deobandi school began with the Taliban movement inside Afghan territory in the mid-1990s as a result of civil war, internal chaos, and a political vacuum. Others may believe that the Deobandi jihad began in the eighties in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets, encouraged by the Pakistani authorities, especially former President Zia al-Haq.

Despite the great importance of the foregoing, the matter is further and more profound than that. In the researcher's view, the Deobandi thought was hostile to the values of Western modernity, and the Deobandi societies ascetic lifestyle, avoiding consumerism in addition to the spirit and the goal for which Deobandi madrasas were established (the foundation for confronting colonialism); This trilogy preserved what can be called the culture of 'susceptibility to jihad' in the Deobandi memory practice since its foundation, even though the significant Deobandi political parties adopted a peaceful reformist approach in Pakistan and an apolitical stance in India and other countries (Metcalf 2002, 15).

Sheikh Sami al-Haq stated, "Even before the Pakistani government had an Afghan policy, we used to send our Mujahideen to fight next to the Afghan Mujahideen." This claim is reinforced by the continuation of many Deobandi schools in calling for jihad (with and without Pakistani authorities' confirmation) even after the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan at the end of 2001[21].

The history of the Deobandi jihad goes back to the participation of the Deobandi scholars in the armed resistance against British rule at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to leading the famous silk letters movement in the second decade of the twentieth century, one more time, against the British colonizers (Miyan, 2012, viii- xii). Also, participated in the struggle for

[21] ICG Asia Report N°49, Pakistan: the Mullahs and the military, international crisis group, 20 March 2003, 13.

Kashmir against the Indian army in the mid-forties through the Deobandi Pashtun tribes[22], Up to the contemporary armed movements, most notably The Taliban movement in Afghanistan.

3.3.6. Armed Deobandi Map

We can divide the armed Deobandi movements into two main categories: Pakistani groups and the Afghan Taliban.

The Pakistani groups:

- Anti-Shia groups (Sipah Sahaba, Lashkar Jhangvi)

The Sipah Sahaba group (which means the Prophet's Companion's Army) was established in Pakistan in 1985 as a reaction to the expansion of Shiite political influence in Pakistan after the Iranian revolution in 1979. The group aimed to create a purely Sunni state in Pakistan. The group's main military activity was targeting the presence and influence of the Shiites.

It has launched numerous and significant attacks against them in recent decades. Sipah Sahaba is at the head of the groups accused of engaging in sectarian fighting alongside other Shiite parties, such as the Movement Sipah Muhammad and the Jafari movement in Pakistan and others. Many believe that Iran and some Arab political regimes had a hand in fueling this ongoing sectarian war. The second group is Lashkar Jhangvi, which emerged from the womb of Sipah Sahaba in 1994 and followed the same approach (Riaz 2008, 109- 113).

- Kashmiri groups: (Islamic Jihad Movement - Mujahideen Movement - Muhammad's Army)

In another context, and apart from the sectarian war, Kashmiri Deobandi jihad groups were established in the last two decades of the twentieth century (the era of the Afghan

[22] Ibid.

jihad and its aftermath). Its political agenda was summed up in two matters: the liberation of Indian- occupied Kashmir and its annexation to Pakistan, and then the complete Islamization of the Pakistan state. In fact, besides its fighting in Afghanistan, the main activity of the Kashmiri groups was against the occupying Indian authorities in Kashmir and India.

It is worth mentioning here that the Mujahideen Movement and Muhammad's Army adopted some of the "global jihadism" ideology and tactics, carrying out many military tactics and operations similar to al Qaeda's approach (such as hijacking civilian aircraft and targeting Western tourists), before gradually reversing that and returning to its original program.[23].

It is unknown whether these groups have any participation in armed action against the government in Pakistan. Some observers attribute this to their keenness to maintain their large infrastructure. Stretching in Pakistan, this structure includes schools, health centers, properties and offices, and its affiliated organizational networks.[24]

- Tehreek-e-Taliban (Pakistan Taliban TTP)

On the other side of the Kashmiri groups, the Pakistani Taliban movement TTP (the newer Deobandi group) is at the forefront of the groups that are militarily clashing with the government and the Pakistani army, and it announced its existence in December 2007 as a result of the alliance of about 40 tribal factions. In its beginnings between 2002 and 2004, the group's discourse and work focused primarily on supporting the jihad against the invading NATO forces in Afghanistan To restore the rule of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. However, as a result of many factors, foremost of which is the army's continuous campaigns against the semi-autonomous tribal areas (TTP stronghold), the Pakistani Taliban movement's program shifted to a clash with the Pakistani authorities and army.[25].

[23] Muhammed Amir Rana, Pakistan- based militant groups & prospects of their re-integration: A structural analysis. Mantraya Occasional paper, 12 March 2018. 2-3-8-9.
[24] Ibid, 12.
[25]Ibid, 2-10.

Since then, the group's priorities have shifted to the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan, in addition to its association with global jihadi groups. The presence of the group is limited to the tribal areas of Pakistan, and its establishment was like a decentralized alliance between Many local factions. From an ideological and organizational links perspective, the group is greatly influenced and attached to the global jihadist organizations and networks[26].

On the ground, at the local level, it is described as a fighting power combining clashing with the authorities and contributing to sectarian war simultaneously, In addition to targeting the parties' members and scholars participating in the political process in Pakistan (Semple 2016, 72; Fida Ur Rahman, 2018, 217-218).

- Afghan Taliban

The largest and most prominent armed movement (claimed to be Deobandi by the vast majority of studies), both regionally and globally, is the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. Since transitioning from an armed social movement to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in 1996, the movement's political narrative and military objectives have remained consistent. Its central focus has been to preserve Islamic rule in Afghanistan, as represented by the IEA, and to fight against those who oppose this rule, including foreign colonial forces and their allied local governments in Afghanistan (Semple 2016, 65-67).

From the author's point of view, the Afghan Taliban model seems to be the closest to the approach of the founders of the Deobandi movement. It combines three issues:

- Preserving the strong bonds between the armed movement (the Taliban) and the broader Deobandi scholarly movement. This is clearly noticed through the great support the Taliban enjoys from the scholarly Deobandi movement.[27].

[26]Ibid, 12.
[27] Dietrich Reetz. From madrassa to university (2010), 118. DAWN newspaper, JUI-S leaders say party still supporting Afghan Taliban, 8 April 2016.

- The historical trajectories of the movement: The start was from a purely religious education, isolated from the influences of modernity and modern life. Then, the armed social movement came, and finally, the free political rise away from the political paths and structures set by the colonial powers and post-colonial states. (Zaeef, 2010, xxii-xxiii)

- Distancing the movement from sectarian discourses and wars[28] And focusing on confronting the colonizer and its followers.

It is good to remind here that despite the swift overthrow of the Taliban regime in In Afghanistan in 2001, the movement succeeded in gathering its power and leading a jihad resistance for nearly two decades in the face of an international coalition led by the US and signed a historical agreement on February 29th, 2020, that included the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

If we go back two decades, specifically in April 2001, we will find ourselves in front of a large international meeting and a massive religious gathering in Taro Jhaba town near the Pakistani Peshawar city on the 150th anniversary of the launch of the Deobandi scholarly movement. The announced goal of this event, attended by tens of thousands, is to review the achievements of the Deobandi movement throughout that period. The event included delegations and senior leadership figures representing the Deobandi scholarly, advocacy missionary, political, and jihad organizations, Starting with the organizer of the ceremony: JUI (the most potent religious-political party in Pakistan) and the JUH (A huge scholarly-educational group), the Tabligh and Dawah Jamaat (a global advocacy missionary group), up to the representatives of The Taliban government (the rulers of Afghanistan at that time). Despite the apparent differences between the agendas of these groups, the general collective purpose of this gathering was to Demonstrate the political power of the Deobandi religious madrassas, support the principle of the Islamic government, and the rule of the Taliban politically and morally, and show solidarity with it in the face of Western sanctions.[29].

[28] Karam al-Ḥafīyān, Malāmiḥ al-Mashrūʿal-Siyāsī li-Ḥarakat Ṭālibān, (Isṭanbūl: al-Maʿhad al-Miṣrī li-al-Dirāsāt al-Siyāsiyyah wa-al-Istrātījiyyah, 2019), al-Nuqṭah al-Khāmisah.
[29] Dietrich Reetz. The Deoband universe, 152-153.

3.4. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter attempted to present and analyze the religious stream from which the founders of the Taliban were raised. A relatively unknown major movement was the Deobandi movement. This movement has had a vast cultural, social, and political impact in significant countries and areas in many parts of the Islamic world. It is classified within the traditional conservative Islamic streams that avoid interaction with all kinds of modern culture and knowledge and is deficient in making any contributions or achievements in the modern sciences and technological fields.

However, this research showed some of the movement's religious educational system and organizational structural and activist specialties that qualified it to build robust and effective transnational scholarly, missionary, political institutes, armed movements, and cohesive communities and societies.

The Deobandi scholarly institutes in the Indian subcontinent and its surroundings have become one of the most active, if not the most active, Islamic knowledge centers across the Muslim world, and their efforts in preserving and spreading classical Islamic sciences and morals are well-known. Most importantly, the independence of these scholarly “castles” from the interventions of colonial and postcolonial Governments tampering with their work and curricula. This was achieved by activating the role of Muslim societies in financing and protecting their madrassas and spreading an ascetic, anti-materialistic Islamic culture.

Also, the Deobandi political parties in Pakistan succeeded in acting as a political pressure group capable of forcing the authorities to pass Islamic laws, amend internal and external policies, cancel governmental and constitutional decisions, or cling to the independence of their extensive educational systems and madrassa networks, however, in the other side their major parties in Pakistan was accused of making a strategic alliance with the military establishment and favoring mutual interests on others rights.

In terms of preaching and missionary groups and efforts, what many people do not know is that the most prominent Islamic revival advocacy group, the Tablighi Jamaat,

is one of the Deobandi school movements, and it works in coordination with its leadership.

At the level of jihad movements, the Deobandi school has produced various models, ranging from resistance and functional to sectarian organizations. However, the most potent group claimed to be Deobandi by many authors is the Afghan Taliban. It stands as the most successful jihad movement militarily and politically in the post-colonial Islamic world, at least in my view.

Finally, the main observation worthy of reflection in the Deobandi movement model and its different manifestations is the great degree of cooperation between many Deobandi components and entities, regardless of their scholarly, educational, missionary, political, or jihad programs. If this has any indication, it indicates a great degree of centrality, independence, and coherence of the Deobandi movement and its epistemological, ideological, and structural paradigms.

CHAPTER IV

THE RISE AND RULE OF TALIBAN (1994-2001)

4.1. Afghanistan and its Religious Class: A Historical View

Before delving into the story of the establishment and rise of the Taliban in the 1990s, it is necessary to briefly address Afghanistan's history, with a focus on the distinctive ethnicities within the country and the position and role of its religious class within society. Afghanistan, a landlocked country at the heart of Asia, has a rich and complex history. Its strategic location has made it a crossroads of various cultures and empires throughout history. For thousands of years, this land has been subjected to invasions by different foreign powers, starting with the Persians under King Cyrus, followed by the Greeks led by Alexander the Great, and then the Mongols under Genghis Khan. Each of these empires left its mark on this land, which has always been the center of major wars and historical events. The Afghan people have consistently proven themselves as formidable fighters, resistant to foreign invaders (Barfield 2010, 1).

4.1.1. A Religious People

History tells us that the Afghan people are inherently religious, defending their adopted faith with all their spiritual and martial strength. This was true for Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and other local religions, such as star worship and idol worship. Since the Arab Muslim conquest of Afghanistan in the 8th century CE, the people gradually embraced Islam over several centuries. Some Afghan communities converted to Islam early on, while others resisted it, leading to clashes and battles between the Muslims and certain Afghan tribes. As the majority of Afghans gradually converted to Islam due to various factors, including military conquest, missionary efforts, and the influence of Sufi orders, Afghanistan became a stronghold for the defense and propagation of Islam. Throughout history, several great Islamic empires, such as the Ghaznavid, Ghorid, Hotak, and Abdali states, emerged from Afghanistan

and played a key role in spreading or defending Islam, especially in the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia (Barfield 2010, 91-92; Haqqani 1997, 33).

The Lebanese historian and writer Shakib Arslan (1869–1946) famously described the Afghan people's attachment to Islam, stating: "If there remained only one pulse for Islam in the world, I would see it beating in the people of the mountains of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush, with their resolve standing firm" (Arsalan 1973, 197). This statement particularly applies to the Pashtun ethnic group, which represents the majority of the population in southern and southeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. Historically, the term "Pashtun" was synonymous with "Afghan." As the anthropologist Thomas Barfield notes, Afghanistan was once known as the land of the Pashtuns. Recently, however, the term "Afghan" has come to have a more nationalistic connotation, referring to all people living in Afghanistan, though some ethnic groups still use it exclusively for the Pashtun population (Barfield 2010, 24).

4.1.2. Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a highly ethnically diverse country, home to around 21 different ethnic groups. The largest of these are the Pashtuns (40–60%), followed by the Tajiks (25–30%), Uzbeks (6.6%), Hazaras (3.3–6.6%), and smaller groups such as the Farsis (5.2%), Aimaqs (1.3%), Qizilbash (1.3%), and Turkmen (1.2%). In addition, there are small communities of Baluchis, Arabs, Mongols, Kyrgyz, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews. The vast majority of Afghans are Sunni Muslims, primarily adhering to the Hanafi madhab (82–90%), while the Hazaras, Farsis, and Qizilbash are Shi'a Muslims, mostly following the Imami school (8–15%). The two official languages are Pashto and Dari (a variant of Persian), with other regional languages, such as Uzbek, Turkmen, and Baluchi, also spoken by various groups (Haqqani 1997, 9–10).

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), the famous philosopher, historian, and political activist, when discussing the ethnic diversity of Afghanistan, used the term "Afghani" to specifically refer to the Pashtuns. While Islam remains a way of life for the majority of ethnic groups in Afghanistan, unlike in many other Muslim-majority countries, al-Afghani's observations about the Pashtuns' religiosity seem

exceptional even within Afghanistan. The Pashtuns are characterized by their rigorous observance of religious practices, such as prayer and fasting, with no distinction made between men and women or between urban and rural populations. They highly revere Islamic law and strongly identify with their Islamic and ethnic identity, believing that "true faith and pure Islam exist only among the Afghan and Arab peoples." Alongside their strong religious fervor, they also possess a deeply tribal social structure, with a highly organized military system marked by strict obedience to their leaders, as described by al-Afghani. Despite their fervent devotion to religion and ethnicity, the Pashtuns have not historically oppressed other religious or ethnic groups in Afghanistan. They are known for offering protection to those seeking refuge with them, often at the cost of their own lives and resources. This aligns with their reputation for austerity, bravery, and deeply rooted nomadic traditions, even among urban dwellers.

However, they are also described as being prone to looting and infighting among their tribes. Moreover, some Pashtuns have a strong interest in acquiring knowledge, and their religious scholars hold significant sway among the general population, with a social and spiritual influence that often rivals that of the political rulers, who may be compelled to comply with their demands. This power could, at times, be exploited for personal gain or to settle scores (al-Afghani 2015, 61–69). Historically, the ruling class in Afghanistan has also been primarily Pashtun (Barfield 2010, 25).

The second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Tajiks, who are also Sunni Muslims following the Hanafi madhab, though they differ significantly from the Pashtuns in language, culture, social structure, and political role. Tajiks are a non-tribal group and are often more associated with urban life than the Pashtuns. They are described as the least cohesive among all Afghan ethnicities, generally identifying themselves by their cities or regions rather than anything else. They are concentrated in the capital, Kabul (in the east), the western city of Herat, and the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, but their largest concentration is in the northeastern mountainous regions. Persian is their primary language, which serves as the language of culture and diplomacy, making them influential despite never having held political power in Afghanistan. According to al-Afghani, Tajiks are more intelligent and cultured than Pashtuns, and their rural populations are known for

their skill in archery and their frequent internal feuds and bloodshed in the villages of Kabul's mountains (al-Afghani 2015, 70–71; Barfield 2010, 26).

In northern Afghanistan, the Uzbeks are concentrated in the city of Balkh, and the Turkmen are located in the northwest between the cities of Herat and Maimana. Both groups are also Sunni Muslims adhering to the Hanafi madhab, with Turkic origins, speaking Turkish languages, but Uzbeks also speak their own Uzbek language. The Uzbeks are predominantly farmers and have a notable tradition of horsemanship, while the Turkmen were historically known for their raids near the Afghani-Irani borders and for selling captives. During the Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil war, the Uzbeks grew in political power, particularly in northern Afghanistan. In central Afghanistan, the Hazaras and Aimaqs are located.

The Hazaras are Shi'a Muslims, while the Aimaqs are Sunni Muslims. Both groups have Mongolian roots, although some believe the Aimaqs have Turkish origins and speak various Turkic dialects. The Hazaras are described as wild, nomadic, and irreligious, even though they were openly hostile towards the Sunni population a long time ago. They are also known for their courage, as well as for looting and plundering. Additionally, they are involved in the production of fine woolen cloth. The Hazaras control important mountain passes in the Hindu Kush, which separate southern and northern Afghanistan. Some studies mention that they have faced persecution and marginalization by certain Afghan rulers. As for Aimaqs, they are either nomadic tribes living in the mountains or semi-nomadic pastoralists in rural areas.

The Farsiwan, commonly mistaken as Tajiks, are primarily Shi'a Muslims and are located in the western provinces near the Iranian border. The Qizilbash, a minority group of Turkic origin who speak Persian, are also Shi'a Muslims. Despite their small number (1.3%), they have historically held important administrative and intellectual positions within the Afghan state. This is due to several reasons: First, because of their historical roots, as they were part of the military elites that defended the Afghan state against those who rebelled against it in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Second, because they are one of the most intellectual and educated social groups, Afghan kings previously appointed them as teachers and

tutors for their children. Third, because they employ the practice of taqiyya, according to some studies (al-Afghani 2015, 71-73; Barfield 2010, 26-30; Haqqani 1997, 27-29). Afghanistan also has some very small communities, such as the Kyrgyz, Baluch, Arabs, Indians, Hindus, and Jews, though their social, political, or religious influence is marginal.

