
Taliban Dogma and Power: Looking for the Sources

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The Taliban burst onto the international scene in 1996 with the seizure of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, and the installation of one of the most repressive cultural regimes in the world. They now control about 85% of the Afghan territory. Their ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam has been denounced by Western nations and even most Islamic scholars. Only three countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, have recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

This paper examines the Taliban religious movement and its violent takeover of Afghanistan. I argue that actual religious texts play a relatively minor role in Taliban dogma creation. Instead, this war-making movement has coalesced primarily around ethnicity. In addition, an understanding of the Taliban's mythologized view of tradition and religious extremism is important to analyzing the reasons for Taliban actions and policies. The first section of the paper is a historical overview of the Taliban origins, the international actors that support it, and its rapid rise in Afghanistan. The second section looks at how the Taliban have installed their understanding of Islam in Afghanistan and how they have maintained control. I particularly emphasize the repression of women. However, the reader should understand that the repression of women is only one symptom of the Taliban's fundamentalist worldview; it is not an end in itself. The third section examines the theoretical underpinnings of the religious movement. Where are the texts that form the basis of Taliban beliefs? How do their beliefs translate into laws? Are there other sources besides texts that influence what is going on in Afghanistan? Finally, in the fourth section I offer recommendations for re-thinking how Western nations and Afghans themselves can interact with the Taliban.

Background of the Taliban

Development of the movement

Getting to the root of the Taliban takes some effort given that they have not sought to ingratiate themselves with the world outside of Afghanistan beyond what they need to survive financially and defensively. They have created a closed society in which little public information is transmitted in or out. What is known about the Taliban comes mostly from academic research conducted before 1996 and a few first-hand accounts of the situation today. Beginning with the Arabic language, talib means "student," and taliban is the plural. Winston Churchill wrote about wandering "talib-ul-ilms" in 1898.ⁱ The tradition of sending boys to study in Islamic private schools, or madrasas, dates back centuries.

The Taliban's theoretical basis comes from the Deoband movement, which takes its name from a *madrasa* founded in 1866 in Deoband, India. At that time, Islam was waning in India. Muslims felt under siege by English Christian proselytizers. "To cope with this grave situation it was necessary to start a movement on a large scale to fill up on the whole the frightful cracks that had been created in the life of the Muslims."ⁱⁱ This conservative movement focused on Islamic law, *sharia*, and jurisprudence, *fiqh*, and was influenced by Shah Waliullah of India, who was in turn influenced by his contemporary, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab of Arabia.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, the Taliban have an ideological connection to Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi movement. By 1880, the Deoband curriculum had totally excluded philosophy and critical thinking.^{iv}

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The work of scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1884-1944) was instrumental to the spread of Islam in South Asia. He came from the Deobandi seminary and was convinced that ordinary Muslims could undertake missionary work, which had earlier been restricted to the sphere of educated men of notable birth. His reforms of the 1920s were key to redefining the qualification of exercising religious leadership among South Asian Muslims.^v The Indian and Pakistani Deobandi movement spread to southern Afghanistan. Eventually, hundreds of rural *madrasas* housed teachers and students. These were people who were not accepted at the official State Faculty of Theology, founded in 1951.^{vi} Often, boys were sent to the *madrasa* at a very young age. Religion and pedagogy replaced familial and tribal connections.^{vii}

Before the Soviet coup, organized religion was not a dominant force in Afghan politics. However, the atheism of the Soviet-installed regime in the late 1970s made it likely that religion would be the common bond for those opposed to the Soviets. During the Soviet invasion, the students of *madrasas* became Mujahideen soldiers (Warriors in the Way of God), and the *madrasas* became military bases. The Mujahideen resistance encompassed a wide range of ideological views and sociological backgrounds.^{viii} Having a common enemy helped to lessen the tension between rural students and urban intellectuals.^{ix} Most of today's core Taliban leaders were trained in the Deobandi *madrasas* and were active in the resistance against the Soviets as minor commanders or soldiers. Some of the Taliban soldiers today are too young to have participated in the *jihad*.

Olivier Roy, author of several books on the Afghan state and society, argues that in the late 1980s the Islamic militant international networks, which supported the Mujahideen, lost their connections with their sponsoring states. A theoretical rift developed between Islamism and neo-fundamentalism. The fall of Communism "made redundant an anti-Communist radical Islam." The Gulf War turned Sunni Islamist movements against Saudi Arabia.^x The militants sided with the traditional mullahs rather than the Islamists on women's issues and *sharia* law. The militant Islamic network advocated a global *jihad* and a revival of the *umma*, the body of Islamic supporters, which, as Roy argues, "was more imaginary than real" since these militants had been cut off from their sponsoring states and countries of origin.^{xi} Consequently, the militants became more extreme, and their support for extremist groups grew.

In addition to these theoretical issues, ethnicity greatly influences Taliban identity. The Taliban are mostly Sunni Muslim Pashtuns, the dominant ethnicity in the south, west, and east of Afghanistan, particularly around the city of Kandahar. Shia Hazaras have a homeland in the Hazarajat, the mountainous central highlands around Bamiyan. The northeast of Afghanistan, Badakhshan province, is traditionally an Ismaili region.^{xii} Before the Taliban takeover of Kabul, the leadership in Kabul was mostly comprised of Tajiks. This was an unusual situation because, traditionally, the leadership of Afghanistan had been majority Pashtun. With the Tajik minority in control in Kabul, there was unease among the Pashtuns. This unease among the majority aided the Taliban's efforts.

Who supports the Taliban?

The Taliban movement received and continues to receive support from Pakistan. During the war against the Soviets, Pakistan, acting through its Inter Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), channeled support to the Mujahideen through an informal Muslim network based in the Pakistani city of Peshawar. Additional support to the Mujahideen came from Saudi Intelligence with the approval of the CIA, whose short-sighted goal was to support the most radical groups that would fight against the Soviets. Foreign Islamists recruited and financed volunteers, decided where they would go, and introduced into the Afghan resistance a strong Middle Eastern influence.^{xiii}

Pakistan wanted to secure its strategic position in the region. The Soviets completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1987. The Mujahideen split into various warring factions. Random violence was common in the cities and at border crossings. The Mujahideen-versus-Communist Cold War pattern dissolved into a conflict mostly based on ethnic lines. The United States backed out of the region. However, the regional powers, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Russia, India, and Saudi Arabia, continued to provide support for one group or another. Consequently, no group could obtain an advantage. Because Iran was making significant progress in opening trade with Central Asian countries, the need to obtain a secure trade route to Central Asia pushed Pakistan into making a decisive move.^{xiv}

The Taliban version of history tells that in 1994 Mohammad Omar, a former Mujahid living in a *madrasa* in Kandahar province, was tired of the marauding and violence. He gathered thirty compatriots to

begin the movement. While the details of the actual story are unclear, the group needed funds to pursue its goals. Around this time, the retired Pakistani Interior Minister, Naseerullah Babar, a Pashtun who had extensive contacts with Afghan factions, announced that his government had an interest in an overland route from Pakistan to Turkmenistan.^{xv} The Taliban's first military victory was on October 12, 1994, with the capture of a truck stop-over point in a border district center.^{xvi} Within two weeks, the Taliban had seized Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city. They had grown from a few hundred soldiers to 2,500-3,000 during this short period.^{xvii} As the Taliban gained legitimacy through conquest, Pakistani support grew. Pakistan had tapped into the Pashtun resentment of non-Pashtun leadership in Kabul and anger against the corrupt former Mujahideen.^{xviii} The Taliban movement was quick to win converts.

During this period of rapid conquest, the composition of the Taliban became more professional. The movement attracted not only *madrassa* youth, but also fighters in the *jihad* and former Communist regime officers. While there were conflicts among this mix of backgrounds, the soldiers likely considered themselves as part of the *umma*, the Muslim community or brotherhood. The bandwagon effect led to an aura of invincibility that was supplemented with great amounts of foreign money from Pakistan. Also during this period, the movement took on a mythic quality. Taliban lore makes several claims: there was no loss of life during the takeover of the provinces, which had fallen into lawlessness before the Taliban's coming, and, therefore, the movement was bringing peace to the land.^{xix} In reality, with the exception of two cities, the takeover of the provinces involved many deaths. Besides Kandahar itself, most of the regions were already at peace and arguably enjoyed better services and government structure than those with which the Taliban replaced them. The Taliban was designed as a war-making movement. When they took over a region, the Taliban could neither govern effectively nor deliver services.^{xx} Both the idea of the *umma* and the myth of the bloodless revolution are particularly strong symbols in Islam. When the Prophet Muhammad was in Medina around 625AD, he gathered strength from followers and created the *umma*, which consisted of Muslims and anyone who would fight with them. "Men are enemies of one another but under leadership they become as one hand. The *umma*, united against all others, gave the new community its identity."^{xxi} Additionally, the swiftness of the Taliban takeover is reminiscent of the initial, rapid spread of Islam. In 630AD, Muhammad conquered Mecca; all of Arabia was in his control within months. By 652, most of Asia Minor was conquered by Islamic forces.^{xxii} The Taliban likely used this comparison to promote acceptance of their takeover.

The Taliban's Installation of their Islam

Movement into the cities

As the Taliban moved closer to Kabul, public opinion was mixed. Some hoped that they would bring an end to the violence of the warring Afghan factions while others became worried about the Taliban's fundamentalist strictures. In metropolitan Kabul, and Herat in the west, life for the inhabitants was different from that in the countryside and villages.