4.1.3. The Religious Class

Shifting from the ethnic composition of Afghanistan to a closer examination of the traditional religious class (From which the Taliban emerged) and its political influence since the establishment of the Afghanistan state in 1747 and till the Taliban gained power in 1996, we see that over a span of roughly 250 years, thirty kings and presidents ruled Afghanistan. According to Pakistani researcher Mawlawi Hafizullah Haqqani, thirteen of these rulers (43.3%) came to power through religious endorsements and pledges (fatwas) from scholars, while eleven (36.6%) were ousted after their legitimacy was revoked through similar religious rulings. The reasons for these uprisings by the religious scholars were varied. In some instances, the catalyst was the misconduct of the guards of an Afghan ruler, such as Shah Mahmud. This prompted the scholar Mir Waiz Sayyid Ahmad to issue a fatwa during a Friday sermon, calling for the killing of the guards (who were from the Qizilbash tribe). When Shah Mahmud defended his guards, Mir Waiz issued another fatwa in 1804 to depose him.

On other occasions, the reason for the scholars' opposition was that the ruler had become a puppet of foreign occupiers, as was the case with Shah Shuja, who aligned with the British. This situation led to the cessation of prayers for the ruler during Friday sermons, marking the first signs of delegitimization in traditional Islamic jurisprudence. The scholars then declared jihad against the British, which began in the Barshak region of Kandahar. They turned their standard bearers' cloaks into war flags, inscribing "Hasbuna Allah" (God is sufficient for us) on them in 1841. Additionally, the scholar Mir Haji in Kabul led the resistance against the British, and mosque preachers rallied the people, leading to a swift and historic defeat of the British, forcing their withdrawal from Afghanistan within a year. During the second British invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent capture of the Afghan Amir,

religious scholars played a central role, not only in declaring jihad but also in leading it. Two prominent scholars from Zabul and Ghazni (Mullah Meshk and Mullah Abdul Ghafur) were instrumental in this effort. Mullah Meshk, in particular, assumed temporary leadership of Afghanistan until a new Amir could be elected. A pivotal moment in modern Afghan history, which could have dramatically altered the nation's trajectory, occurred in 1928 when Amir Amanullah Khan sought to modernize Afghanistan in the image of contemporary Turkey. He introduced several controversial measures, such as banning the Azan (call to prayer in Kabul), prohibiting the hijab for women, allowing women to shoot their husbands if they opposed these changes, moving the official holiday from Friday to Thursday, restricting religious education, sending girls to Turkey for studies, and promoting Western lifestyles. In response, scholars in Paktika and Nangarhar, eastern Afghanistan, issued fatwas declaring Amanullah an infidel and calling for his deposition. This sparked a popular uprising, and the people forced him to flee, bringing an end to his reign (Haqqani 1997, 38-42; Mutmain 2019, 20-22).

Following this event, no ruler dared to implement such radical reforms until the communists seized power in the late 1970s and attempted to impose communist reforms and ideologies on the Afghan population. However, at the beginning of the rise of communists, religious scholars didn’t oppose them, primarily because they were unaware of the communists' plans. Instead, it was the Islamists who took the first steps (Haqqani 1997, 43). This issue is debated: researchers such as Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, in their book “The Fountainhead of Jihad,” provide evidence and documentation showing that the first calls for jihad and confrontations with communism came from religious scholars and students of religious schools in eastern Afghanistan, led by Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani, months before the political Islamists, based in Pakistan, issued their declaration (Brown and Rassler 2013, 45).

Mullah Abdul Hai Mutmain, the spokesperson for Mullah Mohammad Omar, leader of the Taliban, highlighted another dimension, pointing out that the Afghan people initially did not respond positively to the political Islamists. However, when local mullahs within Afghanistan declared jihad against communism, the people responded by taking to the streets with axes, sticks, and shovels, attacking

government buildings and officials. From his perspective, it was the Ulama (religious sciences scholars) who played the most crucial role in sparking this jihad on the ground. This jihad expanded over time, involving various factions against the Afghan communists and the Soviet invasion, which began in 1979. Afghanistan was ultimately liberated after the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989, and the communist government collapsed in 1992 (Mutmain 2019, 19, 32).

In the same year, political Islamist parties took control of the Afghan government, and religious scholars and the traditional religious class returned to their homes and teaching and educational roles, as they had always done throughout the past 250 years. They rose in rebellion and jihad when religious principles were violated or sacred matters were threatened, then they brought to power those they deemed deserving but never acquired the power to themselves (Zaeef 2010, 52: Haqqani 1997, 44), So, what changed that caused the Taliban to hold on to power and not hand it over to others? Did a paradigm shift occur? And if so, how? These are the questions we will explore in this chapter.

4.1.4. Common Misconception

First of All, it is noteworthy to correct the widespread misconception about the era of the foundation of the Taliban. Actually, it wasn't in 1994; however, according to one of the most prominent Taliban figures, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, in his unique book "My Life with Taliban" " he states that the movement was present and identified as "Taliban" in the form of armed groups of religious students and scholars within mujahedeen ranks in the 1980s during the Soviet Union invasion (Zaeef 2010, xvii-xviii).

4.2. Taliban between IR and Ibn Khaldun

The mainstream literature on the Taliban movement in Afghanistan generally perceives the Taliban phenomenon using solely a political international relations lens and approach. According to this widespread approach, the Taliban is considered a Pakistani-American product produced within the Cold War context and conditions, with the purpose of opposing the Soviet and communist influence in

Afghanistan. Later, it developed dramatically to be part of the global terrorism agenda (Crews and Amin Tarzi, eds. 2008, 7-11). However, in this chapter, I attempt to argue that this is a misleading and reductionist theory, ignoring the more crucial inner factors and the deeper, more effective Afghani socio-political changes that led to this extreme change in the Afghani power distribution scene and the birth of the Taliban.

Relevantly, a mixed group of classical socio-political Theories extracted from Ibn Khaldun's masterpiece al-Muqaddimah seems to provide a helpful framework in analyzing the fundamental factors in and surrounding the founding of Taliban, its rise and rule.

Ibn Khaldun explains the rise and fall of states and civilizations through the concept of asabiyyah, which refers to group feeling and social solidarity. This solidarity exists in various forms across different societies, from nomadic tribes to ruling dynasties and powerful states. Generally, nomadic tribes and rural societies are less powerful than urbanized states due to their limited social structure. Each tribe typically only accepts a leader from their own lineage, which constrains their potential for collective power. On the other hand, states have more complex and advanced social organizations with stronger economic, legal, political, and military institutions. However, when nomads or tribes, often living in deserts or rural peripheries, unite under religious call and leadership, they can overthrow ruling dynasties and states, replacing them in power. Ibn Khaldun highlights this process when discussing the origins of great states, stating: "Sovereignty results from superiority. Superiority results from group feeling. Only with God's assistance in upholding His religion do individual desires align, leading to a shared purpose and unifying hearts". This is because nomadic tribes are more courageous and fiercer, morally superior to sedentary people, and possess a stronger sense of group feeling based on blood, kinship ties, or similar bonds. Over time, however, they begin to lose their asabiyyah gradually, and if they do not maintain their savage, united nature, fresh, united nomads or tribes will eventually come to defeat and replace them. Thus, the historical cycle continues every three or four generations. (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 473-496, 510-513).

Therefore, generally, according to Ibn Khaldun, the socio-political deep change comes from the powerful mobilization and revolution of Bedouins or rural tribes, not from uprisings in urban centers, and the religious call and leadership performs a critical role in increasing the strength of this movement. Interestingly, on the other hand, Ibn Khaldun coined an extremely relevant rule to the research subject; he emphasized that religious calls can't be victorious without asabiyyah, and then he continues to mention historical incidents of failed revolutions carried out by religious scholars or common people. He demonstrates his words by saying that rulers and regimes are firmly founded and not removed or destroyed except with extensive efforts and group feelings of tribes. One last point he states is that each dynasty rules certain areas and lands in proportion to its power and group feeling, beyond which any extension will have a negative effect (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 519-527).

Verily, all previous theories, in a way or another, are closely related to the foundation, rise, and rule of the Taliban, and throughout the chapter, we will pass through them and check to what extent they were manifested and in what manners they make Taliban different from many other Islamic movements in Afghanistan and beyond.

4.3. Taliban's Backgrounds

4.3.1. Religious Roots: The Deobandi Madrassas

Accordingly, if we want to explore and trace the first fundamental root of the Taliban's identity construction, no doubt, we will find ourselves in direct contact with the educational system and milieu from within most Taliban leaders passed through or graduated from: the madrassa networks (Islamic traditional schools) and especially the Deobandi school. The previous chapter discussed Deobandi Madrassas' special characteristics, principles, and structures in detail, but it seems noteworthy to mention them again in brief.

These religious Madrassas are broadly spread in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and both countries are within a few countries in the Islamic world which witnessed

development and spread of these kinds of education network systems in rural areas through the twentieth century (Roy 2002, 9).

The first Deobandi madrasas were established by a revival of the Islamic movement in India after the 1857 catastrophic end of the political legacy of Muslims in India, which became entirely under British colonization. These madrassas were established for two reasons: to keep the spirit of fighting colonial rule and to preserve Muslim beliefs and traditions from the threat of the British educational and cultural system through the continuous presence and production of scholars educating Muslims, especially in rural areas in India[30].

The Deobandi teaching, which many Taliban leaders received, whether in Afghanistan or Pakistan, neither included English or Western subjects nor emphasized Islamic logic and philosophy. However, it was composed exclusively of two interconnected parts: specifically chosen curriculums from the Islamic tradition in fields of Fiqh (Jurisprudence), hadith (prophet's sayings), and Quran studies, and inner and outer ritual practical practices represented very good in the following statement: "diffusion of scripturalist practices and cultivation of inner spiritual life". (Metcalf 1978, 26).

The former represented a predominant unified school of thought in South Asia within the Hanafi Maturidi school. The latter could signify the ascetic attitude spread among many Taliban leaders and members (Zaeef 2010, xvii). The mentioned points associated with their general Taqlid (conformist) mentality, in the researcher's view, can demonstrate the lack of serious ideological or organizational divisions throughout the movement's history despite the tremendous local and international challenges and efforts working on dividing the movement.

[30] Ansari, Mohammad Asjad, "Modern education on madrasas: a perspective study of Dar al-Uloom Deoband". Asia Pacific Journal of research. Vol: I. Issue XLIV, October 2016. 103.

4.3.2. Social Structure: Rural Transnational Pashtun Tribes

The second fundamental root of Taliban formation is the rural Pashtun tribal structure starting from Kandahar province, stretching via southern and eastern Afghanistan alongside the border with Pakistan and extending beyond the borders into the tribal regions in west Pakistan. Pashtun tribes are equally distributed between Afghanistan and Pakistan, representing the majority and traditional rulers of Afghanistan and the second ethnic group and majority in western provinces in Pakistan, and a substantial intra and inter-sense of ethnic identity among and between both (Zaeef 2010, 1-2; Rahimi 2008, 13).

The elements of this ethnic, social solidarity refer, in addition to the common religion, language, and tradition, to a robust social code known as "Pashtunwali." The uniqueness of the Pashtunwali code tradition is that Though Pashtun tribes have heterogenic traditions, Pashtunwali stands as the unified common tradition among various Pashtun tribes.

The application of a traditional code of behavior is existential in honor of Afghans and especially Pashtuns. Pashtunwali is composed of many codes, but three come on top: Melmastia (hospitality), Badal (revenge), and Nanawateh (asylum); for a Pashtun, it's a moral obligation to fulfill these codes, whatever the situation is, and whoever is against it. This can explain the Taliban's actions later. The Last crucial point important to mention about the Taliban and their rural Pashtun tribal background is the historical and contemporary relation between the Pashtun Tribes and the state in Afghanistan. Pashtun tribes in rural areas and tribal regions have always maintained cultural, economic, and administrative autonomy and retained strong tribal links. Interestingly, the Tribes had always realized themselves as the center, not the modern state. This is due to several reasons: 1. their presence preceded the modern central state by centuries 2. Common perception within the tribes that the modern state is anti-Islamic 3. Self-sufficiency in services due to the concentric social rings surrounding individuals: "An Afghan individual, particularly a Pashtun, rarely requires the services of outsiders" (Rahimi 2008, 15, 18-19).

4.3.3. Political Passiveness

Like most conservative religious streams in the post-colonial era in the Muslim world, the Taliban (students at religious schools) adopted a politically passive approach and focused on traditional religious education and teaching; "the Taliban mostly eschewed politics." The first somewhat reactionary political involvement in the Taliban's history can be traced to the late 1970s, months before the Soviet Union invasion, when the communist government started to target them. In return, the Taliban started to attack the government and its supporters. Afterward, during the Soviet Union occupation and communist Afghani regime rule, the Taliban formed its special fighting groups in southern Afghanistan, especially in Kandahar province, and emphasized religiously educated fighters joining its ranks; they also established judicial courts based on Islamic law (Zaeef 2010, 10).

However, they didn't have any political strategy, program, party, or even ambition. Actually, their groups were functioning under the umbrella of other traditional Afghani parties politically active at that time: Harakat Inqilab Islami of Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi and Hizb-i Islami of Yunus Khales (Roy 2002, 14). Mullah Umar himself, the founder and leader of the politically active Taliban movement in 1994, was a local military leader in one of the fronts of Harakat Inqilab Islami. Later, after their participation in the defeat and withdrawal of the soviet occupation in 1989 and the fall of the communist regime in 1992, the more popular Islamist parties formed the new government, and the traditional Taliban returned to their religious school lessons. But, unexpectedly, a couple of years later, the Taliban started to act and became, surprisingly, in a few years, the most potent social and political power in Afghanistan for the past thirty years (Mutmain 2019, 41-50).

To sum up, the Taliban movement's roots are similar to a great extent to most conservative traditional Islamic streams spread throughout the Muslim world from east to west. The similarities include the three main features mentioned in the previous pages. Firstly, there is an emphasis on education, solely the traditional religious subjects, and neglecting all other kinds of knowledge and education. Secondly, the conservative tribal, rural anti-modernity social background, and thirdly, the political passiveness via not engaging in any peaceful or violent form of political

activism. So, what changed the Taliban in this sharp, deep-rooted change, and in what did it change? How it became this powerful armed socio-political force capable of defeating the widest-militarily international coalition, NATO, and pushing other superpowers (Russia and China) to recognize its political legitimacy. I'll try to provide adequate answers in the coming pages.

4.4. The Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan (1994-1996)

For a comprehensive understanding of the rise of the Taliban, we need to have a deep insight into the most critical manifold religious drives, social conditions, ethnic compositions, pre-Taliban Islamist government performance and rule, geo-political considerations, and international policy dynamics.

After the defeat and withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the collapse of the Najibullah communist regime in Kabul in 1992, the most influential Islamist armed political parties in the 1980s were Hizb-i Islami, headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jamiat-i Islami led by charismatic military leader Ahmad Shah Masood, both leaders, and parties failed to reach a consensus and establish a unified government. Unfortunately, an unprecedented wave of violence and bloody civil war exploded throughout the country, not to forget the role of remnants of the previous communist parties. Actually, some of them sided with Masood, while others allied with Hekmatyar (Roy 2002, 6-7; Zaeef 2010, 52). This major bloody infighting continued for two years and resulted in the widespread phenomena of armed gangs creating tremendous illegal check posts to collect taxes from passerby trucks, vehicles, and passengers, in addition to robbing public and private property and committing massive- criminal activities, including killing and rapping which became common[31]. Kandahar, the hometown of many prominent leaders of the Taliban as well as of the Pashtun ethnic majority (the traditional rulers of Afghanistan since 1747), was not an exception; on the contrary, it was a disastrous major battlefield for both: the chaotic civil war infighting and daily armed gangs' unsocial criminalities (Zaeef 2010, 55-60).

[31] Aliya, Brahimi. "The Taliban's evolving ideology". LSE Global Governance Working Paper WP 02/2010 July 2010, 2.

4.4.1. The Initial Mobilization

A group of students of madrassas decided to react in response to an awful crime where an entire Afghan family was killed, raped, and cruelly burned by a gang checkpoint on the way between Herat and Kandahar provinces. Tens of mullahs (students of religious sciences who hadn't graduated yet) and a few mawlawis (religious scholars) gathered in the white mosque of Sangisar area in Kandahar and swore on the holy Quran to fight criminals and corruption and implement Islamic law. Mullah Mohamed Omar was chosen as the commander of the first founding group of the Taliban movement, and at this point, the story of the rise of the Taliban started (Zaeef 2010, 65).

Though the Taliban is more a mullah's movement rather than a Mawlawi's movement, elderly Mawlawis had an important participant as well as consulting and confirming role for Taliban mobilization; for instance, the famous public respected figure known as Mawlawi Pasani approved the Taliban starting action. (Semple 2014, 21; Zaeef 2010, 63). Until that moment, the movement didn't have any political roadmap, strategy, or intention to revolt against and topple the present Islamist government, still only reacting to the disastrous social conditions and corruption. Later, they asked for a stop to the disastrous infighting between two major Islamist factions in government and opposition, the expelling of the previous regime communists from the governmental ranks and forces, and the application of Islamic sharia law; no agreement was reached and fighting continued.

Surprisingly, from their first shot in September 1994 till September 1996, the Taliban was able to defeat all gangs and conflicting Islamist Mujahideen factions, restore social security and order in most of Afghanistan, and enter the capital Kabul victoriously on September 27th, 1996, after the Islamist government forces fled. In one of its initial actions, Taliban leaders forcibly extracted former communist president Najibullah, a Pashtun, from his refugee in a UN office (since 1992), killed him with a handgun, and hanged him publicly. Najibullah had been responsible for the deaths of thousands of Afghans during his tenure as the head of KhAD, the Afghan intelligence service, under Soviet occupation. The Taliban leaders chose to

execute him swiftly, fearing that arresting him would invite international pressure, which may lead to his survival (Mutmain 2019, 99).

4.4.2. Weighted Factors and Gathering Dynamics

An immediate question arises here: How was a newly born movement like the Taliban, with no previous political experience, capable of defeating all other factions and forces, taking power, and restoring order in most of Afghanistan in a relatively short period? In fact, the direct brief answer is linked to a combination of several religious, socio-economic, and political factors manifested perfectly in ibn Khaldun's theories of the rise and fall of dynasties. The decrease in asabiyyah (group feeling) of the rulers (political weakness or breakdown) and the success of religious leadership to unite rural tribes (with high asabiyyah) far from dynasty centers, the addition in Taliban's case is that the religious leadership is a complete social movement not just an individual.

In detail, The Taliban movement was formed by an active, successful mass mobilization of the madrassa students in the Afghani countryside. The rural population in Afghanistan is massively broad, forming about 80 percent of the Afghani population[32]. It is generally disintegrated from the urban areas, decentralized from the central state, and economically self-sufficient through its informal economy. The mentioned mobilization was not limited to the mullahs and madrassa students; rather, it was stimulated and led by them. Those mullah networks belong to the main religious stream in the Afghani countryside. Mullahs have a tremendous social role in Afghan villages: leading daily prayers in local mosques, teaching religious sciences in local madrassas, offering sharia advice, and regularly attending public events like marriage and funeral ceremonies. Moreover, another important element in the social structure of the countryside is the tribes and tribal law. The blood and kinship ties inside tribes are crucial for intra-solidarity, in addition to a unified moral code of behavior known as Pashtunwali (the way of Pashtun) and recognized and applied even by non-Pashtuns. (Rahman 2010, 1-15).

[32] International Monetary Fund. "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: poverty reduction strategy paper."*IMF Country Report* 08/153 (2008), 88.

A crucial point here is that solidarity inside tribes operates in a bottom-up manner, starting from family and extended family till reaching the clans, tribes, and tribal federations. However, Generally, the source of authority is on the individual and family level, tribes are not organized, and tribal leadership councils (jirga) don't function except temporarily during conflicts like wars, and their primary concern is to preserve their autonomy and self-interests unless a charismatic religious leader appears and units them to a more significant cause, this is what exactly happened with the Taliban founder mullah Mohamed Omar, and this was the first time the religious leader became the political leader in Afghanistan. (Rahimi 2008, 13-15; Roy 2002, 18).

4.4.3. Characteristics of Taliban Movement

It is noteworthy to point here to the different realms and backgrounds from which the Taliban and its rival Islamist movement leaders and members originated. Generally speaking, Taliban leaders are tribal men living in rural areas and studying at or graduating from religious madrassas, while Islamist movement leaders are mainly urban modern university grads (Roy 2002, 6). This could explain the different mobilization dynamics that led to the success of the former group and the failure of the latter. Although the Taliban have been critical of many local traditions, such as devotional festivals, their presence in tribal societies has been both organic and influential. This is due to their shared interpretation of Islam, which aligns with the traditional religious practices of these communities. Additionally, their high societal status, derived from their roles as religious scholars or mullahs, set them apart from Islamist leaders, who were often viewed as proponents of an anti-traditional understanding of Islam and were typically non-religious seminar graduates with rigid political ideologies. These factors collectively contributed to the Taliban's greater acceptance within tribal societies, as opposed to the more alienating figure of the Islamist leaders (Crews and Tarzi, eds. 2008, 35, 99,106). This directly applies to Tilly's resource mobilization theory and boundary activation theory. The former illustrates how the Taliban benefited from a shared identity, as "identity claims declare that 'we' (the claimants) constitute a unified force to be reckoned with." In contrast, the latter theory explains how the differing religious interpretations created

a divide, distancing the Islamists from the local society in tribal areas, as "boundary activation singles out one of these shared identities and its opposition to other identities" (Tilly 2006, 130-184).

In this context, it is noteworthy to mention that during the Soviet Union resistance era, the major resistance groups were seven; four were Islamists who were eager to establish a new state within Islamic principles, while the other three traditionalist movements were satisfied with the return of the previous king Zaheer shah, who ruled Afghanistan for four decades in the pre-communist era, and his time was known for national peace. Interestingly, most of the early Taliban members were fighters among the traditionalist movements, and the founder, Mullah Omar himself, was a local well-known military leader on the traditional Harakat al inqilab fronts (Mutmain 2019, 32-42). The previous facts will play a vital role in the perception and reaction of the US towards and during the Taliban expansion and gaining power between 1994-1996.

Returning back to the socio-political analysis of the rise of the Taliban, more precisely that connected to ethnic considerations, we will realize that it was the first time in 300 years that the authority fell into non-Pashtun hands (majority ethnic group), a unique event which provoked many Pashtuns from different political backgrounds to join Taliban in toppling the new authority (Roy 2002, 18). At that time, the authority was formed by a coalition of religious, ideological, and ethnic minorities, but actually, there were two major coalitions struggling for power with more complex subdivisions. The former was composed of The Tajiks led by the Tajik president Rabbani and defense minister Ahmad Shah Masood, allied with the communist Uzbek general Dostum, his Uzbek militia, together with the Shia Hazara minority in addition to the Perchamis communist party (mainly urban- non-Pashtuns). On the other side, the Pashtun prime minister, Hekmatyar, and his followers, who were mainly Pashtuns, together with the Khalqis communists (mainly rural Pashtuns). In fact, the division of power was more complex and fragmented, and the mentioned Alliances were so loose, ironically shifting from the side of Hekmatyar to Masood and vice versa. Afghanistan was witnessing a total breakdown of the social, economic, and political orders; warlords were ruling their specific areas and provinces, and ethnic polarization reached its peak levels. In terms of Geopolitics and

sectarianism, Iran was backing the governmental coalition headed by Masood due to its support and alliance with Shia minority forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were supporting the Sunni Pashtuns led by Hekmatyar (Rahman 2010, 36).

Upon the failure of Hekmatyar in toppling the governmental coalition, and with the mass mobilization and speedy victories of the Taliban, Pakistan shifted its support to the Taliban and opened the borders for the massive influx of Afghani madrassa students in Pakistan to join their fellows in Afghanistan (Roy 2002, 7-12). One last crucial point that facilitated the rise of the Taliban was its ambiguity and savvy during its march to Kabul. The international media was spreading news stating that the Taliban would topple the Islamist government to bring back the favored ruler in the American eyes: King Zahir Shah. Taliban didn't deliver any response until it strengthened and expanded its military power on the ground, gained more social popularity, and fixed its political alliance with Pakistan. Later, after seizing power in Kabul, the Taliban announced their refusal of the return of deposed king Zahir Shah, bringing great disappointment to the US administration as the foreign minister Madeleine Albright stated[33].

In brief, the rise of the Taliban can be seen as the emergence of peripheral traditional religious social powers in Afghanistan, with all their distinct characteristics and features. This occurred as a result of the decline of Russian hegemonic power following the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Wallerstein's world-systems theory provides a helpful framework to understand this phenomenon: "As a hegemonic power decline, there are always others who attempt to replace it, but such a replacement takes a long time, and ultimately another thirty years war" (Wallerstein 2004, 59). This anticipated chaos can trigger significant political and social upheaval, creating an environment where peripheral movements have the chance to emerge and consolidate power, which is precisely what happened in Afghanistan with the rise of the Taliban.

[33] Ahmad Zaidan. "Limaadhā Najahat Ṭālibān wa Akhfqat al-Qā'idah." part 2. 12 January 2018. https://www.aljazeera.net/blogs/2018/1/12/%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b0%d8%a7-%d9%86%d8%ac%d8%ad%d8%aa-%d8%b7%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%a7%d9%86-%d9%88%d8%a3%d8%ae%d9%81%d9%82%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%af%d8%a9-2.

This socio-political change theory aligns in a sense with Ibn Khaldun's framework on the rise of *asabiyyah* in peripheral groups and the decline of *asabiyyah* in the core. Interestingly, this rise was both driven by and contributed to a unique and ongoing phenomenon within modern Islamic movements: the emergence of powerful, politically active, rural, neo-traditionalist religious forces following the failure of urban Afghan Islamist movements in both governance and moral leadership in the post-Soviet era.

4.5. Rule of Taliban (1996-2001)

Within a couple of years, the rise of the Taliban went quickly and led to the rule of the Taliban. In less than five years, the Taliban was controlling 90% of Afghani territories. Surprisingly, this was the first time in Afghani history that a movement of religious clerics ruled. Actually, it is a rare event, not only in the post-colonial era but in the whole Muslim ummah History.

The uniqueness and oddness in the Taliban case is the added fact that Taliban is a traditional religious movement with neither previous political theorization nor even political activism, unlike the Iranian case, for instance. Also, it's quite different from the Saudi case, where the founders and rulers allied themselves with a religious stream (Wahabi stream) but still the rulers are tribal leaders not religious scholarly movement.

4.5.1. Legitimacy of the Rule of the Taliban

Actually, the Taliban derived its legitimacy in ruling Afghanistan from three main considerations, firstly: the historically successful restoration of social order and security in a very sensitive, turbulent period where the previous Mujahedeen groups controlling Afghanistan in the post-communist phase "shed their legitimacy by engaging in arbitrary taxation and extortion and by enabling an environment of chronic insecurity, sexual violence, general oppression of the civilian population, and violent power struggles" (Stenersen 2010, 15).

Secondly, their capabilities and skills in winning the Pashtun majority arena and dominating the leadership among the Pashtun population though other prominent

Pashtun parties and personalities like Hekmatyar were more backed from foreign sides (D. Crews and Tarzi, eds. 2008, 59, 74, 80). Then comes the crucial religious meeting and pledge of allegiance where a large gathering of religious scholars in April 1996 decided that the Taliban and its leader, Mullah Umar, should take power and establish a new political authority, "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" IEA, which will apply the Islamic sharia law (Stenersen 2010, 52). Anyway, the Taliban rule between 1996-2001 was characterized by the following fundamental features:

4.5.2. First: The Total Deconstruction of the Previous Communist Regime and its Socio-Political Structures

As we mentioned before, from the beginning of the mobilization of the Taliban, and before they took power and control over Kabul, one of their first reformist demands from the established Islamist government was the complete exclusion of the communists from all governmental institutions and administrations. Prior to the Taliban, during the Islamist period, the communist Administration was still functioning in various military, intelligence, civil and cultural sectors. (Roy 2002, 7) Accordingly, upon their control of Kabul, the Taliban's policy was the eradication of the communist cadres and kicking out communists from all different governmental positions and jobs[34] (Abd al-Hakeem 2013, 25).

4.5.3. Second: The Asabiyyah of Pashtuns and Core Leadership of Clerics from Greater Kandahar Province

Obviously, before, during, and after the rule of Taliban, a two folded fact remained fixed: the dominance of the Pashtun ethnic component and taste in the Taliban structure as well as the exclusive character of core and high rank leadership being bonded with madrassa scholars and students from greater Qandahar: the birthplace and strongholds of Taliban (Semple 2014, 18).

However, the Taliban never realized itself as a Pashtun movement. Rather, it was relatively diverse and accurately described as a "caravan" and "dynamic cultural

[34] In this page there is a major mistake in translation, communist juniors were replaced by communist children.

body" involving the inclusion of various social groups with distinct tastes and cultures (Zaeef 2010, 116; D. Crews and Tarzi 2008, 28). More Precisely, the Taliban worked on broadening its base and some leadership positions to include the country's conservative religious networks regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Several Tajik and Uzbek ministers were appointed during Taliban rule (Giustozzi 2010, 4).

4.5.4. Third: The Rule of Religious Rural Traditionalists

Surprisingly, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, one of the prominent founders of the Taliban, mentioned that the first time he entered the capital, Kabul, was after the Taliban took the city in September 1996, like many of his colleagues (Zaeef 2010, 84). Actually, this points to the modest rural lifestyle many of the leaders and founders grew up with. Interestingly, even after the Taliban took power and control of Afghanistan, they kept on practicing and promoting simplicity and humbleness as a virtuous moral Islamic lifestyle, differentiating themselves from previous politicians and governmental elites, including the pre-Taliban Islamist government (Semple 2014, 11-12). In general, Taliban ministers will sit on the floor, sleep on the floor, eat the same food as the common people, eat with their employees on one big plate during working hours, and join the battlefield after finishing working hours (Huwaydi 2001, 58). These practices reflected their attempts and claims to build an ideal Islamic state similar to Medina's role model and also manifested the traditional egalitarian ideal culture of Pashtun tribes. Noticeably, though the country was still suffering from massive post-war ruination and poverty, the Taliban's success in securing the highways facilitated domestic trade and improved the economy to a certain extent (D.crews and Tarzi 2008, eds. 45, 106; Semple 2014, 12; Abd-al-Hakeem 2013, 26).

In the same context, implementing the Sharia law comes at the forefront of the Taliban's goals. Intuitively, it will occur according to their ideological background. Occasionally, their ideology was described as an extreme Deobandi traditional school of thought refusing any sort of reform or questioning, but, in my opinion, the following definition of Taliban ideology is more accurate: it is a mix of Deobandi doctrines and ultra-conservative village Islam with special focus on rituals and modes of behavior (Stenersen 2010, 48).

This mix of public application of Islam principles and counter-modernism approaches is manifested in the following measures carried out by the Taliban: Daily Ritual prayers should be done by men at mosques, their beards should be at least a hand's length, Music, TV, and filming were forbidden. Women were obliged to wear the burqa face veil and were generally limited to private spheres, with many behavioral restriction measures when present in public spheres. The previous measures of women segregation were normal for Afghans, especially Pashtuns, but they were problematic in some urban societies (D.crews and Tarzi 2008, eds. 118, 140, 145).

The segregation extended to work and education. As for working women in governmental institutions, their salaries will reach them at home without working. Regarding education, though the Taliban believed that seeking knowledge and education is an Islamic obligation and necessity for both males and females, they had great concerns regarding the educational system preceding their era. Those concerns included the mass co-education conditions and moralities associated with it at that time in Kabul, the teaching staff, and the un-Islamic curriculums taught in preceding periods. Therefore, they temporarily stopped the girls' schools until the curriculums and surrounding conditions were adjusted, and generally, modern school education was unstable. Curriculums were revised to be modified within Islamic values, and after the addition of fundamental Islamic subjects, residents were left to choose between religious or modern schools (Huwaydi 2001, 69- 77).

Returning to women's positions and status under the Taliban, Mullah Umar issued a decree criminalizing two tribal customs. In The first, a woman or several women will be given as compensation from the tribe of a killer to the tribe of the victim. The other custom forbids a widow from marrying outside her late husband's clan. Both were banned, and those who applied them were harshly punished (Mutmain 2019, 193).
In a parallel context, in their way of building an Islamic state, besides that all ministers were from the Taliban, the Islamization two-folded process of the employment framework included appointing mullahs from the Taliban on top of fundamental positions and directories while keeping the technical specialist men as the second responsible men, and simultaneously creating capable cadres from Taliban in administering the country via attending courses in administration, Arabic and foreign languages, diplomatic affairs and other disciplines. No need to add that in all

previous circumstances, Taliban members would practice preaching to other employees (Abd-al-Hakeem 2013, 25).

4.5.5. Fourth: Independent Islamic National Rule

Obviously, from the very beginning, the Taliban promoted and realized itself as an independent Islamic national regime, the "Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan" IEA. It never claimed that it was a caliphate or transnational state.

We can relate the Taliban's project to Ibn Khaldun's theory of the control of provinces and lands in proportion to areas of asabiyyah (Pashtuns are majority only in Afghanistan), no more (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 524). Two main principles the Taliban was keen on and showed steadfastness in preserving them: the establishment of an Islamic regime in united Afghanistan and a high level of political independence. This Islamic and national autonomy included independence from both the super and regional powers, whether they were "friend" or "enemy" states.

It included major and strategic economic projects and political decisions. Mullah Zaeef mentions many examples in his well-known book "My Life with Taliban," starting from not changing the ruling system and laws related to Islamic identity in order to achieve international recognition by the UN, Passing through the refusal of American monopolization of oil and gas resources in Afghanistan through the American company Unocal (Zaeef 2010, 95-96). In addition to refusing to hand over foreign fighters and citizens, whether to the hostile USA regime or to the friend Chinese regime. The former entered extensive negotiations with the Taliban and imposed high pressure on the Taliban to hand over US-wanted man bin Laden, and the latter was concerned with the rumors regarding the Taliban's support to a Turkistan Islamic resistance group performing military operations in Xinjiang/east Turkestan against the Chinese authorities. Actually, the Taliban has been providing shelter to a Turkestan armed group and many other Arab and Asian organizations present in Afghanistan since the soviet occupation era (Abd-al-Hakeem 2004, 727; 1998, 40).

Eventually, Despite the wide ideological and political agenda disagreement with its guest groups[35], and in spite of many temptations, including the USA's recognition of the Taliban's authority over Afghanistan and the removal of sanctions imposed on them, they refused to hand anyone, showing great stability in sticking to their moral values and autonomy criteria. They just continued reassuring other states by declaring the continuity of their realistic policy in neither interfering in other countries' domestic affairs nor allowing any organization to use Afghani soil to harm them. (Zaeef 2010, 133-139).

Actually, one of the main defining features of the Taliban's rule in the 1990s was the widespread refusal by the international community to recognize it as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. This refusal was accompanied by the imposition of severe economic sanctions, the movement's isolation on the global stage, and extensive media campaigns aimed at undermining its legitimacy, in addition to the presence of a small part of the Afghan territories under the control of the Afghan armed opposition led by Ahmed shah Masoud (Mutmain 2019, 196). Despite these significant challenges, the Taliban was able to maintain a remarkable degree of internal cohesion. While factors such as religious and social homogeneity, traditional organizational Islamic structures, and powerful military mobilization capacity are often cited as explanations for this cohesion, another potential factor worth considering is the persistent external threats posed by several countries, both regionally and globally. These external challenges, whether in the form of military pressure, political opposition, or diplomatic isolation, could be added among the important factors galvanizing the Taliban's internal solidarity. Ibn Khaldun, in his Muqaddimah, offers an insightful discussion of this dynamic, arguing that one of the key factors contributing to the cohesion of any social or political group is the ongoing presence of an external enemy that poses a direct threat to the group's existence. This external pressure serves to unite the members of the group, temporarily suppressing internal divisions and reinforcing a collective identity in the face of a common adversary (Ibn Khaldun 2014, 503-504).

[35] Main differences mentioned in the book "Afghanistan, Taliban and the battle for Islam today" by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri included the Islamic school of thought, issues of takfeer (declaring someone an unbeliever), Sufism and Salafism, military tactics, political agendas and others.