The differences were most pronounced for women. Contrary to Western assumptions that all Afghan rural women wear highly-restrictive coverings, rural and nomadic women traditionally wear veils that are worn over the head but can be pulled over the face for modesty. These veils are distinctive to the tribe or ethnic group and are often made using bright colors, embroidery, or small mirrors. These women generally do not wear a *burqa*, the heavy, head-to-toe shroud also known as *chadari*, unless they are traveling to a city.^{xxiii} This point may be understood to mean that village women think there is a need to be more covered in the city, a place where one is unknown and less-protected. Regardless of the justification, the wearing of the *burqa* had been a matter of personal choice for decades.

In the cities, women's dress was more Westernized. In the early years of this century, if women wanted to attain schooling, they had to wear the *burqa*. As early as 1919, King Amanullah sent women abroad to study nursing. However, in the 1950s women studying in universities began to wear the *chador*, a simple head covering. The movement gained popularity. Within a few years, all the university women were wearing the *chador*.^{xxiv} In 1959 the government of Prime Minister Daoud Khan announced the voluntary end of women's seclusion and the veil. Because it was voluntary, individual families could decide.^{xxv} By the 1970s, women of Herat and Kabul were wearing Western clothes. Women's education and professional careers were the norm.

Women in the cities were active contributors to society. Before the Taliban takeover, women of Kabul were generally educated and employed. At Kabul University, 50% of the students and 60% of the teachers were women. 70% of the city's school teachers, 50% of the civilian government workers, and 40% of the doctors were women.^{xxvi} The education of boys and girls was similar in these pre-Taliban times. In the 1970s, boys and girls studied together in elementary school. In middle school and high school, boys and girls were separated, but they studied together again in university.^{xxvii}

On September 26, 1996, the Taliban swept into Kabul, the capital. The former Communist president Najibullah and his younger brother were hanged in Ariana Square, setting a violent example of what happens to Taliban enemies. The Taliban immediately imposed a code of behavior on the city's residents. They also installed behavioral rules with the takeovers of Mazar-i-Sharif, August 8, 1998, and Bamiyan, September 13, 1998.

Taliban violence against ethnic minorities was rampant. There have been reports of mass arrests in Hazara neighborhoods of Kabul. In the cities of Mazar-i-Sharif and Bamiyan, there were reports of mass killings of civilians and prisoners, mostly Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, and rapes and abductions of Hazara girls and women. The new Taliban governor of Mazar-i-Sharif did not allow the relatives of the dead to collect the bodies for burial. Noncombatants were taken prisoner and transferred to other Taliban-controlled cities. Many of them died of asphyxiation or heat stroke en route.^{xxviii} The peace of the Taliban seems to be for Pashtuns and their supporters exclusively.

Complexities of women's repression

It is ironic that, ostensibly to confront the ills of Afghan society, the Taliban imprisoned half of its productive people. As noted earlier, the Taliban leadership issued behavioral decrees for the populace. Some of the more noteworthy include: the decree that women are not allowed to work outside the home, girls and women are prohibited from attending schools and universities, women are forced to wear the *burqa* outside the home, cannot leave home unaccompanied by a close male relative, must paint their windows to hide from outsiders' view, and are forbidden to wear white socks or shoes that make noise when they walk. Male doctors cannot examine women. Men must grow beards, wear turbans, and attend mosque.^{xxix} To enforce the new dictates, agents of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice (PVSV) roam the streets. The new regulations are transmitted to the populace via Radio Shariat. Afghanistan's ability to deal with societal problems immediately plummeted.

Officially, men are supposed to be punished for the violations committed by the women under their control. This reflects the traditional Muslim belief that men are responsible for women. Men have a duty to exercise control over female members of their families. Female behavior then becomes a litmus test for family status.^{xxx} To bring shame to one's family or tribe is the ultimate evil.^{xxxi} Individuals, especially women, have less worth than the group. Men, as heads of families, have final responsibility for their families.

Unofficially, hundreds of women have been beaten by the young Taliban militia for being slow to comply with the new rules. The attacks are random and often committed for inconsequential reasons, such as the color of one's shoes or the length of the *burqa*.^{xxxii} Often these attacks are carried out by individuals without sanction of the authorities. Sometimes in their zealotry, the militia carry out orders too efficiently. For example, when Radio Shariat informed women on December 8, 1996, that they could not enter offices of foreign agencies, militia members responded by attacking women leaving UN and NGO offices.^{xxxiii}

The Taliban leadership cannot effectively control these militia men, who are poorly-educated and often do not understand the regulations. The militias are largely composed of young men, refugees who grew up in the rural *madrasas*, and learned by rote the conservative rules fed to them by their leaders. As Sachedina relates, "Religious piety is expressed in one's acceptance and obedience to Islamic precepts. One should be ready to die for one's faith. That is the meaning of martyrdom in Islam."^{xxxiv} During the takeover of the provinces, these soldiers were ready to do just that. When the young militia men arrived in Kabul for the first time, the sight of independent women must have appeared to them as a shocking indication of moral corruption. Since they had been taught to believe that unveiled women were morally suspect, the "sins" of the city were personified by the women themselves. The Taliban leadership depends

heavily on the militia for its base of support. The leaders cannot risk losing the militia's loyalty by modifying its stance on women too greatly.^{xxxv} Because of these uncontrolled militia, the concern for women's safety takes on a different light. If women were sexually dishonored on a widespread basis, the Taliban movement would be dishonored as well. Keeping women indoors keeps them safe, at least in some respects.^{xxxvi}

Currently, the Taliban decrees are enforced sporadically nationwide. Outside the cities, administrative control is still lacking. The individual personalities of administrators determine the degree of enforcement of behavioral rules in a community.^{xxxvii} Inside the cities, the ultra-conservatives dominate, although lately there have been indications that the leadership has relented slightly. Women and girls can now visit hospitals and be treated by male doctors; some female doctors have been allowed to return to work.^{xxxviii} The unpredictability of the rules and their enforcement makes them even more difficult to follow.

Religion as Justification for Violence?

Taliban interpretations

How are the Taliban keeping the people repressed so effectively? What aspects of Islam do they use to justify their violence? First, the Taliban have always emphasized the temporary nature of their rule. They insist that their goal is to establish an Islamic state, not to rule it. This is reflected in their continual use of "Acting" titles, such as Acting Foreign Minister.^{xxxix} They tell outsiders who are critical of their regime that their imposed rules are justified by the need to bring order to society and that extreme times call for harsh measures. They claim publicly that education for all is an Islamic duty. Their ostensible plan is that once the streets are safe, and separate, licensed facilities are available for girls, they too will be educated.^{xl} Revealingly, there has been no discussion by the Taliban of a suitable replacement government structure.

In general, the Taliban claim to base their rule on Islamic law. They stated early in 1999 that they were drafting a new constitution based on the sources of Islamic law, *sharia*: the Koran, the Suna, and Hanafi jurisprudence.^{xli} I have not been successful in locating any actual texts to which they point as authoritative. One explanation is that the majority of the Taliban, while they can read and recite the Arabic script, cannot comprehend the meaning of the Arabic words. It would be as if an monolingual English speaker, who could read Spanish text because it uses the Latin alphabet, tried to comprehend its meaning.^{xlii} The Taliban's interpretation of Islam is manifested in dozens of Radio Shariat decrees and street incidents rather than in an official document. By listing these decrees, one can try to piece together some sort of underlying ethos. For example, traditional activities, such as kite-flying and chess playing, have been banned. Due to the Taliban's interpretation of a religious injunction against representations of living things, dolls, stuffed animals, and photographs are prohibited, as are movies, music, and television. In some areas parents are required to give children "Islamic" names. PVSV members have stopped people on the street in Kabul and quizzed them to see if they could recite Koranic passages. Hundreds of people have been beaten or killed under the Taliban's interpretation of what is appropriate to do or wear.^{xliii}

These seemingly unrelated and bizarre injunctions are connected in at least two respects. First, they represent a drive to bring modern cities to the level of traditional village life. However, as Maley points out, the Taliban are bearers of an

‘imagined tradition’. . . rather than ‘pure’ traditions with genuine as opposed to mythologised historical referents. It is not the values of the village, but the values of the village *as interpreted by refugee camp dwellers or madrassa students most of whom have never known ordinary village life* that the Taliban seek to impose on places like Kabul. This accounts for their ability to do things which would be unthinkable in a typical Afghan village—for example beat up women from a stranger's family. . .^{xliv}

The young militia men are striving for the normality of a life they have never known. The "traditional" life has become a spiritual goal such that this vision of Islam justifies all means employed to attain it, despite the fact that this goal is in many respects completely unconnected to Islam.

Secondly, the decrees represent behavioral control. From the Deobandi school, ritual is seen as the highest good. Critical thinking is a foreign concept and would undermine the Taliban's existence. The Deobandi school itself was created as a backlash against British colonization. Instead of engaging the sacred Islamic texts, the Deobandis and their followers were entrenched in the need to expel all things Western and modern. The image of "cleansing" the body of the *umma* is understood as a way of gaining new health and strength and finishing the work of the jihad against the Soviets. The Deobandis, like their Wahhabi compatriots, espouse a form of Islam that rejects *ijtihad*, the creation of innovations in *sharia* that respond to modern conditions.^{xiv} Evil is defined in part by a departure from ritual.^{xv} The enforcement of strict modes of behavior is paramount.

Control of women and their bodies is of great importance to most religions and to the Taliban in particular. Taliban leaders place great emphasis on the need to create a safe environment where women can be assured of chastity and dignity.^{xvii} The Taliban have pushed their controls to new limits.

The question of who controls interpretation is basic to understanding how the Taliban derive their power. Fundamentalists claim that they will rid Islam of all "un-Islamic" features that have evolved to modern times. The rejection of *ijtihad* indicates that there can be no use of reason to develop innovations in the *sharia* in response to current conditions.^{xviii} Those that control Afghanistan, Mullah Omar and the Supreme Shura, demand control of all interpretation and re-interpretation. Only their version of Islam is allowed. In this view, it makes sense to have poorly-educated militia (and even ill-educated Taliban leadership) and to persecute the educated classes, regardless of their sex. The educated elites will emigrate, as they have by the thousands, or be stifled into submission. The Taliban will be left in control of the territory.