In another context, lots of spread literature classifies the Taliban's rule as an autocratic one-man rule. This assumption was mainly based on the theoretical framework of excessive authorities and institutions headed by mullah Umar. (Stenersen 2010, 45; Huwaydi 2001, 54). However, Practically, Afghanistan under the Taliban's regime was operating (to a certain extent) in a decentralized manner through the polycentric local shura councils, moral police, and judges established by the Taliban in the Pashtun areas and the indirect rule feature in the non-Pashtun important areas. (D.crews and Tarzi 2008, 79-87, Giustozzi 2010, 4).

4.6. Conclusion

To sum up, for a comprehensive understanding of the recent powerful resurgence of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan despite the two decades of fierce Western war on it. We can't repeat the same mistake with the first rise of the Taliban in the nineties, which was analyzed mainly from an international relations perspective, including a power struggle and changes in the power balance between various regions and superpowers at that time. However, we need to carry out a wider socio-political approach, taking into consideration the multiple ideological, historical, spiritual, social, ethnic, and economic variations between the Taliban and other local actors and powers in the Afghani soil and scene.

Khaldunian theories on the rise and fall of dynasties are highly applicable to the Afghan case. His ideas about *asabiyyah* (group solidarity) and the shifting, cyclical power dynamics between the state and tribes, urban and nomadic groups, and the center and the periphery are particularly relevant. These concepts, especially the role of religion, demonstrate how significant political change can emerge from the peripheries when driven by a strong sense of *asabiyyah*. This is precisely what happened with the Taliban: a political breakdown of Soviet colonial occupation and the postcolonial communist state was followed by a religious movement calling for socio-political reform in Afghanistan. The movement succeeded in building multiple layers of religious and tribal *asabiyyah* through mass mobilization of the madrasa (Islamic traditional seminaries) students and tribal youth, mainly from the rural Pashtun majority in the country's vast countryside. Ultimately, this led to the collapse of the previous ruling system and elites and the emergence of a new, powerful, and dominant *asabiyyah*: the Taliban.

CHAPTER V

THE RESURRECTION OF THE TALIBAN FINDINGS

Figure 5.1. Taliban in Palace 1

Source: Hindustan Times, 16 Aug 2021

If the Taliban's first rise to power in the 1990s was surprising to many experts on Afghan affairs, then their return to power in 2021 could be considered a myth or a miracle. The surprising aspect of the Taliban's initial rise was that it came at the hands of a group of simple, poor, traditional religious seminar students who were neither leaders of any political party nor figures from prominent tribes nor even well-known Ulama (religious scholars) or leaders of widely influential Sufi orders. In short, they were not symbolic figures with followers in society. What was equally surprising was the speed with which they took control of most of Afghanistan, defeated the warlords, ended the civil war, imposed security, and governed Afghanistan in a centralized manner despite the country’s history of decentralized rule due to the lack of modernization, its significant ethnic and cultural diversity, and the rugged geography

that separates regions. A third exceptional point is that this was the first time in Afghanistan's history that power was held by a group from the religious class.

The second rise of the Taliban in August 2021 was even stranger than the first and marked the beginning of a new phase and a historic shift in Afghanistan's ruling class. It solidified the rule of religious class under the name of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This time, the Taliban exerted full control over the entire Afghan territory, unlike the first rise, where areas in northern Afghanistan were outside Taliban control.

What was also remarkable about the second rise was that it came after a prolonged struggle lasting two consecutive decades with a vast external coalition led by the United States in coordination with an internal alliance that included long-established political parties (some of which had fought the Soviets), as well as various religious, ideological, and ethnic minorities. This contrasts with the first rise, where the conflict was confined to local factions without military intervention from superpowers or international coalitions.

Another significant difference between the two rises, which made the Taliban's first rise relatively easier, was the ambiguity surrounding the Taliban's political agenda at the beginning of their movement. There was no clear understanding of the political stance the group would take on issues that concerned super or major powers, such as control over primary resources, political subordination, and security coordination against international fugitives and anti-American organizations. In other words, there was no clear global Western resistance to the Taliban's first rise, especially since the movement emerged from politically conservative religious groups that did not carry an explicitly anti-American agenda in South and Central Asia. This was in stark contrast to the more independent stance in the Taliban's foreign policy that developed later and their closer ties to countries and groups opposed to U.S. policy, as detailed in the previous chapter.

What concerns us in this study and chapter is examining the religious factors that contributed to the cohesion of the Taliban movement from its birth to its return to power with even greater strength at the end of 2021. In this chapter, I will present the

most important findings from in-depth interviews I conducted with thirteen Afghan and non-Afghan individuals, most of whom were either members of the Taliban, key figures in Afghan affairs, or experts on Afghan and Taliban issues. These findings will be compared with key writings I have reviewed, leading to conclusions and new contributions that enrich the existing literature, fill previously unexplored research gaps, or correct some of the misconceptions and misinformation that are widely circulated.

5.1. Deobandism or Traditional Hanafism

One of the key points that most of the literature agrees on is the special ideological and organizational impacts and links between the Deobandi movement and the Taliban. However, most participants, especially those who were in Afghanistan, pointed to several important aspects that either have not been addressed by the literature or have been presented inadequately or incorrectly.

The first point is that the issue is not linked to a specific orientation or particular teachings of the Deobandi school but is broader and older than that. Deobandism does not possess characteristics different from the general traditional Hanafi madrassas prevalent in Afghanistan. It is merely an extension of these schools, which have been spread throughout South and Central Asia for centuries, whether in terms of doctrine, jurisprudence, behavioral and ethical principles, educational methods, and the teacher-student relationship. Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed, a member of the cultural commission in the Taliban during the jihad against the American occupation, says:

"The Islamic Emirate, which we refer to here as the Taliban, does not officially identify as Deobandi. In fact, in this region (Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India), the prevailing religious methodology for centuries has not been assigned a specific name. The people here adhere to the Maturidi interpretation within the school of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah and follow the Hanafi jurisprudence in practical matters. Historically, they have not been referred to as Deobandis since 'Darul Uloom Deoband' is the name of a single madrasa that was established nearly 170 years ago. However, these communities have resided here for centuries with the same beliefs and thoughts."

This point was also confirmed by Afghan academic Dr. Fazal ul-Hadi Wazeen, an author proficient in six languages, who holds a PhD in Islamic law from Imam Muhammad bin Saud University in Riyadh and served as a professor of graduate studies at Salam University in Kabul. He is also a political activist in the fields of peace and reconciliation. He informed me that he had previously participated in the fight during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Dr. Wazeen belongs to a different school of thought, namely the Islamic movement, which significantly differs from the traditional movements from which the Taliban emerged. Dr. Wazeen supported the same information that Qari Saeed mentioned: Deobandism does not differ from the traditional Hanafi schools that are widespread in South Asia. It essentially relies on the teaching of classical Hanafi jurisprudence, adherence to it, refraining from taking from other jurisprudential schools[36], not opening the door to ijtihad[37] (independent legal reasoning) for students, and not engaging with modern sciences. This leads to significant uniformity and homogeneity among graduates of these schools, but, on the other hand, it also results in scholarly shallowness, scientific stagnation, and an inability to keep up with the developments of the modern world, he said[38].

The famous Indian scholar Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi also pointed to some of this in his book Muslims in India, when he reviewed and discussed the various religious and cultural currents there. He mentioned the widespread presence of old, conservative, traditional schools that produced scholars before the establishment of Dar al-Uloom Deoband. He discussed the shared traditions from which the Deobandi school and others emerged, whether in terms of the unified curricula, the value system that encourages reliance on God and renunciation of worldly affairs, or the close and enduring relationship between teachers and students, which resembled the father-son relationship.[39]

[36] Within the Sunni Madhabs (schools of jurisprudence) There are four major schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. The predominant school in Asia especially central and south Asia is Hanafi Madhab.

[37] Ijtihad is an Islamic concept that refers to the process of independent reasoning by scholars to make legal decisions when there is no explicit guidance in the Quran or Hadith (the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad). It involves using deep knowledge of Islamic law, thoughtful reasoning, and careful judgment to form new rulings or interpretations on matters not directly addressed in traditional sources. This allows scholars to apply Islamic principles to contemporary issues, ensuring that the law remains relevant and adaptable.

[38] Personal interview with Dr. Fazul ul-Hadi Wazeen in Istanbul on the 9th of October 2024.

[39] al-Hasani al-Nadwi, Abu al-Hasan Ali. *Al-Muslimun fi al-Hind* [The Muslims in India]. 1st ed. (Damascus-Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1999), 99-133.

5.1.1. Socially Cohesive Religion

In addition to the points previously discussed, the issue of informal Islamic economies associated with traditional madrassas, based on the collection of zakat, charity, and the funding of madrassas from these sources, emerges as part of what Dr. Ahmad Muwaffaq Zaidan, the former director of Al Jazeera's office in Pakistan for twenty years (1996-2016), referred to the "shadow economy" in a conversation with me. Just as this economy played a significant role in funding and sustaining the operations of madrassas away from political authority, it also had a profound impact on funding the Taliban during both their first and second rises to power, as Zaidan explained[40].

From this perspective, we can understand the importance of what Fareed al-Attas, quoting Ibn Khaldun, calls "socially cohesive religion," considering it one of the pillars of *'asabiyyah* (social solidarity) that contributes to uniting societal forces striving for political change through seeking power or rulership. al-Attas sometimes even considers it a form of *'asabiyyah* in and of itself:

> The social cohesion expressed by the concept of 'asabiyyah is only partly derived from agnatic ties in tribal social organizations. While all tribal groups have stronger or weaker 'asabiyyah based on kinship, religion can also bring about such social cohesion, as was the case with the Arabs who needed Islam in order to subordinate themselves and unite as a social organization (al-Attas 2014, 51).

In addition to that, Ibn Khaldun highlighted the importance of taqlid: adhering to and imitating one of the four well-established Sunni Jurisprudence schools and perceived this as an important factor in reducing the divisions between Muslims and avoiding Manipulation of Sharia rulings by unqualified individuals. He stated:

> The tradition of following the four imams became established in the cities, and those who practiced imitation (taqlid) followed only them while disregarding others. People closed the door to divergence of opinion and its pathways due to the increasing complexity of terminology in the sciences, the difficulty of reaching the rank of ijtihad, and the fear of attributing it to those unqualified for it… They prohibited the circulation of taqlid to others because of the potential for manipulation… Today, the people of Islam adhere to the taqlid of these four imams. (Ibn Khaldun, 2014, 951).

[40] Personal interview with Dr. Ahmad Muwaffaq Zaidan in Istanbul on the 2nd of October 2024.

Therefore, in my view, the description of "socially cohesive religion" applies to the case of the Taliban and the traditional religious environment and culture from which it emerged, which emphasizes adhering strictly to one Islamic Sunni jurisprudence school (the Hanafi madhab). This contrasts with the ideologies of most other Afghan organizations (including Islamic ones), which cannot be described as "socially cohesive religions."

5.1.2. Differences between the Taliban and Deobandism

In his contributions, Afghan academic Zahid Jalali, former head of the Political Science Department at Kardan University in Kabul and an opposition writer during the U.S. occupation, highlighted two critical points. The first is that the most accurate description of the Taliban is that they are followers of the traditional Hanafi school of thought rather than Deobandism. Deobandism in Pakistan and India has specific connotations associated with its contrast to the Barelvi school, with high-level polarisation between the two, as each school considers the other to be deviating from the authentic understanding of religion.[41] This, however, does not apply to the Taliban.

On the other hand, Jalali also emphasized the reciprocal influence between Afghan religious schools and those in neighboring countries, including the Deobandi school. He explained that Afghanistan has historically been an important religious, cultural, and economic center, acting as a bridge between South and Central Asia. It has both influenced and been influenced by its surroundings, not merely being a passive receiver of foreign ideas. He cited the example of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, the largest Sufi order in the world, which spread from Afghanistan to India, not the other way around. The second point he stressed is that there is a significant exaggeration in Western studies regarding the connection between the Taliban and the Deobandi schools, especially in Pakistan. This misunderstanding has led to erroneous approaches by both the U.S. occupation and the Afghan governments that were supported by it. Jalali explained, "The Westerners and the Afghan government aligned with them

[41] Although both the Deobandi and Barelvi movements identify as Hanafi Sunni Muslims, they differ widely in their beliefs, their approach to Sufism, how they view history, their political involvement, and how they address modern issues. See more: William Kesler Jackson, "A Subcontinent's Sunni Schism: The Deobandi-Barelvi Rivalry and the Creation of Modern South Asia," *Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs*, August 2013, 1-11.

would send delegations to Deobandi scholars in Pakistan, trying to convince them to issue fatwas urging the Taliban to abandon jihad and lay down their arms. What they failed to realize is that the Taliban do not follow the fatwas of Deobandi scholars in Pakistan on all matters; in fact, they do not agree with their political approach, which involves participation in the political process in its modernist form.[42]" This point is further addressed in the memoirs of Mullah Abdul Hai Mutmain, former spokesperson for Mullah Mohammad Omar, who stated: "Even though Mullah Omar didn't like the acts and policies of Pakistan's religious groups, nor their political role in the current democracy, he respected Pakistani Islamic scholars and considered them friends." (Mutmain 2019, 185).

Mullah Omar's statement reveals two important matters regarding Deobandism and its influence on the Taliban: The first is that the political thought followed by the Taliban is rooted in classical Hanafi texts (which are also found in the older Deobandi literature), not in the contemporary Deobandi practices in Pakistan and India. Dr. Abdul Jabbar Bahir[43], founder and head of the Afghan Center for Research and Media, mentioned this in an interview with me, confirming that the Taliban "do not acknowledge the new political foundations presented by the Deobandi scholars in Pakistan and India. The Taliban continue to adhere to the old fatwas, such as the one on selecting a ruler, based on the Hanafi school of thought and Deobandi principles, whereas some scholars in India and Pakistan accept the electoral process in modern states" From my perspective, this adherence to classical texts is one of the main reasons for the cohesion within the Taliban movement and its ability to avoid the fragmentation experienced by many other Deobandi or Islamic parties.

5.1.3. The Relationship between the Taliban and Deobandism

The second point is the nature of the relationship between the Taliban and the Deobandi school, particularly in Pakistan. Syrian expert on Afghan and Pakistani affairs, Dr. Zaidan, detailed this relationship in our conversation. He explained that it is based on mutual respect and significant support in terms of fatwas and manpower

[42] Personal interview with Zahid Jalali in Istanbul on the 11th of October 2024.
[43] Online personal interview with Abdul Jabbar Bahir present in Afghanistan on 29th of October 2024.

from the Pakistani Deobandi community, both during the Taliban's first rise to power and its revival. Zaidan said:

"Having spent years covering the Afghan-Pakistani dynamics and knowing the key figures, parties, and movements involved, despite the ideological differences between the Taliban and Deobandi scholars in Pakistan, not a single fatwa was issued against the Taliban or even al-Qaeda."

The final point concerning the Deobandi-Taliban relationship is the concept of jihad. While some literature has focused on foundational Deobandi texts and its Jihad practices, whether in India, Pakistan, or Kashmir, claiming that the Taliban derived this concept both theoretically and practically from the Deobandi anti-colonial legacy, this element, according to many scholars and participants in my interviews, seems out of place and far from reality. The Taliban, as an Afghan movement, and Afghanistan, known in the past two centuries as the "Graveyard of Empires," have long been involved in religiously motivated struggles, especially in resisting British, Soviet, and U.S. imperialism. The traditional religious class in Afghanistan, regardless of the specific jurisprudential school or Sufi order to which it belongs, has played a central role not only in igniting jihad against foreign empires but also in defeating them and maintaining local political power. This legacy is far more significant to the Taliban than any Deobandi influence on the concept of jihad. This argument seems overly constructed, particularly when considering the non-revolutionary stance of large portions of the Deobandi movements in Pakistan and the more political- quietest attitude of their counterparts in India and other countries where Deobandism is active, as many studies have pointed out (Metcalf 2002; Reetz 2007).

In brief, the Taliban's belonging and ties to traditional Hanafi madrassa networks place it within the framework of "socially cohesive religion," distinguishing it from many contemporary organizations (Islamic and non-Islamic) that struggle to form large, unified social movements capable of continuous recruitment from and mobilization of homogenous structures and communities outside their specific organizations.

Secondly, regarding the Taliban-Deoband movement links, though many of the Taliban's founding members were educated at prominent Deobandi madrassas in

Pakistan, labeling the Taliban as strictly Deobandi is inaccurate. Traditional Hanafi madrassas in Afghanistan, the primary source of Taliban leadership, predate the Deobandi movement and share structural and ideological similarities (Informal independent traditional religious seminars) without being part of the Deobandi network and institutions (Mutmain 2019, 7-10). Additionally, despite the rivalry between Deobandis and Barelvis, the Taliban does not share the same hostility towards the Barelvi movement, further distinguishing it from the Deobandi-Barelvi divide common across the Indian subcontinent, which may have contributed to its recruitment base. While the Taliban has indeed received substantial support from Deobandi scholars and groups outside Afghanistan and has special close relations with it, the group's political agenda, practices, and decisions do not align with the Deobandi tradition and leadership in Pakistan. Therefore, although the Deobandi label has some validity, it fails to capture the full scope of the Taliban's ideological and political identity.

5.2. The Implementation of Sharia

The second religious factor extensively discussed in the literature is the implementation of Islamic Sharia, which involves the governance, organization, and regulation of society according to Islamic law. Most studies, as well as all participants in my interviews, agree on the centrality of Sharia implementation in the Taliban's belief system and ideology and its impact on restoring security, which subsequently increased its popularity and legitimacy in comparison to others. This was the case both during the preceding the Taliban's first rise in the 1990s, marked by civil war, catastrophic chaos, and the rule of warlords with no security in or between regions (Stenersen 2010, 15), and during the time of the U.S. occupation, when the Afghan governments supported by the U.S. were characterized by significant weakness and corruption. Giustozzi notes this by stating: "Demoralised and corrupted police units were often reported refusing to enforce law and order, forcing locals to rely on the Taliban" (Giustozzi 2007,177).