If one examines the texts, the case against the Taliban's actions, particularly regarding women, is substantial. While the interpretation of the Ancient Arabic language is a pertinent issue, most interpretations show that both the Koran and the life of Muhammad run counter to the Taliban's restrictive interpretations regarding women. Ideas of equal rights and equal treatment of men and women run throughout the Koran.^{xix} The Koran states that women have a right to work and to inherit property.ⁱ The Prophet's sayings, or Hadiths, emphasize education for every Muslim boy and girl.ⁱⁱ The life of the Prophet shows that he was supportive of women's activity in society. His first wife, Khadijah, was a businesswoman and his first convert. His favorite wife was Aisha, who figured powerfully in the political intrigues after his death.ⁱⁱⁱ These women were neither cloistered in their homes nor denied the opportunity for employment or education. Muhammad was a radical reformer for his time regarding women. It was only after his death that tribal traditions slowly returned to circumscribe women's public activities.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

The right to look at the texts, to examine and question what they actually say, is what the Taliban are denying the people. The Taliban claim authenticity in their re-writing of history and interpretation of the sacred texts. Yet, as Gopin points out, for fundamentalists,

... the rage against the liberal state and the barrenness of materialist global civilization have driven many to a conscious unwillingness to see innovation and re-reading as anything but destructive to their only line of defense against a world bereft of truth and certainty.^{lv}

This describes the Taliban and, even more directly, the Deobandi movement that spawned it. For years, vulnerable youths were taught to recite lessons. Today, the PVSV enforces the party line. Taliban members, whether intellectual or illiterate, deny deviations from their strict point of view.

Precisely because of this justification of repression, re-reading is essential to empower ideological change. The divinely-revealed texts will always be in existence, and this is the important point of re-interpretation. Despite the efforts of authorities, the texts will be available for all to consider.^{lv}

There is evidence that Afghan women are educating themselves on Islamic law in their homes. Education in all subjects has become an act of empowerment. There have also been reports that girls are being educated in home schools. As an Afghan living in the United States points out, "To be a teacher in Afghanistan is to be political."^{lvi} One could argue that to examine the religious texts critically is the greatest political act of all.

Recommendations

In the *quietist*, or non-violent, tradition of Islam, “sinful rule and tyrannical government...are not the greatest evils, because the alternative to such a rule is chaos.”^{lvii} Afghanistan has been racked by decades of violence, and there is little desire to start the battles again. It is likely that the repression of the people, each day becoming more normal, will continue. The people of the cities do not want war again. Because the Taliban control most of the territory, the weapons, and the drug trade, there are few options for creating a lasting, peaceful existence in Afghanistan other than negotiating with them. While Western governments sometimes seek to exclude religion and religious people from negotiation processes, this only leads to frustration, anger, and inattention to core problems.^{lviii} It is possible for Western negotiators to respect Islam and Afghan culture while remaining opposed to the human rights abuses of the Taliban. By engaging the Taliban, governments opposed to their radicalism can work to weaken it.^{lix} Working with the Taliban is the only realistic solution.

New employment for the militia
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The militia, as followers and enforcers of Taliban rule, are the basis of Taliban power. A bottom-up effort at reform would be a lasting way to diffuse the harshness of the Taliban decrees. When the young militia arrived in Kabul, the city's women with their freedom of dress and behavior were not only shocking to the ignorant soldiers, but they were likely viewed as an embodiment of evil, a thing to be destroyed. When considering evil, "what is at stake in the discussion is the extent and limit of human power to take charge. . . Knowledge is the power that shatters the illusion of evil."^{lxix} Knowledge is power, and it is this kind of power, not that of weapons and violence, that these young men need.

Simply introducing them to peacetime situations may be extremely influential. These are young men who have lived most of their lives as warriors. Dealing with the peace may be harder than the accustomed battle. In this light, it does not seem so unusual that the militia strike out violently at the least provocation, generally in the form of a woman. The relative peace of the city may have a calming effect, and this may already be underway.^{lxi} There are precedents in Afghan history for this experience. After wreaking terror on the women of Kabul in 1992, the young Mujahideen soldiers eventually lost their religious fervor and "gave in to the lures of women and succumbed to corrupt city ways."^{lxii} This change in attitude was aided by the laxity of the former, pre-Taliban regime. Concurrently, women lost their fear and moved about the city, as they had done in the past. Within a few months, women were wearing Western clothes and going about their business. The experience of 1992 provides the example that a quiet revolution could occur if the Taliban would weaken the enforcement of their edicts.

On a more fundamental level, the young militiamen need to have alternatives to soldiering and a new sense of purpose. If the Taliban ever achieve a measure of security in their sovereignty, it is possible that they would decommission a portion of their fighting force. The need for alternative careers is essential in order to bring these young men into society peacefully. Community or tribal apprenticeship programs should be considered. The need for skilled labor and professionals to rebuild the country is desperate. I address again later the possibility of retraining.

Build coalitions of moderates

The Taliban are not all-powerful, nor are its members monolithic. Moderate Taliban do exist in the leadership, and they could be lobbied for reform. There are Afghan men, some distinguished professionals, who are not Taliban and who do not approve of the Taliban's excessively harsh decrees and actions.^{lxiii} While simply finding and communicating with these individuals would be difficult, if these like-minded individuals could forge links among themselves and even with moderate Afghans abroad, they could create a plan for engaging the radical leadership, redirecting the energies of the militia, and reconsidering some of the restrictive policies.

These talks could be the basis for reforming government rule. The various ethnic and religious groups must be included in power-sharing for some kind of representative governmental system. It would be a long-term goal, but the traditional Afghan system may be conducive to some form of modern, coalition-party government.

Go to the texts

As Gopin has suggested, re-reading the sacred texts can be the most important starting point for finding bases for peace. In the case of the Taliban's societal repression, the texts could be a basis for negotiating reforms. Women in Afghanistan are studying the Koran and religious texts to find out what they actually say regarding women and rules of behavior. Abu-Nimur advocates this return to the Koran, the first Islamic holy text and primary source of guidance, and, secondarily, the Haddiths. He suggests that it would be particularly useful to study texts in which Islamic leaders were involved in cases of conflict, negotiation, and resolution.^{lxiv}

It may be that women will not be allowed to negotiate with the Taliban. Still, they could work to persuade their male relatives or the moderates in the Taliban hierarchy who are sympathetic to women's plight. Knowledge of counter-arguments in the texts would prove useful to those who would negotiate with

the Taliban leadership. Those who claim to know the one and only interpretation of *sharia* law must be engaged in discourse regardless of their fundamentalist beliefs.

Role of international actors

The Taliban have already shown a general disregard for the opinions of the world community.^{lxv} Aid has slowed, as relief agencies are ambivalent about continuing their work and possibly being viewed as supporting the Taliban. However desperately they are needed, aid efforts do not address the core problems facing Afghanistan.

First of all, the United States and the European Union need to realize the strategic importance of Afghanistan and its potential for igniting a Central Asian *jihad*. Fundamentalists come to Afghanistan from all over the world to train for revolution. They return to their homelands to sow discontent. Wealthy Islamic militants from the Middle East, including Osama bin Laden, fund these efforts. In addition, Afghanistan now has the dubious distinction of being the world's largest producer of opium, the raw material for heroin. The Taliban leadership has admitted to taxing the drug trade at 20%, another important source of funds to shore up the regime.^{lxvi} Afghan opium production is increasing, doubling its sales from last year and showing "little sign of curbing production."^{lxvii} Between Afghanistan's locus for war training and role in the drug trade, the entire world has an interest in Afghanistan's peace and stability.

The important role that international actors can play is in structurally reforming Afghanistan economically. Because the Afghan economy is currently based on the drug trade, farmers cannot afford *not* to grow poppies. In fact, the drug dealers extend credits to the farmers in advance of their poppy crop, which makes the dealers the only bank system in the country.^{lxviii} The developed countries, the IMF, and Islamic countries could work together to devise the incentive of an economic aid package to transform the agricultural sector. Such plans have had some success in Latin America. Of course, this would involve an unprecedented level of cooperation and negotiation with the Taliban leadership. It might be an option in the long term.

When considering the role of Islamic countries, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia must be given special attention. With the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia bent to U.S. wishes and cut back on its funding of militant Islamic groups. Pakistan is another story. It has succeeded in creating a friendly relationship with the Taliban and a secure trade route to Central Asia. Despite its strategic success, it may live to regret its support for the Taliban. The Taliban leaders have on many occasions ignored the advice of Pakistan, including their detention of a Russian aircrew captured in 1995 and their inflexibility of social and gender stricture enforcement.^{lxix} Some observers argue that ". . . there is no danger of a Taliban spillover elsewhere" because of the specificities of Afghan politics.^{lxx} Peter Tomsen recently claimed that the Taliban movement has "passed its high-water mark" and that the local populace will rise up against the corrupt, extremist Taliban officials.^{lxxi} He ignores the entrenched economic strength of the drug and arms trade and the Taliban's willingness to use violence to maintain control. Others counter that the Taliban movement and its effects will spread to neighboring countries, and they point to current events for support. For example, heroin addiction is on the rise in Pakistan, Iran, and China.^{lxxii} The United States and the developed world must pressure Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to stop their support and supply of arms to Afghanistan.