This situation was not merely due to the corruption of the Afghan governments but also due to the integrity of the Taliban (non-taking bribes), which was largely free from corruption, especially in the judicial sector. Their ability to obtain people's rights and

enforce rulings contributed significantly to their rise. This was confirmed by most interviewees, with Dr. Wazeen recounting a remarkable story of a governor from Ghazni province, who, having lost hope in the Afghan government's judicial system due to widespread bribery and corruption, turned to the Taliban's judiciary for resolution. As Wazeen laughingly put it, the governor found the Taliban's system more reliable. Bahir also described the enforcement of Sharia as the primary tool the Taliban used for mobilization, while Jalali went even further, stating:

"The one thing that distinguishes the Taliban from others is their implementation of Sharia and jihad. Even members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups joined them due to their seriousness in applying Sharia. The Taliban does not have prominent scholars or university professors. The Taliban are ordinary men with no great knowledge or status in society. If you remove the issue of Sharia, what is left of the Taliban?"

Regarding the seriousness of Sharia implementation, Islam al-Ghamri, a researcher in Islamic movements and a participant in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, affirmed that this was one of the key distinctions between the Taliban and earlier Afghan movements that participated in the jihad against the Soviets or the governments that ruled after the fall of the Taliban's first reign.[44]. In contrast, while Khalifa Haydara, a Tunisian preacher and Sharia teacher at Deobandi institutions in Pakistan, agreed with the centrality of Sharia in the Taliban's ideology and its role in the cohesion of the movement and its continued appeal, he argued that this was mainly true during the Taliban's early rise in the 1990s. After the Taliban's numbers increased and included a broader base, their implementation of Sharia became excessively harsh and severe during their first rule, which, to some extent, alienated the people.

In response, the Deobandi Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan sent groups of preachers to interact with the Taliban and soften their approach. Sheikh Khalifa Haydara also mentioned that the harshness of the Taliban reappeared during their confrontation with the U.S. occupation, which, according to him, was due to two main reasons: the

[44] Personal interview with Islam al-Ghamri at his office in Istanbul on the 30th of October 2024.

scarcity of scholars within their ranks, and the dominance of Pashtun ethnicity, which is often characterized by its ruggedness, asceticism, and resistance to pressure qualities that were beneficial in facing invaders, but horrible in handling internal societal matters.[45]

5.2.1. The Khaldunian Approach to Islamic Revival

Returning to the issue of combating corruption and implementing Sharia as a basis for a social movement seeking religious revival prompted me to explore a theoretical framework that discusses and explains this issue. The question that preoccupied me was whether there is a reform model that is fundamentally based on commanding the good and forbidding the evil and consequently reaching power. The answer came from the theories of Ibn Khaldun, as interpreted and formulated by Syed Fareed al-Attas in his critical book Applying ibn Khaldun: The Revival of a Lost Tradition in Sociology.

Interestingly, al-Attas argues that Ibn Khaldun's most famous theories related to the rise and fall of dynasties, states, and civilizations are also theories of Islamic revival, based on the concept of:" Taghyīr al-munkar," which refers to the concept of changing or prohibiting what is considered religiously wrong or evil in society. This model has recurred throughout Islamic history, dating back to the first century. Alatas provides several historical examples in his book, including three North African dynasties: the Almoravid, Almohad, and Merinid states. In these instances, a religious reformer emerged in response to doctrinal, moral, and societal corruption, promoting Taghyīr al-munkar, and succeeded in uniting peripheral tribal forces far from the urban centers. This eventually led to the fall of one state and the rise of another (al-Attas 2014, 98–113). This is exactly what occurred with the Taliban movement, which was founded on the principles of commanding the good, forbidding evil, and establishing Sharia law.

[45] Online personal interview with Khalifa Haidara present in South Africa on 16th of October 2024.

5.2.2. Sharia and Customs

Regarding the blending of Islamic Sharia with local customs, the results of the interviews varied; however, the majority of participants agreed that the Taliban took Afghan customs into account as long as they did not conflict with Islamic Sharia. From their perspective, in general, Afghan customs do not contradict Islamic values, and the movement respects them on this basis. However, Customs that directly contradict Sharia, such as those that oppress women, including denying them their inheritance rights, forced marriages based on family decisions, and other similar practices, the cultivation of opium, or practices like music and singing, are prohibited by the movement. Qari Abdul Sattar Saeed, a Taliban leader, elaborated on the Taliban's approach, saying*: "The movement does not consider Afghan society to be outside Islam or a Jahili (pre-Islamic society) as some political movements do. It does not seek to Islamize society from scratch but rather views it as a Muslim society in need of reform."* He further argued that many Afghan customs are Islamic or, at the very least, not in opposition to Islam. For example, some customs, such as the tribal *jirga* councils convened to resolve disputes, stem from the Islamic concept of *shura* (consultation), and *chiegha* corresponds to the concept of *nafir*' am (general mobilization) in Islam. Other practices fall under what is known in Islamic jurisprudence as *maslaha mursala* (public interest), where Sharia has neither prescribed nor prohibited them, and these are also respected by the movement[46].

In the Taliban's public statements throughout the years of occupation, it was evident that their statements consistently referenced Islamic values alongside Afghan customs. This integration of both was a point of frustration for Dr. Wazeen, who remarked, "Isn't it enough for them to simply say Islam?" This distinction highlights a key difference between the Taliban and other Afghan Islamic political movements, which did not respect Afghan customs as much. This, in turn, could explain one of the reasons for the Taliban's strong cohesion compared to the relatively weak unity and popularity of other Afghan Islamic parties that preceded the Taliban in establishment and movement.

[46] Online personal contact with Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed present in Afghanistan, He sent the answers list on 29th October 2024.

However, contrary to the majority of participants, Dr. Abdul Jabbar Bahir told me that the Taliban did not consider the *loya jirga* councils, for instance, and instead ruled independently without involving elders or tribal leaders in local governance or dispute resolution. The only issue they paid attention to was the matter of girls' education, where they respected the tribal leaders' demands to restrict girls from education.

Veteran Afghan journalist Ikram Shinwari, currently based in Kabul and who has witnessed all the Afghan wars over the past four decades, explained in a Zoom interview that the issue of girls' education is very complex. He noted that while many Taliban members support girls' education, the issue is heavily influenced by local customs and varies from one region to another. In some areas, particularly in southern Afghanistan, local communities strongly oppose girls' education, and the Taliban feared mass uprisings in these regions during their fight against U.S. occupying forces[47]. Zaidan also pointed out that the issue is not limited to local customs, as there is a very small number (fewer than three) of influential Taliban scholars within the movement who staunchly oppose girls' education. The movement is extremely cautious about any issue that could cause internal division, especially after the experience of Afghan mujahideen factions following the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the communist regime in Afghanistan, He said.

5.2.3. Opium and Jihad

Regarding the issue of opium cultivation and the debates surrounding it, the majority of interviews supported the literature that discussed the Taliban's allowance of opium cultivation and non-prohibition policy in the areas under their temporary- control during the fight against the U.S. occupation. Ikram Shinwari stated that the movement banned it during its rule but did not prohibit it during the period of occupation, as they were not the ruling authority; they were present at night but absent during the day. The story of this prohibition was mentioned by Mullah Abdul Hai Mutmain, who recounted it as one of the revolutionary decisions made by Mullah Omar, particularly during a time when Afghanistan was experiencing severe economic hardship due to successive wars and UN sanctions. Mullah Omar initially aimed to phase out opium cultivation

[47] Online personal interview with Ikram Shinwari present in Kabul on the 4th of October 2024.

in coordination with international organizations that would compensate the farmers, but after realizing the failure of this plan, he issued a decree in July 2000 banning opium production with strict punishments for violators. Mutmain described the event as follows:

> Mullah Omar asked me to make contact via the phone and to take a piece of paper and a pen... Mullah Omar said to write that from today onwards, there will be a ban on the cultivation of poppy. There will be strict punishments for violators. I asked him whether there was any condition and about asking international organizations for support as an alternative. He said there is no condition, and I am banning it as a religious responsibility. (Mutmain 2019, 197).

Foreign mujahid Abu Musa al-Uzbeki, who fought alongside the Taliban for three years after 2001, offered an alternative explanation to that of Ikram Shinwari, suggesting that the Taliban did not prohibit opium cultivation during the U.S. occupation because they were not the ruling authority and were engaged in a war of attrition. He explained that there is a fatwa within the Hanafi madhab permitting specific actions, such as usury and opium cultivation, during times of war. According to Abu Musa, the Taliban did not cultivate opium themselves but used the funds raised from it to support their jihad. This issue was highlighted in some studies discussing how certain Taliban leaders imposed taxes on opium production and issued fatwas that allowed such taxation under these specific circumstances. These revenues became a significant source of funding during that period (Martin 2014, 56). Abu Musa also pointed out that the people in the mountainous regions of eastern and southern Afghanistan were living under extremely difficult economic conditions, with limited access to water for growing other crops and no electricity. Therefore, opium cultivation became an emergency solution for their survival[48]. Some studies noted that this situation was a turning point, strengthening local support for the Taliban in Helmand province (one of the Taliban's key strongholds in southern Afghanistan) between 2006 and 2007, where local populations would shelter the Taliban and provide them with food, water, shelter, and support during the fighting (Giustozzi 2022, 65-66).

This crucial information is strongly supported by Abu Musa’s personal experience, where he saw opium being cultivated even on the streets of Helmand province. Specifically, regarding Helmand, Abu Musa emphasized that the men of Helmand

[48] Online personal interviews with Abu Musa al- Uzbeki on 20th, 21th and 22th of October 2024.

were the strongest in Afghanistan, and their women were also very strong, even participating in the battles and fighting against the occupation.

According to Abu Musa, the Taliban consistently prioritized Sharia law over customs and traditions without question. They applied Sharia in areas under their control during the occupation, including religious preaching, education, Sharia courts, and assistance to the poor, as well as administering punishments according to their ability. However, there were two things they would never tolerate, regardless of the circumstances: treason and adultery.

Therefore, there is broad agreement among the interviews and the literature that the application of Sharia according to traditional Islamic jurisprudence, encompassing *amr bil ma'roof* (commanding the good) and *nahi anil munkar* (forbidding the evil), was the primary driving force behind the Taliban movement. This aspect distinguished them from other movements and contributed to the preservation of their unity and cohesion. This aligns with Ibn Khaldun's theory of Islamic revival, which he discusses in his works, particularly as articulated by al-Attas in his efforts to revive Ibn Khaldun's tradition and attempt to establish a new school in sociology based on Ibn Khaldun's heritage.

The overall conclusion drawn from this study, based on the interviews, is that the Taliban respected Afghan customs and traditions that did not contradict Islamic Sharia and incorporated them into their practices. This respect for local customs contributed to their ability to unite with large segments of the Afghan population. However, in general, the movement prioritized what it deemed to be Islamic Sharia over local customs or interests that were seen as contrary to Sharia, regardless of the political, economic, and social consequences. The only exception to this was the issue of girls' education. This approach applied throughout all stages of their rule, both during and after their time in power, albeit with varying degrees of implementation depending on their capacity and circumstances.

5.3. The Structure of the Movement

The third influential factor in the strength of the Taliban movement is its distinctive organizational structure, which is also based on a pre-modern model, referred to as the Islamic Emirate, with the Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful) at its helm. In this model, the concept of the followers' obedience to the leader takes on a deeply entrenched religious character, which differs significantly from that of any modern political party or contemporary political entity. Traditional Islamic jurisprudence, from which the movement draws its principles, places a strong emphasis on the obedience of the Amir al-Mu'minin, prohibiting disobedience except in cases that involve explicit violations of Islamic Sharia texts, as outlined by Qadi Abdul Hakim Haqqani in his important work *Al-Emārah al-Islāmīyah wa Nizāmuhā* (*The Islamic Emirate and Its System)* (Haqqani 2022, 141).

5.3.1. The Leader: Amir al-Mu'minin

All the interviews aligned with studies regarding the exceptional obedience of the Taliban followers to their leaders, stemming from the application of this traditional religious understanding of loyalty to the Muslim ruler, or Amir al-Mu'minin, to their own movement leader following the formal pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*) given by the largest scholarly assembly in the history of Kandahar (D. Crews and Tarzi 2008, 220-221). Below are various excerpts from the interviews that support this understanding. Shaykh Sami al-Saedi, the current head of the Libyan Fatwa House and a former mujahid in Afghanistan during the Soviet era, who also spent years in Afghanistan during the Taliban's first rule in the 1990s and had connections with Taliban leaders, including its founder Mullah Omar, explained to me in an interview that the religious duty of obedience to the rulers was deeply ingrained. In fact, he noted that official documents from some Taliban ministries during their first rule would explicitly state, "The order of the Amir is obligatory" in Persian, which he himself had seen[49].

This obedience is hierarchical, as Abdullah al-Kurdi, a foreign mujahid who fought against the U.S. occupation within the Taliban ranks, explained. He described how the

[49] Personal interview with Sami al-Saedi in Istanbul on 25th of September 2024.

principle of obedience to the leader was understood by Taliban fighters, as one fighter explained to him: "Obeying the order of the direct commander is an extension of obeying the higher commander, ultimately leading to obeying Amir al-Mu'minin and, in the end, the Lord of the Worlds."[50] Abu Musa also supported this, saying that obedience to the leader was considered as essential as prayer. Disobedience to the direct commander, in their view, equated to disobedience to the higher commander, extending to disobedience to God Himself. This obedience is a double-edged sword, as Dr. Wazeen put it, emphasizing that this religious authority is not found in other Afghan Islamic political parties, where the leader's authority is limited. Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed stated:

"In the Taliban, the leader is not viewed as a temporary or short-term president, as is the case in other political groups, where leaders may be elected through votes or rely on the support of followers. Instead, the leadership in the Taliban is seen as a divinely ordained position for oversight and succession, in line with religious teachings".

5.3.2. Amir al-Mu'minin: The Difference between the Taliban and Other Islamic Movements

When I asked Abu al-Walid al-Homsi, a former political prisoner, researcher in Islamic movements, and mujahid in the Syrian revolution, about the difference between the Taliban and other movements that have also declared their leader as Amir al-Mu'minin, he explained that the title "Amir al-Mu'minin" is associated with dignity and empowerment for Muslims. However, the paradox is that the present age is one in which Muslims have been most humiliated, yet it is also an era marked by the rise of self-proclaimed Amir al-Mu'minin in many countries, such as in the case of the Takfir wal-Hijra group in Egypt, the GIA in Algeria, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and even some Sufi groups. He went on to explain that the difference between the Taliban and all these other cases is that the pledge of allegiance to the Taliban was made by a large gathering of religious scholars and prominent community leaders in Afghanistan, whereas in the case of groups like ISIS, the pledge was made by a very small number of unknown individuals even within their communities.[51].

[50] Online Personal interview with Abdullah al-Kurdi on 7th of October 2024.
[51] Online personal interview with Abu al-Waleed al Homsi on 27th October 2024.

Egyptian researcher Ahmed Mawlana, an Egyptian politician and a specialist in political studies, elaborated on the distinction in more detail, stating that the pledge of allegiance to Mullah Omar was public and followed days of deliberations among a large group of Afghan religious scholars and society leaders. In contrast, the pledge of allegiance to the leader of ISIS was made by a very small group of individuals who were largely anonymous characters.[52].

5.3.3. Followers: The Ordinary Fighters of the Taliban

Moving on to the followers and soldiers who represent the military force of the Taliban, what many may not know is that the majority of Taliban members are not mullahs or religious scholars; rather, they are ordinary members of tribal communities (Martin 2014, 209). In fact, some extensive field studies in Afghanistan have pointed to a high level of illiteracy among Taliban fighters (Giustozzi 2022, 198). This significant level of ignorance and illiteracy is also agreed upon by all the interviewees who fought in Afghanistan within the ranks of the Taliban, such as Abdullah al-Kurdi and Abu Musa al-Uzbeki, or were present there, like Abdul Jabbar Bahir and Dr. Wazeen. All confirmed that leadership positions within the movement were reserved for graduates of Madrassas, who were responsible for interpreting religion and issuing orders to the soldiers.

Thus, the basic structure of the movement consists of leaders who are religious scholars and followers who are mostly illiterate and uneducated, which aligns perfectly with the model of a revolutionary social movement mentioned by al-Attas, as cited from Ibn Khaldun. In this model, the religious leader emerges as a mediator or interpreter of religion in a tribal or Bedouin context, unlike institutionalized religion based on texts in urban areas where knowledge is more widespread. These tribal masses are characterized by bravery, asceticism, a collective martial spirit, and homogeneity, in contrast to urban populations who do not exhibit the same virtues due to the prevalence of luxury, corruption, and the power of authority. An important point emphasized by al-Attas, and which applies notably to the Taliban model, is that

[52] Personal interview with Ahmed Mawlana in Istanbul on 13th October 2024.

religious solidarity (aṣabiyyah) does not negate tribal solidarity but rather forms trans-tribal solidarity, relying on stronger tribal solidarity. As Al-Attas stated:

> Religious reform functions as an overarching ‘aṣabiyyah that transcends tribalism, class, and ethnicity and yet is immanent in them. For example, an Islamic ‘aṣabiyyah transcends all tribes, but is at the same time dependent on the ‘aṣabiyyah of the strongest tribe, which appealed to religion as a galvanizing force (al-Attas 2014, 121).

In a similar context, researchers Vahid Brown and Don Rassler discussed the model of religious schools that spread throughout the tribal areas of Pakistan in the 20th century. These networks created supratribal solidarities among their members and new institutions for political mobilization: the Deobandi madrassa networks (Brown and Rassler 2013, 25).

5.3.4. Centralization or Decentralization

Some studies have discussed the extreme centralization within the Taliban movement, represented by the position and person of Amir al-Mu’minin, who holds vast authority in decision-making (Huwaydi 2001,54). Other studies, however, have pointed to a significant degree of decentralization through multiple centers, even during the more stable Taliban rule in the 1990s (D. Crews and Tarzi 2009, 79–87; Giustozzi 2010, 4) and certainly during the phase of resisting the American occupation (Martin 2014, 204-205; Giustozzi 2022, 12). Most interviews favored the view that, in principle and theory, the Taliban is largely a centralized movement. Despite the existence of regional Shura councils and a smaller, higher Shura ("ahl al-hall wa al-‘aqd") that advises the movement's leader before major decisions, and the ability of the council to remove the Amir should he stray from Islamic principles, such as engaging in Kufr (disbelief) or fisk (certain types of immorality or corruption), or lack competence (Haqqani 2022, 126-138), the final decision on all matters rests with the Amir al-Mu’minin, as long as he remains a legitimate Amir.

Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed described the Taliban as "largely considered a leader-centric movement," and Ahmad Mawlana clarified that Shura in the Taliban is advisory, not obligatory, based on traditional Islamic jurisprudence. The Amir is expected to consult, discuss, and listen to advice, but he is not obligated to follow the

council's suggestions. Abu al-Walid al-Homsi mentioned that Shura is highly functional within the Taliban as it is a deeply ingrained religious principle that they have learned, been raised on, and practiced. A lack of Shura would lead to marginalization and a lack of loyalty within the movement. However, the ultimate decision rests with the leader, as it must. Otherwise, division and conflict would arise, as has happened in many contemporary revolutionary and Jihad movements and fields, he stated.

5.3.5. Taliban out of Power: The Starfish Model

Zaidan also supported the idea that the Taliban is fundamentally a centralized movement. However, he noted that after being removed from power and beginning its resistance against the occupation, the movement employed a "starfish" model. This model represents a decentralized organizational structure, offering a sharp contrast to traditional, hierarchical (spider) organizations. In this model, there is no central authority or command chain. Instead, power and decision-making are spread across multiple independent units or "arms," each operating autonomously. This setup allows for greater agility, adaptability, and resilience. Like a starfish can regenerate its limbs, the model is designed to evolve and adapt over time. It's commonly found in organizations that prioritize collaboration, community involvement, and shared values, creating a strong sense of ownership and participation among members[53]. The Taliban movement, in their struggle against the US and the coalition occupation forces, split into six or seven factions, each operating independently, conducting operations, and engaging in struggle separately from the other factions. However, there was a very important element: the spiritual leader who organized and orchestrated the movement as a whole, Amir al mu'minin. Zaidan recounted personal experiences and stories showing how, even in this decentralized phase, Mullah Mohammad Omar managed and controlled the situation. He described how Mullah Omar acted when some leaders deviated from the prescribed path: he would send cassette messages threatening them and warning them that they would be held accountable when he returned to power. Zaidan argued that the authority of the Amir among the movement's leaders and members was not merely symbolic or moral but religious and personal. According to

[53]For more details: Brafman, Ori, and Rod A. Beckstrom. *Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*. New York: Penguin Group, 2006, 26-32.

Islamic law, defying or rebelling against the Amir is a very serious matter, and the personal authority of Mullah Omar stemmed from his historical achievements in Afghanistan as the founder. If he said he would return, he would certainly return, Taliban commanders think like this. All these considerations were present in the minds of the Taliban members, and thus, no splits occurred. Unlike in pre-modern parties and movements, Splits typically happen in post-modern movements because they lack well-established religio-social references.

However, the previous arguments do not imply that the movement has not faced existential challenges throughout its journey. There was a significant challenge that threatened the unity of the movement following the announcement of the death of its founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar, in mid-2015. The literature presents varying accounts, but There is a consensus that this phase was the most critical in terms of the cohesion-threatening within the Taliban ranks. Some sources mention severe disputes within the Taliban regarding leadership after the election of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, whom Mullah Omar had appointed as his successor, at a time when efforts were underway to conceal Omar's death. This secrecy upset some leaders, and there were those who wanted specific appointments before giving their allegiance, while others felt that they, or their relatives (such as Mullah Omar's brother from his mother's side, Mullah Abdul Manan, or his son, Mullah Muhammad Yaqoob) should be the rightful candidates for leadership. Some leaders split from the movement, either retreating into their homes, forming new groups, or joining ISIS, leading to significant tensions and concerns about the movement's unity. However, after extensive meetings, discussions, negotiations, and compromises between Shura members and senior Ulama (religious scholars) within the Taliban, the situation stabilized, and Mullah Akhtar Mansour successfully reunited the movement through his impressive social skills and relationships both within and outside the movement (Giustozzi 2022, 220-224).

Mullah Mutmain's memoirs support some of the points made by Giustozzi, including the rejection of Mullah Akhtar Mansour's allegiance by some leaders within the Taliban, such as Mullah Omar's son and brother. He also mentions some significant splits, though not as widespread as described by Giustozzi. Mullah Mutmain did not mention Mullah Muhammad Yaqoob's request to be a candidate for leadership after Mullah Omar, and regarding Mullah Abdul Manan, Mutmain noted that some of his

supporters said he was willing to pledge allegiance to Mansour if he were appointed as his deputy, which the Taliban leadership rejected, as they did not accept any conditions before the pledge of allegiance. After several months, Mullah Yaqoob and Mullah Abdul Manan pledged allegiance without conditions, following continuous efforts by scholars and mediators within the Taliban, and the unity of the movement was largely restored (Mutmain 2019, 283-292).

I could not thoroughly verify all the details mentioned in the literature, but some interviews highlighted important aspects of how the Taliban navigated this critical phase. First, Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed referred to the significant test faced by leader-centric movements, such as the Taliban, following the death of their founder, and then discussed two important points: Firstly, Mullah Akhtar Mansour skillfully managed the situation, avoiding significant splits, and appointed Mullah Hibatullah (the current Amir of the Taliban) as his first deputy, thereby gaining the trust of scholars, as he was a scholar trusted by them. He also appointed Mullah Sirajuddin Haqqani as his second deputy, a figure from a prominent Mujahid family with extensive influence and popularity. Mansour was able to deal with his opponents without using force against them. Jalali echoed Saeed's words, describing the situation as catastrophic after Mullah Omar's death and the refusal of some Shura members to pledge allegiance to Mullah Akhtar Mansour. He described Mansour as highly intelligent and politically astute, comparing him to the famous companion of the Prophet, Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, for his ability to reunite the group by satisfying all factions in ways that appeased each one. Jalali also provided a critical piece of information that contradicts some literature's analysis that Mansour was closely aligned with Pakistan, saying that Mullah Akhtar Mansour was Pakistan's main enemy and was the one who sought to expand the Taliban's relations beyond Pakistan, which had been the only window for the Taliban.

5.3.6. Differences between the Three Amirs

In this context, it is important to highlight the main qualities and differences between the three Amirs who have led the Taliban since its inception, and how each of their leadership capabilities contributed to maintaining the unity of the movement. Initially, all participants agreed that the role of Amir al-Mu'minin in unifying the

movement was immense, primarily deriving from his religious authority and the oath of allegiance (bay'ah) he received rather than from his personal charisma, popularity, or personality. Zaidan emphasized this by stating, "Mullah Omar was not well-known, but after the bay'ah, he became a spiritual leader." However, there are undoubtedly differences between the three amirs.

Mullah Mohammad Omar was, without question, a spiritual leader par excellence. Jalali mentioned that he was a Sufi who deeply loved the Naqshbandi order. In his youth, he had wished to pledge allegiance to the Sufi leader in Kabul but could not due to his poverty. Omar was a man of few words, rarely angry, and would often play with children. He was very attached to remaining in Afghanistan and focused on jihad, not willing to go into hiding or leave for Pakistan. Jalali also expressed the status of Mullah Omar, saying, “I do not know if anyone will ever have the impact Mullah Omar had." There was unanimous agreement among the participants that Mullah Omar’s overwhelming spiritual presence and influence were crucial to his leadership, and Zaidan added that his prestige was such that it was difficult for anyone to oppose him. Ahmad Mawlana also emphasized the profound influence of being the founder, asserting that the founder of any group or movement typically leaves an indelible mark, one that no subsequent leader can replicate. He also noted that no divisions occurred during Mullah Omar’s leadership.

Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor was greatly different, as described by Dr. Zaidan, and was a man of great political astuteness and a statesman in the truest sense. He opened extensive foreign relations for the Taliban, unlike Mullah Omar, who preferred to remain inwardly focused. Zaidan added that it was rumored Mullah Mansoor visited Dubai fourteen times under a pseudonym. He was instrumental in forming strong economic ties with several countries. While Mansoor succeeded in reunifying the Taliban to a great extent, his leadership was abruptly cut short when he was killed by a U.S. drone strike. Ahmad Mawlana highlighted the institutionalization efforts Mansour initiated. This was reflected in the literature as noted by Mutmain, "Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansoor was a leader in the Taliban who intended to systematize and modernize the Taliban movement, in addition to the struggle against the U.S" It was via establishing the ‘Leadership Office’ for better administration and promoting public interest projects like water, electricity, and agriculture. Also, He made strategic

appointments to unite factions within the movement by appointing influential leaders at the top of the Taliban hierarchy and including the modern educated Taliban[54]. His focus on professional training and modern education aimed to modernize and sustain the Taliban in the long term. (Mutmain 2019, 282- 289, 312).

The third leader of the Taliban was Mawlawi Hebatullah, whom Mullah Akhtar Mansoor appointed as his deputy, as previously mentioned. He was a spiritually pious and ascetic judge. According to Zaidan, he was a less centralized leader than Mullah Omar and Mullah Mansoor. Some literature suggests that Mullah Hebatullah struggled to complete the unification of the Taliban despite his attempts to bring together various factions and supporters of the movement (Giustozzi 2022, 271-274). Jalali, however, strongly disagreed with this assessment, arguing that Hebatullah was more influential than Mansoor. He pointed out that Mawlawi Hebatullah had an advantage that neither Mullah Omar nor Mullah Mansoor possessed: He was an eloquent speaker with an influential voice. His credibility was further strengthened when his son carried out a suicide martyrdom operation against U.S. forces in 2017 after Hebatullah had assumed leadership. Jalali also referred to the amnesty decree issued by Hebatullah before the Taliban's 2021 capture of Kabul, which, according to him, led to the collapse of the Afghan government.

5.3.7. The Role of Ulama (Senior Scholars)

There is broad agreement across interviews and literature on the pivotal role of scholars in the Taliban movement, particularly in education, judicial matters, legislative affairs, and advisory roles. The scholar's influence is crucial in ensuring that the decisions made by the movement are not contrary to Islamic law, as their role is essential in legitimizing the Taliban's actions (Stenersen 42-55). al-Saedi noted the significant role of the Supreme Court of Afghanistan, which consists of senior scholars with the

[54] This included the appointment of Khalifa Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the powerful Haqqani network in eastern Afghanistan, as his deputy. Despite many international efforts to separate the Haqqanis from the Taliban, Sirajuddin refused to break ties with the movement, and according to Mutmain, his loyalty made him deserving of this important role. Additionally, Mullah Mansoor appointed Sher Abbas Stankzai, a modern university graduate rather than a religious scholar, as the head of the political committee, showing his openness to different forms of expertise within the Taliban leadership (Mutmain 2019, 284- 285).

authority to issue fatwas and decisions regarding the permissibility or prohibition of any matter. He shared an example where Mullah Omar referred the issue of handing over Osama bin Laden to Saudi Arabia or the U.S. to the court, which rejected the request. This story was also recounted by Mutmain in his memoirs (Mutmain 2019, 158-159). Qari Abdul Sattar al-Saeed also gave another example of the scholars' role in decision-making, citing the Doha Agreement, which required approval from a five-member committee of scholars to ensure its religious legitimacy. As for administrative and military positions or decisions related to them, the individual's level of religious knowledge did not directly correlate with the positions they held. Many of the Taliban's senior leaders were not renowned scholars or mullahs but rather lower-ranking mullahs, which aligns with the findings in the literature (Semple 2014, 21). An additional point raised by Bahir, which was not found in the literature, is the qualitative shift in the movement after Mullah Hebatullah assumed leadership in 2016.

The new Amir showed a greater interest in involving scholars in leadership positions, significantly increasing their presence in various Shura councils, making them the overwhelming majority, as Bahir stated. This contrasted with Mullah Omar and Mullah Mansoor, who had not assigned such significant roles to the scholars, their involvement being primarily concerned with ensuring that the actions and decisions of the movement conformed to Islamic law rather than occupying leadership positions. In conclusion, the Taliban is a movement centered around a leader (not just any leader) but one who embodies both political and religious authority through the position of Amir al-Mu'minin, commanding high levels of obedience. Nevertheless, on the ground, the movement is run by Shura (advisory) councils, the Scholars Council, which ensures that the actions of the movement do not contravene Islamic teachings, though scholars do not intervene in the minutiae of decision-making. Furthermore, the movement has demonstrated a significant level of flexibility, transitioning to a decentralized form (Starfish model) during two decades of war while maintaining the position of the central spiritual leader who organized all the decentralized Shura networks operating on the ground. From my perspective, the structural factors outlined above have been key to maintaining the unity of the movement through its critical historical junctures rather than personal or external factors.

5.4. Foreign Mujahid Organizations

More than a decade before the rise of the Taliban, volunteers from various parts of the Islamic world, particularly Central Asia and the Arab world, began arriving in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s to support the Afghan people in their struggle against the Soviet occupation. At the time, many Islamic movements were fighting the Soviets, some large and others small. However, there was one group that controlled the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, specifically in areas and cities where the majority of foreign fighters entered and exited, areas known to have been rebellious since the British colonial era, where they had been resistant to colonial rule. Following the emergence of the Taliban and their control over most of Afghanistan, this group joined the Taliban and handed over all their weapons. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, this group played a significant role in reviving the Taliban, as documented in both academic literature and interviews. This group became a major component within the Taliban, with Mullah Sirajuddin Haqqani, who became Deputy Amir al-Mu'minin in 2016, at its helm (Mutmain 2019, 310-313).

This introduction is crucial to understanding the relationship between the Taliban and foreign Mujahid organisations, as what is known as the Haqqani network within the Taliban is the most active and influential wing in interacting with and being influenced by these organisations. Furthermore, its connection to these groups is much older than the rest of the Taliban factions.

5.4.1. Pre-2001

As discussed earlier in this study, the Taliban movement, led by Mullah Muhammad Omar, emerged in the southern province of Kandahar from a group of local, largely unknown students from religious madrassas who had participated in the jihad against the Soviets and the Communists. Within two years, this nascent movement controlled most of Afghanistan, including the capital, Kabul, and largely confined the civil war and security chaos. However, a small part of northern Afghanistan (5-10%) remained under the control of the Islamist government, which had been overthrown by the Taliban and became an opposing force known as the Northern Alliance. At that time, there were 14 foreign Mujahid groups, mostly Arabs and Central Asians (especially

Uzbeks and Turkestanis), numbering around 2,000 people, in addition to a similar number of Pakistani mujahideen groups. Many of these fighters were remnants of the fighters who had fought the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Most of these groups had an agenda opposed to the ruling regimes in their home countries and were sought by these regimes. The famous al-Qaeda organization, in particular, sought to confront America and launch attacks against it. The Taliban refused to hand over any of them and provided protection for them (Abd-al-Hakeem 2004, 720-725).

Literature focuses on the field support provided by these foreign Mujahids to the Taliban during this period, which was significant in solidifying Taliban rule during its struggle with the Afghan opposition, represented by the Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Massoud (Martin 2014, 109). Interviews confirm this, though some of the claims seem exaggerated. At this stage, the foreign Mujahid bloc was not large, and their field role was not decisive, except during one instance when Kabul almost fell to the Northern Alliance, and it was the foreign Mujahideen who confronted and sent them back alone, as researcher Islam al-Ghamri informed me.

A crucial point not found in any of the writings but mentioned by Abu Hafs al-Muritani, the former mufti of al-Qaeda, in a television interview on Al Jazeera, is that the Taliban did not want to involve foreign Mujahideen in the fight against the Afghan opposition, but the insistence of the foreign fighters led the Taliban to accept their participation. This reinforces what al-Ghamri said that the involvement of foreign fighters was not as impactful as some studies have claimed.

5.4.2. The Complex Relationship between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda

Regarding the relationship between al-Qaeda, the most famous foreign Mujahid organization, and the Taliban, there is a significant consensus between the interviews and the literature on the nature of this complex relationship. On one hand, al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, pledged allegiance to the Taliban and recognized Mullah Muhammad Omar as Amir al-Mu'minin in Afghanistan, and the Taliban offered protection to al-Qaeda. On the other hand, al-Qaeda did not adhere to the policies and directives of the Taliban concerning threats against Saudi Arabia and the United States, nor did they refrain from launching attacks outside Afghanistan, despite repeated

warnings from the Taliban, which strained the relationship between the two (Mutmain 2019, 149-150). Some literature claims that after bin Laden repeatedly violated Taliban instructions and gave several media interviews following the attacks targeting two U.S. embassies in Africa, Mullah Muhammad Omar ordered Osama bin Laden and his family to leave the country (Brown and Rassler 2013, 116). However, none of the interviewees supported this claim. Indeed, Mullah Mutmain mentioned an incident in his memoirs where Saudi intelligence chief Turki al-Faisal, during one of his visits to Afghanistan, offered millions of dollars in exchange for bin Laden's expulsion, something the Taliban considered shameful. Mullah Mutmain highlighted a common misconception in the studies that discussed the Taliban's protection of bin Laden in exchange for his support for them, adding that when Osama joined the Taliban, he was not wealthy enough to support the Taliban movement or government (Mutmain 2019, 151).

Regarding the spread of the ideology of al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden within the Taliban, according to most of the literature, some elements within the movement were influenced by al-Qaeda's ideology and its global jihad project. Notable figures include Tayeb Agha, one of Mullah Omar's three secretaries and a key liaison between the Taliban and al-Qaeda at one point, and some leaders who facilitated bin Laden's media appearances (Mutmain 2019, 135). However, the general ideology of the Taliban remained distinct from al-Qaeda's, focused on establishing an Islamic government in Afghanistan rather than waging war against the U.S. and the West. This was evident in the words of Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, one of the founding members of the Taliban: "I was a Talib, I am a Talib, and I will always be a Talib, but I have never been a part of al-Qaeda" (Zaeef 2010, xxxviii).

Abu Walid confirmed this, warning against the frequent mistake in many studies of classifying the Haqqani network (which is the faction of the Taliban closest to foreign Mujahideen, including al-Qaeda) as separate or semi-independent from the Taliban. He emphasized that this view is inaccurate, as the Taliban is "one entity." Similarly, Jalali told me that the Haqqanis are traditional, like the Taliban, and their influence from al-Qaeda was in other aspects but not in ideology or political agendas.