An essential part of any foreign aid program must be a de-mining campaign. It has been estimated that the current de-mining effort in Afghanistan will take fifty years to complete. Ironically, the peace of the Taliban has increased the number of mine injuries, as people are freer to travel to previously restricted areas that have not been de-mined. In addition, the Taliban prohibited women from attending UNHCR landmine awareness classes. Since the closure of the schools, more children have been playing outside where they are at greater risk.^{lxxiii} The de-mining program must be accelerated, but this can only happen with cooperation from the Taliban leadership. International programs such as "Adopt a Minefield" coupled with international governmental funds and specialists would create a multi-pronged approach to attack this basic human security problem.

It may be beneficial for Western nations to create an exchange program of educated specialists, Afghans themselves, who have emigrated during the past few decades or years. These are people who know from first-hand experience what the "glory years" (1960s-1970s) of Afghanistan were like. They

could provide the vision and hope that the current citizens lack. They could also be useful in training young people, such as the militia, for alternative careers. Of course, these Afghans from abroad are elites and may have difficulties adapting to the strictures that the Taliban would likely impose regarding dress and movement. Still, for a society in which tribe and family relationships are paramount, the hope of returning to one's homeland to reunite with lost loved ones would be a considerable inducement.^{lxxiv} This kind of program could only be undertaken after the establishment of goodwill between the Taliban regime and the countries that would finance the exchange and guarantees of security for the program participants.

Oil companies and those with an economic interest in the region could provide another source of aid and expertise to Afghanistan. Currently, with the country so dangerously unstable, the possibility of foreign investment is remote. It would be in the interest of multi-national corporations to help bring peace to Afghanistan. With the cooperation of the United Nations and multilateral financial institutions, a public-private plan could be created to aid Afghanistan. Management of the funds, including the pipeline rents, would have to be insured to provide accountability to the Afghan people and minimize corruption.^{lxxv} Corporations are not typically known for philanthropy on such a large scale. However, on the practical side, if the perceived economic benefit would outweigh the costs, then such a plan may be feasible.

The Taliban cannot be ignored, no matter how much the West wants to do so. They control 85% of the Afghan territory and the people on it. It does not seem likely that their control will end any time soon. Dealing with fundamentalists is never simple. Negotiating countries do not need to back down from their condemnation of Taliban human rights violations. However, if the developed world turns its back on these quasi-religious extremists, it will ensure Afghanistan's continued poverty and force it to become a haven for all that is illegal and violent elsewhere. The subtitle of Rashid's article, "Exporting Extremism," is entirely appropriate, for that will be the only contribution Afghanistan will make to world trade.

Religion, despite the warped view the Taliban leadership espouse, may hold the key. "Islam itself is fertile soil for nonviolence because of its potential for disobedience, strong discipline, sharing and social responsibility, perseverance and self-sacrifice, and the belief in the unity of the Muslim community and the oneness of mankind."^{lxxvi} Each time an Afghan man or woman reads the holy texts with a critical eye, that person is empowered by his or her faith. It may be that Islam is what saves Afghanistan from the fundamentalists.

Endnotes

ⁱ William Maley, "Interpreting the Taliban," in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 14.

ⁱⁱ Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband*, Translated by Murtaz Husain F. Quraishi (Deoband, U.P., India: Idara-e Ihtemam, Dar al-Ulum, 1980), 107.

ⁱⁱⁱ Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan: Persistent Crisis Challenges the UN System* (Excerpt) (August 1998), http://www.afghan-politics.org/Reference/Taliban/Taliban_Rubin.htm.

^{iv} Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and The Demand for Pakistan* (New York: Asia Pub. House, 1963), 31-32. Chief spokesman of the Deobandi school, Mawlana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, sent the following in a letter to a colleague in 1883: "I think that 'falsifah' (philosophy) is a useless discipline. . . It mars the proper understanding of the 'Shariah' and, under its sordid influence, men are led to express heretical views and are lost in the dark and swarthy world of 'falsifah'. This devilish art, therefore, has been banished from the Madrasah. . ." Faruqi goes on to point out that, ". . . the triumph of orthodoxy over 'falsifah' resulted in a sort of intellectual stagnation that sapped the creative faculty of the Muslim intelligentsia."

^v Barbara D. Metcalf, "'Remaking Ourselves': Islamic Self-Fashioning in a Global Movement of Spiritual Renewal," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, eds. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 706, 707.

^{vi} Olivier Roy, "Has Islamism a Future in Afghanistan?," in Maley, 205.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 209.

^{viii} Maley, 8. This point is especially relevant regarding the majority Sunni Afghan Pashtuns versus the minority Shia Hazaras. As pointed out by Khadduri, “The importance of jihad in Islam lay in shifting the focus of attention of the tribes from their intertribal warfare to the outside world. . . It would have been very difficult for the Islamic state to survive had it not been for the doctrine of the jihad, replacing tribal raids, and directing that enormous energy of the tribes from an inevitable internal conflict to unite and fight against the outside world in the name of the new faith.” M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955), 62. The battle of the faithful versus the Communists fulfilled this unifying role.

^{ix} Roy, 205.