In an interview with me, Ahmad Mawlana went further, stating that the points of divergence between the Taliban and al-Qaeda are more significant than the points of agreement, whether in terms of doctrine, jurisprudence, or political projects. The Taliban's project has always been to establish an Islamic government, and while it may support Muslim causes globally, it is not focused on global jihad. On the other hand, al-Qaeda's goal is the globalization of jihad. However, Islam pointed out the impact of al-Qaeda in helping the Taliban move beyond its "local" context, describing how al-Qaeda brought the Taliban into conflict with global powers starting in the late 1990s.

Indeed, one of the consequences of the Taliban hosting al-Qaeda was the severing of diplomatic relations with several countries, such as Saudi Arabia, after the Taliban refused to hand over bin Laden and Mullah Omar chastised Turki al-Faisal, then head of Saudi intelligence. This led to increased international sanctions and economic blockades, resulting from al-Qaeda's attacks on US embassies and the USS *Cole* in Yemen. Ultimately, after the September 11 attacks, US President George Bush explicitly demanded that Mullah Omar hand over bin Laden despite providing no evidence of his involvement in these attacks. Mullah Omar refused and referred the matter to the Supreme Court. After two days of consultation, the religious scholars issued a fatwa declaring it unlawful to hand over bin Laden to any external party or force him out of Afghanistan. Instead, they ruled that he should leave Afghanistan voluntarily, and if the U.S. invaded, jihad would be obligatory. Mullah Omar's final decision was not to hand over bin Laden or force his departure. He believed that resisting the U.S. was better than submitting to it, as America would not be satisfied even if bin Laden left. As conveyed by Mullah Mutmain on behalf of Mullah Omar, the conclusion was: *"*Islam, a sense of being Afghan, or human pride doesn't allow us to fulfill their demands" (Mutmain 2019, 212-213). Wazeen concluded that the Taliban demonstrated exemplary resistance in refusing to hand over their Muslim brethren, and this stance will forever be remembered in history.

The outcome was the invasion of Afghanistan after the U.S. mustered a broad international coalition, toppling the Taliban regime. Initially, it seemed as though the movement had been completely and definitively eradicated.

5.4.3. Post-2001

Studies and interviews agree that the Haqqani network in eastern Afghanistan, specifically in the cities of Khost, Paktia, and Paktika, collectively known as Loyā Paktia or Greater Paktia, as well as in northern Waziristan in Pakistan, played a significant role in reviving the resistance against the international coalition and reviving the Taliban movement at a time when much of Afghanistan, including Kandahar, the Taliban's stronghold and birthplace, was in a state of collapse. Some studies attribute this to historical and geographical factors. The Haqqanis are Pashtuns from the mountainous regions, historically known for resisting authority and making it difficult to enforce law due to the rugged terrain, even during the British Empire. On the other hand, the influence of religious leaders has always been stronger in these areas than that of traditional tribal leaders, as opposed to the lowland Pashtun regions of southern Afghanistan, particularly Kandahar, which made the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s a revolutionary phenomenon in comparison to the past 150 years (Brown and Rassler 2013, 23-24). However, this theory is strongly contradicted by much of the history of southern Afghanistan, particularly Kandahar, where religious scholars played a fundamental role in leading revolutions against British, Soviet, and American occupations, as well as against some Afghan kings and presidents (Mutmain 2019, 20-34). Therefore, scholars in both the southern and northern regions played a key role in leading revolutions.

This time, the revolution began in the east, with a significant addition: the presence of foreign Mujahid groups. Although their numbers were not as large or as experienced as those of the fighters who arrived in the 1980s during the Soviet war, as shared by Zaidan, al-Ghamri, and Mawlana, their impact was undeniably significant. Former Mujahid fighter in Afghanistan and researcher on Islamic movements, al-Ghamri told me that in the 1980s, there was a notable presence of volunteer Arab officers, including Syrians, Egyptians, a Qatari officer, and a former Tunisian officer who had been part of the personal guard of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. He also mentioned that during the Soviet war, there was greater engagement in military manufacturing. In my view, this is logical, as the Pakistan-Afghanistan border was fully open at that time, with Pakistan being an ally of the U.S. and the West and a supply route for the anti-Soviets and anti-communists.

5.4.4. Fields of Support from Foreign Mujahideen to the Taliban

Before discussing the direct areas in which foreign Mujahideen supported the Taliban, it is essential to note an important point raised by Mujahid Abdullah al-Kurdi, Jalali, and Bahir, which is rarely mentioned in literature. This point concerns the indirect, inspiring impact of foreign Mujahideen in Iraqi resistance on the Taliban's soldiers. During a period of weakness and dormancy for the Taliban, the intense martyrdom operations carried out in Iraq against the U.S. occupation between 2003 and 2006 inspired the Taliban soldiers. They watched these operations and their devastating effect on U.S. forces, seeing them as an unconventional tactic that the Taliban had not previously practiced, Jalali stated. He also told me that there were members of the Taliban who remained unconvinced of this tactic until the end. Even Mullah Mohammad Omar was not a fan of it. However, as the operations increased, he issued a decree prohibiting young people from carrying out these operations, narrowing the usage of these operations only when no other alternative was available, and forbidding them in public places (Mutmain 2019, 267). The current Amir of the Taliban, Mullah Hibatullah, was convinced of it, and his son carried out an operation against U.S. forces in 2017, as mentioned before.

5.4.5. Military Support and New Tactics

Although foreign Mujahideen were not much on the ground and mostly conducted operations in border areas rather than within Afghanistan, the qualitative impact of their military support was widely- acknowledged by those, who participated in the Afghan resistance.

5.4.6. Martyrdom Operations[55]

Literature suggests that foreign mujahideen, particularly those who fought in Iraq, introduced the concept of Martyrdom operations into the Afghan jihad against the Western coalition forces and the Afghan government. Studies emphasize the significant field and psychological impact of these operations, which started in 2006

[55] Known as suicide bombing in the western academia, However in the Islamic concept it is almost described as Al Amaliyat Al Istishhadiya (martyrdom operations).

when they surged to balance out the effects of U.S. airstrikes. Martyrdom operations are typically associated with large-scale attacks and the targeting of high-profile figures. Literature indicates that the Haqqani network carried out more of these operations than other components of the Taliban, and many of those who carried them out were foreign fighters (Giustozzi 2022, 145-157, 171). Interviews confirmed this, with Bahir stating: "I am not exaggerating when I say that the movement's persistence in resistance and its strategies in dealing with the world were among the most important influences of the foreign Mujahideen." Abu Musa, the Uzbek Mujahid, mentioned that when he was in Afghanistan, 90% of the martyrdom attackers were foreign fighters, although I could not verify this percentage with other interviewees.

5.4.7. Fighting Alone

In a related but somewhat distinct matter from martyrdom operations, Zaidan, an expert on Afghan society, drew my attention to a socio-military issue that I have not encountered in any book or study. He pointed out that Afghans typically do not fight alone, as they are used to fighting in groups. This idea of individual combat was introduced by foreign fighters, and the Afghans, including the Taliban, were influenced by them. Abdullah al-Kurdi also told me that Kashmiri fighters were known for their infiltration operations, which were semi-suicidal in nature, as the fighter would penetrate deep into enemy lines and fight until his ammunition was depleted, either detonating himself or returning if possible.

5.4.8. Slaughtering

Another method that became prominent in the Iraqi resistance was the slaughter of traitors, spies, or enemies. One of the participants, Jalali, told me that this was also one of the practices introduced to the Taliban by some foreign mujahideen. Some Taliban fighters carried out these practices, but it was later prohibited by their leaders, unlike martyrdom operations, which continued until the end.

5.4.9. Training

Literature highlights the clear disparity in military experience between foreign mujahideen and the Taliban. Foreign fighters contributed significantly to the establishment of training camps, where they trained some Taliban members on the use of modern weapons and effective combat tactics, particularly in Pakistan's Waziristan and the border regions. However, they had little presence in the interior fronts of Afghanistan. Literature also notes that, over time, the Taliban made noticeable progress in their military capabilities (Giustozzi 2022, 192). Interviews strongly agreed with the first point regarding the important role foreign mujahideen played in training the Taliban. However, the interviews revealed a completely different outcome regarding the improvement in the Taliban's military tactics. Both Abdullah al-Kurdi and Abu Musa al-Uzbeki agreed on this. From Abu Musa's perspective, only a small number of those who benefited from the training camps became professional fighters, not exceeding 10% at best. "The Taliban won through faith, reliance on God, and courage, not through military strategies," he said. He provided examples demonstrating the simplicity of the Taliban fighters, who were not committed to the necessary military camouflage during battles. They would put olive oil on their hair, hang flowers in their ears, and go into battle in this manner. Abu al-Walid also mentioned that the Americans or coalition forces could distinguish between fronts with foreign mujahideen and those without, based on the clear difference in performance and military strategies.

5.4.10. Media and Financial Support

Another crucial area in which foreign mujahideen supported the Taliban, which has been extensively discussed in literature, is financial support. The literature indicates that this support was vital to the war effort, and it came from multiple sources rather than a single country. However, the Arab world and al-Qaeda played a pivotal role (Giustozzi 2022, 15-91-92). Interviews supported this notion, with Jalali particularly noting that the financial support from foreign mujahideen was very important. Several key points regarding this support were raised in the interviews. First, most of the foreign mujahideen were financially well-off, with some even financing their own

martyrdom suicide operations by purchasing the vehicle and explosives used in their missions, as Abu Musa al-Uzbeki informed me.

Another point highlighted by Jalali, which I did not find in the literature, was the role of foreign mujahideen in developing the Taliban's media presence. It was the Arabs who founded *al-Sumud*, the Taliban's official magazine in Arabic, which conveyed news about the battles and statements from Taliban leaders, informing the Arab world and Arabic-speaking populations about the situation in Afghanistan. This greatly helped in securing crucial financial support from the Arab world. Abu Musa also mentioned the transformation brought about by foreign mujahideen in convincing the Taliban to document military operations. This was seen as important in the media war against the enemies. Initially, the Taliban had reservations about filming operations for two reasons: first, to avoid any form of showiness in their work, and second, because they considered it forbidden to film. However, starting in 2009, the Taliban began filming their operations.

5.4.11. Engagement with the Issues of the Ummah and Interaction with Islamic Movements

Interviews emphasized that the Taliban's relationship with foreign mujahideen enabled them to become more aware of global Muslim issues, which they had previously been largely ignorant of due to their deeply localized background. Bahir said, "The movement is not like it was in the past when it only thought about Afghanistan. It now operates as an Islamic state concerned with the Muslim Ummah." He also mentioned how the Taliban, influenced by foreign mujahideen groups, began thinking about how to Islamize all aspects of governance. Despite these influences, it is important to note that this did not mean the Taliban adopted a global jihad ideology or any other Islamic ideology. This point was agreed upon by both studies and interviews. Ahmad Mawlana stated, "In my view, the current Taliban does not carry the ideology and mentality of Salafi jihadism or al-Qaeda." Abu Musa al-Uzbeki shared a similar view, even stating, "Even the countries that supported the Taliban could not change their mindset, so how could we, the foreign fighters?" However, he added that a very small percentage, perhaps no more than 3%, was influenced by the ideas of foreign mujahideen. Shinwari also affirmed this idea, stating that the Taliban

were less influenced by external Islamic ideologies compared to previous Afghan mujahideen groups that fought the Soviets. Zaidan and al-Saedi also noted the Taliban's strong adherence to their Hanafi reference, both in doctrinal and jurisprudential matters, as well as in political aspects, despite developments in certain areas. Zaidan described the Hanafi school as deeply suited to governance and Islamic civilization, as it has been the dominant school of law in Muslim states since the Abbasid era. On his part, Jalali observed a shift towards Salafi thought, but it remained limited as he noticed.

5.4.12. The Taliban, Foreign Mujahideen, and ISIS

The vast majority of foreign fighters in Afghanistan adhere to Salafi ideology, and many fought alongside the Taliban, even pledging allegiance to it, as previously mentioned. However, a segment of foreign fighters joined ISIS, which declared the Taliban to be apostates and fought against them. Despite the defection of some Taliban members to ISIS, including three prominent military leaders, the most notable being Mullah Mansour Dadullah, brother of one of the most significant military leaders during Mullah Omar's time, Mullah Dadullah, there is significant agreement among the literature and interviews that ISIS's ideology came from outside Afghanistan, with many of its members not being Afghan (Mutmain 2019, 305-310). Abdullah al-Kurdi added that most of the Afghans who joined ISIS were Salafis from the provinces of Nuristan and Nangarhar, along with Pakistanis from the tribal areas and many Uzbeks and some Chechens. Al-Ghamri also observed that Salafi currents in Afghanistan were more influenced by ISIS ideology in the Kunar region. Jalali mentioned that some young Taliban members who saw ISIS's publications from Iraq and Syria were influenced by its rhetoric, with some even claiming that ISIS had established a caliphate and surpassed the Taliban, urging others to join them.

Qari Abd al-Sattar al-Saeed stated that, with the exception of Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan, there were no large-scale defections from the Taliban. He also noted that many foreign fighters joined ISIS, particularly Uzbeks, Turkestans, and individuals from certain Arab countries. This led to Taliban suspicions about the opportunism of these foreign fighters, thinking their allegiance to the Taliban had been out of necessity. He also mentioned something that had not appeared in any of the literature:

despite the Taliban sacrificing their rule (the Islamic Emirate) in 2001 because of the actions of foreign fighters, after the Taliban leaders and foreign fighters were imprisoned in Guantanamo, the following occurred, as expressed by Qari Abd al-Sattar al-Saeed:

"Many foreign fighters in Guantanamo would tell the Taliban leaders that they were misguided, engaged in polytheism and innovations because they followed the teachings of Imam Abu Hanifa and adhered to the Ash'ari creed.56. Similarly, after the emergence of ISIS, a large number of foreign fighters joined ISIS, leading the Taliban to conclude that these individuals were only with the Emirate out of necessity and did not truly accept the Emirate's methodology."

In a similar context, Abu Musa al-Uzbeki, a former fighter in the ranks of the Taliban, told me that some Azerbaijanis and Saudis had labeled the Taliban as apostates even before the emergence of ISIS. However, the Taliban did not harm them and instead honored and treated them despite knowing they considered the Taliban apostates, as the Muhajir (foreign fighter) was considered "sacred" to them unless they raised arms against them. He shared many incredible stories, summarising that the Taliban and Afghans, in general, would prioritize the "Muhajirun" (Foreign fighters) over themselves in all matters despite their poverty and that the "Muhajirun" generally regarded Taliban in the high level of Sahaba (companions of the Prophet Muhammad) (PBUH). When I asked him whether these sentiments and treatment changed after the emergence of ISIS, he said that the Taliban distinguishes between ISIS members and other foreign fighters. They knew each other's inclinations and treated them accordingly. Jalali also mentioned that after the rise of ISIS, the Taliban became more scrutinizing of those who claimed Salafi ideology, both from within Afghanistan and abroad.

From the perspective of Abu al-Walid al-Homsi, the experiences of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Bosnia during President Aliya Izetbegović's time were among the most prudent in dealing with foreign mujahideen. In all war arenas, foreign fighters, at a certain point, had a negative impact as well as a positive one. However, in these two

[56] Theological school of thought widely spread throughout the Muslim world.

experiences, the actions and plans of foreign fighters were kept within the framework of the broader project and policy adopted by the Taliban or the Bosnian leadership to avoid internal conflicts and fragmentation. Abdullah al-Kurdi and Abu Musa al-Uzbeki supported this view and pointed out two important aspects of the Taliban's policy toward foreign mujahideen: First, they never gave leadership positions to foreign mujahideen, and second, they kept foreign fighters out of any internal disputes with the Afghan community.

Regarding the conflict between the Taliban and ISIS, most of the interviews suggested that the emergence of ISIS and the ensuing conflict with it was more of an annoyance to the Taliban than a widespread threat. There was no significant fracture in the Taliban's structure or legitimacy, and ISIS remained largely confined to the border regions, contrary to some literature that suggests the Taliban suffered major defections and spent years defending against ISIS (Giustozzi 2022, 247-275). Ahmad Mawlana noted that the rise of ISIS opened a third front for the Taliban, which somewhat distracted them as they were already fighting the Americans and the Afghan government. Zaidan, Bahir, Abdullah al-Kurdi, and Abu Musa all agreed on downplaying the claims of ISIS presenting a real threat to the Taliban. According to them, ISIS was an imported idea, foreign to Afghanistan, and did not have deep-rooted support within the country.

Thus, the interviews strongly supported the literature's account of the complex relationship and significant impact of foreign mujahideen on the Taliban's trajectory since its rise to power in the mid-1990s. However, the general conclusion is that the literature overstates the role of foreign mujahideen in consolidating Taliban rule during the 1990s while providing a thorough examination of the complex relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda during the first Taliban regime up until its fall in late 2001. On the other hand, the literature does not adequately highlight many fields of qualitative support provided by foreign mujahideen during the period of resistance to the U.S. occupation, which the interviews detailed in depth. These contributions ranged from the introduction of new military tactics and methods unknown to the Taliban and Afghans in general to vital media and financial support and the opening of new networks of relationships with individuals and movements in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

The study also revealed the nature of the Taliban's view of foreign mujahideen and their relationship with them. Furthermore, it uncovered another aspect of foreign mujahideen at a certain point when some joined ISIS and fought against the Taliban, while others remained loyal and supportive of the Taliban until it returned to power on August 15, 2021.

In conclusion, the research shows that various religious factors, including doctrine, Sharia, and a homogeneous traditional structure, were the most important in the strength, cohesion, and persistence of the movement, especially during its critical phases. Additionally, the significant impact of foreign mujahideen in providing qualitative support to the movement, particularly during the resistance to occupation, was crucial. From the network of religious traditional schools in Afghanistan and its surroundings, which served as a reservoir for leaders with coherent ideological and moral backgrounds and practices, the Taliban stood apart from other Islamic movements. Interviews pointed to a major misconception in the literature that depicts the Taliban as a product of the Deobandi networks in Pakistan, which was rejected by most participants. They argued that the correct description of the Taliban is that it emerged from traditional Hanafi schools (of which Deobandi is a part) more generally, with no direct ideological or organizational connection to Deobandi centers in Pakistan or India, and there were significant political views and agendas differences between them.

Moreover, the seriousness of implementing Sharia and maintaining social order according to it played a significant role in rallying and attracting support for the Taliban's legitimacy despite the occasional mistakes, excesses, and violations. The central role of the movement's leader, the Amir al-Mu'minin, who represents both religious and political authority and commands a high degree of obedience, is distinct from contemporary political parties. The study also highlighted the personal differences between the three emirs who led the movement and the impact of these differences. Beneath the Amir, the important role of the Shura councils in running the movement in a highly decentralized manner while preserving the unified leadership role in handling and resolving internal conflicts was also evident. The significant weight of Ulema (religious scholars) within the movement played a pivotal role in

maintaining the movement's legitimacy, as well as in overseeing its legislative, judicial, and supervisory functions throughout its journey.

Also, the muscles of the movement, predominantly composed of uneducated or simple tribal youth who fought for various reasons, some of whom committed crimes but overall showed strong loyalty to the movement, were crucial. Finally, the complex role of foreign mujahideen, who had both positive and negative impacts on the Taliban, was also significant. One of the main reasons for the fall of the Taliban's rule was the 9/11 attacks carried out by foreign mujahideen operating from Afghanistan. However, after the fall of the movement, foreign mujahideen played a significant role in supporting the movement with expertise, suicide bombers, unconventional military tactics, as well as media and financial support, which undoubtedly contributed to the Taliban's resurgence. On the other hand, many foreign mujahideen joined ISIS and fought the Taliban, attempting to dismantle it. While ISIS succeeded in disturbing the Taliban and attracting some of its leaders and fighters, the movement ultimately overcame ISIS and maintained its unity, regaining power in August 2021.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It may be one of the rarest cases in modern times, if not the only one, where a social movement successfully seizes power twice within less than twenty-five years and under completely different circumstances. The first time was in the context of a civil war following a war of independence against a superpower, the Soviet Union, and the second came after a prolonged two-decade war against a large international coalition led by the world's sole superpower, the United States. What is even more remarkable is that this movement has, and still does, belonged to a traditional religious stream with little experience not only in contemporary political theories and practice but also in understanding the modern developments in science, social issues, administration, ideological thought, and technology. These combined factors compelled me, strongly and long before the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021, to seriously focus on studying this movement.

A vast number of field studies, books, and academic articles have been published in repeated attempts to analyze the strength and cohesion of the Taliban movement from various perspectives: military, organizational, economic, social, religious, ideological, and others during the long war the Taliban fought against the international coalition in Afghanistan and after their return to power. I have reviewed many of these works, yet I found clear deficiencies in some cases and misunderstandings in others regarding the religious factors contributing to the cohesion of the Taliban movement, which might distinguish it from other Islamic movements and resistance groups that have experienced divisions or failed to achieve their goals. This study is a new attempt to offer a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of a set of religious factors that have influenced the Taliban's unity despite the continuous efforts to divide the movement into "fundamentalists" and "moderates" by successive American administrations over many years, as mentioned by Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, one of the movement's leaders, in his memoirs (Zaeef 2010, 153).

This study's central question is: How has religion contributed to the cohesion of the Taliban movement? I have discussed four key factors that, I believe, bring new insights either by correcting widespread misconceptions in much of the literature or by reinterpreting the religious factors related to the rise and endurance of the Taliban in light of Ibn Khaldun's classical theories on the rise and fall of states. These are the same theories of Islamic revival that have frequently been applied throughout history, as illustrated by Malaysian sociologist Syed Farid al-Attas (al-Attas 2014, 98–118).

For the first factor, the findings showed that the Taliban's affiliation with traditional Hanafi madrassa networks places it within the concept of "socially cohesive religion," which distinguishes it from many contemporary political movements and parties, both Islamic and non-Islamic, that lack this characteristic and struggle to mobilize large, cohesive social networks beyond their organizational members. Another crucial point Regarding the label of the Taliban as a Deobandi movement (a major Hanafi stream) is that while many of its founding leaders and fighters were educated at prominent Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan, this classification is inaccurate for several reasons.

First, the traditional Hanafi madrassas in Afghanistan, which have long been the primary source of Taliban leadership and fighters, predate the establishment of Deobandi madrassas in India and their subsequent spread to Afghanistan. These local Hanafi madrassas are ideologically and structurally (informal independent traditional religious seminars) similar to Deobandi ones but are not part of the Deobandi network. Second, while there is significant polarization between Deobandis and Barelvis, another major Hanafi stream, the Taliban does not share this level of animosity towards the Barelvi movement, further distancing it from the Deobandi-Barelvi divide seen in the wider Indian subcontinent.

Also, Although the Taliban has received considerable support from Deobandis outside Afghanistan, reinforcing a special connection between the two, this relationship is complex. While Deobandi teachings, institutions, and networks have certainly influenced the Taliban, the movement's ideological roots are not limited to the Deoband stream, and their political project and alliances do not fully align with the mainstream Deobandi orientations in Pakistan and elsewhere (Mutmain 2019, 7-10, 185; Jackson 2013, 1-11). Therefore, while the Deobandi label is not entirely without

merit, it does not fully capture the complexities of the Taliban's ideological identity and political agenda.

The second important religious factor discussed in the studies is the Taliban's implementation of Islamic law (Sharia) and its impact on the movement's cohesion and its ability to regenerate support despite the harshness and poor implementation at times. This was because the Taliban managed, through its enforcement of Sharia, to establish security in its areas of control and eradicate corruption, both moral and financial, to a large extent (Stenersen 2010, 15; Giustozzi 2007, 111).

However, the literature often overlooked the fact that the first rise of the Taliban followed a widely established Islamic revival model that has been repeated many times throughout history, starting from the principle of "commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong," a classical method of change that has been applied repeatedly since the first century of the Hijrah (AH), which in many cases led to the fall of states and the rise of new ones. Farid al-attas derived this model from Ibn Khaldun's famous theories about the cyclical nature of states and civilizations (al-Attas 2014, 102), and it is entirely different from contemporary Islamic approaches that seek political change through electoral processes or military coups. Another point of debate in the literature is whether the movement acts pragmatically when Sharia conflicts with local customs or whether it strictly adheres to religious values even when they contradict local norms. In most cases, the research findings leaned toward the latter view, which reinforced the movement's adherence to its values and provided it with an additional advantage over other groups.

The third factor is related to the movement's organizational structure. The findings agreed with the literature that the centrality of the position of the *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful), who holds the leadership of the movement, and the exceptional obedience imposed by religious teachings on the movement's members, embedded in their educational and doctrinal training, played a decisive role in maintaining the unity of the movement. However, the findings also highlighted the flexibility of the movement's structure in adopting a decentralized "starfish" model of administration while maintaining the pivotal role of the Amir (not just symbolically or spiritually) in regulating the movement and resolving disputes among the various

factions leading the field operations. The interviews also clarified the difference between the Taliban and many contemporary groups that declared themselves states or emirates but lacked the cohesion and strength the Taliban maintained.

The study also showed that the leadership within the movement was exclusively made up of Pashtun mullahs, while the bulk of the movement's fighters were young, illiterate, and uneducated, coming from various tribes (Giustozzi 2022, 198; Martin 2014, 209), which fits precisely with the Khaldunian framework of religious-tribal revolutions where religious solidarity transcends tribal bonds, yet it relies on the strongest tribes (al-Attas 2014, 121). Regarding the role of scholars within the movement, the results were consistent with the literature in highlighting their multifaceted roles, most notably in the legislative and judicial domains, in addition to a very important aspect: their general oversight of the movement's performance and policies to ensure that neither the leaders nor the followers deviate from Islamic law, though they do not interfere in the everyday political, administrative, or military decisions or actions.

The final religious factor pertains to foreign Mujahid groups. The results supported the literature in showing the complex roles played by foreign fighters, but interviews with individuals with firsthand field experience in Afghanistan corrected some misconceptions and added valuable insights. Initially, the findings supported the few studies that argued that the role of foreign Mujahideen in supporting the Taliban militarily during the 1990s was overestimated, though it was critical in two incidents. However, the findings differed from the literature regarding the financial support from al-Qaeda to the Taliban during that period, as the participants confirmed that this was inaccurate since al-Qaeda was undergoing a financial crisis at the time. Another aspect where the findings agreed with the literature was the tension between the Taliban and al-Qaeda during the movement's rule due to al-Qaeda's continuous non-adherence to the Taliban's foreign policies (Brown and Rassler 2013, 114).

Interviews also confirmed what the literature had mentioned regarding the small number of Taliban members who were influenced by al-Qaeda's ideology. After 2001, the results corroborated the literature on the support provided by foreign Mujahedeen to the Taliban in terms of media, finances, and military aid against the coalition forces

and their local allies. However, they also highlighted significant aspects that had not been adequately addressed, such as the contribution of Arab Mujahideen in developing Taliban media targeted at Arabs, which led to increased support for the Taliban from the Arab world, as well as the key impact of unconventional combat methods, particularly martyrdom operations, which were transferred from the Iraqi resistance to Afghanistan, marking a turning point in the war (Giustozzi 2022, 145–157, 171).

Furthermore, the establishment of training camps under the supervision of foreign fighters from various countries proved essential. The interviews also confirmed the joining of many foreign fighters to ISIS and their subsequent excommunication and fighting against the Taliban. While some Taliban leaders and members joined ISIS, it did not pose a serious threat to the Taliban's unity, which maintained its cohesion and strength until it entered Kabul and liberated all of Afghanistan by the end of 2021.

Through the discussion of the aforementioned factors, this thesis attempted to study a contemporary, traditional religious movement that returned to power three and a half years ago after engaging in a prolonged twenty-year struggle with the world's most powerful military alliance, NATO. The novel contribution of this thesis and its findings lies in offering an interpretation of the role of religion in the cohesion of the Taliban based on pre-modern theories rarely utilized by researchers in analyzing contemporary social and political movements.

I believe Ibn Khaldun's theories on the role of religion (with the conditions and elements he outlined) in the cohesion of movements are closely connected to the study and understanding of the Taliban's case. They provide a framework for explaining the Taliban's repeated rise to power and its ability to remain united at every stage despite all available circumstances, justifications, and pressures exerted against it.

First, the issue of religious *'asabiyyah* (social cohesion), as discussed by Ibn Khaldun in his analysis of social movements, is often found in traditional currents that adopt inherited schools and directions in interpreting and applying religion. This is particularly applicable to the Taliban movement. Through this theory, we can identify one of the most important factors for the unity of the Taliban from within and its continued ability to attract supporters from outside its organizational framework, in

contrast to other Islamist and national resistance groups whose religious renewal reform approach does not align with the “socially cohesive religion” described by Ibn Khaldun. The issue is not just about ideological unity within the organization but also about homogeneity within the broader social environment: homogeneity, not merely tolerance or cooperation.

Verily, some resistance or revolutionary armed movements in the Islamic world have started to be influenced by the Taliban in various aspects. For instance, a study published by Aaron Y. Zelin, an expert on armed Muslim movements, in 2022 discussed the Talibanization of some former al-Qaeda groups, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria, in several respects. One of the points discussed was HTS's shift in focus to the Shafi'i Sunni school of thought, one of the four traditional Sunni schools of jurisprudence. This school is particularly dominant in northern Syria (Zelin 2022, 8).

Recently, Syrian rebel forces led by HTS and its leaders were able to overthrow the Syrian Assad regime after 54 years of rule, despite recent attempts to normalize relations with the Assad regime by the Arab League and some regional countries, just days before the 11-day rebel campaign that ultimately toppled the regime. It seems important to explore the impact of HTS's adherence to the Shafi'i school on its cohesion, recruitment capacity, and increased power.

Second, the religious slogan and principle of “commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil” (known as Amr bil ma‘ruf wa nahy an al-munkar) has been raised by many Islamic political groups over the past century, whether peaceful or armed, in different countries, including Afghanistan. However, for most of these groups, it was not the basis or a means of social mobilization but a delayed practice to be done after establishing the Islamic state and starting to implement the Sharia law. In contrast, for the Taliban, it was the main driving force for starting the movement. The Taliban began with recruitment under the umbrella of this principle and then implemented Sharia law socially and judicially before eventually establishing a state. This latter scenario aligns with a historically recurring model of mobilization, as discussed by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*.

Similarly, we can trace the centrality of this concept in other revolutionary movements like HTS in Syria for example, where the principle of Hisba (commanding the good and forbidding the evil) is one of the significant parts of the governance model applied by HTS beside the other sides of providing services and security. Their application included controlling public behavior and imposing religious and moral conservative standards (Y. Zelin 2022, 39- 41). However, though this religious factor seems important for HTS, it differs from the Taliban in several issues. Firstly, it was not the main driving force behind the group's mobilization. Actually, the driving force was toppling the secular sectarian Assad regime, but we should also keep in mind that commanding the good and forbidding the evil was a religiously important principle and instrumental tool for maintaining cohesiveness in the movement throughout the struggle; it was not a marginal issue or a postponed issue after reaching power.

The second difference from the Taliban is that though the HTS leaders and members are highly conservative, promoting unmixing between genders and regulating public behavior, they never had a problem with girls or modern education.

It would be worthwhile for researchers to conduct comparative studies between the Taliban, HTS, and other Islamic movements in the Arab world, Asia, and Africa, exploring the similarities and differences in the role and impact of implementing Sharia law and the concept of commanding the good and forbidding the evil during the rising phase of these movements. This is particularly relevant in countries with social and political conditions similar to those of Afghanistan.

Third, the organizational structure of the movement, which emerges from the traditional model of obedience to the leader (represented by the position of Amir al-Mu’minin or Commander of the Faithful), plays a central role in the cohesion of the Taliban. This structure places key roles for religious scholars in legislative, judicial, and supervisory functions. Leadership positions are restricted to students and graduates of religious madrassas, who occupy various administrative, military, and political posts. The core of the movement, its powerful human resources, even though composed of illiterate youth from various tribes and ethnicities, has remained centered around the strongest tribes, particularly the Pashtun tribes, and more specifically, the Kandahar tribes, the birthplace of the Taliban. This combination also aligns with Ibn

Khaldun's framework regarding the structure of leaders and followers in religious revolutionary movements.

Until today, several Islamic movements have declared their leaders as *Amir al-Mu'minin* and have relied heavily on tribal structures. The most famous, powerful, and recent example is ISIS, which controlled vast areas in Iraq and Syria and even expanded into Libya, Egypt, Afghanistan, and some African countries. Here, we can observe the major differences in structure between the Taliban and ISIS, with the key distinction being the role of the religious class. The Taliban belongs to the traditional Hanafi religious school, which is widespread in Afghanistan and surrounding countries.

This school provided legitimacy to the Taliban through a public gathering in Kandahar, as we discussed throughout the study. It supported the movement, with a significant portion of the religious class merging into the Taliban structure, greatly influencing decision-making processes. In contrast, groups like ISIS, which declared itself a Caliphate rather than merely an Islamic Emirate or State, did not have a religious class within the movement. Its leader, Abo Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced as *Amir al-Mu'minin*, was chosen by a limited number of publicly ambiguous ISIS leaders in 2014, who were not religious scholars but former officers in the secular Baathist regime of Iraq (Lister 2015, 272).

According to Ibn Khaldun's theories, the presence of a religious class in the hierarchy of a religious revolutionary movement is not a requirement for success or the ability to mobilize. It is sufficient for the leadership to be a well-known, religiously influential leader or spiritual figure. Therefore, in the case of the Taliban, there is an additional layer of religious *asabiyyah*, something missing in many other movements, even those that declare their leader *Amir al-Mu'minin*, but lack a powerful religious structure and elements.

Fourth, the issue of the complex roles played by foreign Mujahid groups, which began in Afghanistan in the 1980s and later became a prominent phenomenon across the Islamic world, has always been a subject of debate: Are they helpful to local Mujahid movements, or are they counterproductive? We have witnessed the various stages of

foreign fighters' involvement with the Taliban. Initially, when the Taliban was in power, some supported them, while others, particularly those who did not adhere to the Taliban's policies, entangled the movement in confrontations with international powers, leading to its fall. In a later phase, during the battle against the U.S.-led coalition, foreign fighters became influential supporters, providing money, expertise, and their lives. Then, some of them left and accused the Taliban of deviation, even fighting against them. The Taliban's approach has been consistent: it protects foreign fighters in general, except for those fighting against it, refuses to hand them over to any foreign state, and, on the other hand, does not grant them leadership positions in Afghanistan (Mutmain 2019, 141, 215).

This strategy aligns with their vision and organizational structure, based on religious and tribal *'asabiyyah*, and differs from many other Islamic movements that have integrated foreign fighters into their leadership structure. Could this have also been a factor contributing to the Taliban's cohesion, strength, and popular acceptance, compared to those multinational organizations at the highest echelons of leadership? This is a matter that deserves further exploration.

The results I present in this thesis were built after reviewing a substantial body of literature over several years and conducting in-depth interviews with thirteen individuals from diverse nationalities, academic backgrounds, and professional experiences. Most of them had firsthand experience in Afghanistan, with ten of them having lived in the country for many years, some for decades. The list included a Taliban leader, Afghan academic and media figures, the director of Al-Jazeera's office in Pakistan for twenty years, an expert on Afghan affairs, foreign fighters who fought with the Taliban, a Deobandi Sharia scholar, Arab Islamist activists, and researchers on Islamic movements. While the number may not seem large, I made significant efforts to reach these knowledgeable individuals who were actively involved in the Afghan and Taliban scenes. I also made every effort to ensure that the sample selected was unbiased and objective as much as possible, a fact I observed during the course of the interviews.

For researchers interested in social movements, particularly Islamic ones, and who wish to explore further the Taliban movement, it would be beneficial to increase the

number of interviews and ensure meetings with a broader range of individuals and groups active in the Afghan and Taliban scene, especially given that the movement is now the de facto ruling power controlling all of Afghanistan's territory and is in the process of establishing its state and restructuring its institutions and policies in accordance with its vision.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Below Indicates the Interviewees' Data

Table A.1. Below Indicates the Interviewees' Data

No	Participants' name	Age	Nationality	Position
1.				
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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education:

2007 – 2012 BA in Management, Misr University for Science and Technology, MUST, Egypt
2016 – 2018 Diploma in Islamic studies, Tripoli University (Lebanon), Istanbul branch

Work Experience:

2018 – Present Researcher in Islamic Movements