^x Roy, 203. Roy defines Islamism as “. . . the perception of Islam more as a political ideology than as a mere religion. For Islamists, the *Sharia* is just a part of the agenda. They address society in its entirety, in politics, economics, culture and law. . . The Islamists recruit among the intelligentsia and the modern strata of society, including students from ‘secular’ facilities, mostly in sciences (and are) able to attract many educated women, who, if wearing the Islamist veil, were accepted into the political and economic area, which is almost anathema for traditionalists.” *Ibid.*, 199.

^{xi} Roy, 203-204.

^{xii} U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Afghanistan, Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (September 9, 1999), http://www.afghan-politics.org/Current_Af.rd_Qtr_1999/USDos_Annual_Int_Religions.htm.

^{xiii} Roy, 201-202.

^{xiv} Barnett R. Rubin, “Women and Pipelines: Afghanistan’s Proxy Wars,” *International Affairs*, 73, 2 (1997), 283-287. Iran had opened a rail link between Mashhad and Turkmenistan, was constructing a free-trade zone on the Iran-Turkmenistan border, and was signing deals with the Central Asian states regarding oil and gas swaps.

^{xv} Anthony Davis, “How the Taliban became a Military Force,” in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 45, citing “Afghanistan: La Vengeance de la CIA,” *LE FIGARO* (February 21, 1995).

^{xvi} *Ibid.* See also Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: from Failed State to Buffer State*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 139.

^{xvii} *Ibid.*, 48.

^{xviii} Rubin, 286.

^{xix} The claim that all the regions had fallen into lawlessness was essential to the justification of the Taliban movement. In fact, the only reason for jihad is to achieve peace. “The jihad. . . was regarded as Islam’s instrument to transform the dar al-harb (war) into dar al-Islam (peace).” Khadduri, 141. Even though the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan was not an official jihad, as had been the Mujahideen’s conflict with the Soviets, the jihad excuse, that they were bringing peace to land that was without peace, might have been convincing to those in territories who did not know the actual reality of the regions already at peace.

^{xx} Davis, 55.

^{xxi} Henry Thompson, *World Religions in War and Peace* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1988), 40.

^{xxii} *Ibid.* See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islam,” in *Our Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 435-436.

^{xxiii} Nancy Hatch Dupree, “Afghan Women under the Taliban,” in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 160. Another reason a village woman would wear the *burqa* is if her husband had acquired education or been hired into a government position. Then she would “wear it proudly as a symbol of status and sophistication.” Exploring the feminist scholarly debate on internalized oppression is beyond the scope of this paper. See *Making Face, Making Soul=Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990); Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

^{xxiv} Farhat Nojumi, interview with author, Medford, Massachusetts, 21 October 1999.

^{xxv} Hatch Dupree, 152-153. She also makes the point that those who opposed the unveiling of women were repressed, presumably by the government. Therefore, there must have been individuals or groups within Afghanistan, at least during the 1950s, that were opposed to the liberal changes.

^{xxvi} The Case for Women in Afganistan, WAPHA Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan, <http://www.angelfire.com/on/wapha/the.case.html>.

^{xxvii} Farhod Nojumi, interview with author, Medford, Massachusetts, 21 October 1999.

^{xxviii} U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Afghanistan, Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (September 9, 1999), http://www.afghan-politics.org/Current_Af...rd_Qtr_1999/USDos_Annual_Int_Religioms.htm, 4.

^{xxix} The Case for Women in Afganistan, WAPHA Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan, <http://www.angelfire.com/on/wapha/the.case.html>. William Maley, "Interpreting the Taliban," in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

^{xxx} Hatch Dupree, 156-157.

^{xxxi} Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Is There a Tradition of Pacifism and Nonviolence in Islam?* 5, Paper presented at the U.S. Institute of Peace workshop on Religious Perspectives on Pacifism and Nonviolence (July 28, 1993.)

^{xxxii} Hatch Dupree, 152.

^{xxxiii} *Ibid.*, 159, citing "Afghan women warned not to enter foreign offices," *The Frontier Post*, December 9, 1996.

^{xxxiv} Sachedina, 8.

^{xxxv} Hatch Dupree, 150-151. Rubin points out that the fighters were "raised in refugee camps and all-male *madrasas*,... (and) had hardly lived in Afghan society. They had been raised in an ideologically supercharged environment against a background of pervasive violence and deprivation. The movement's extreme ideology provided a much-needed sense of discipline and purpose in their disrupted lives and supplied an outlet for the pervasive generational and gender conflicts that Afghanistan's social disruption had caused. It also gave them the only occupation for which they were qualified." Rubin, 289-290.

^{xxxvi} *Ibid.* Hatch Dupree observes that this phenomenon is not without precedent in Afghanistan. In 1992, "equally inexperienced young Mujahideen... came to Kabul... with similar ideas about upright female behaviour. . . . Young immature Mujahideen who had grown up on the battlefield under the influence of conservative leaders marveled at the unveiled Afghan female newsreaders on TN, concluded they must be promiscuous, and—Kalashnikovs at the ready—waylaid the ladies at the studio gate saying, 'Tonight you are mine.'"

Another point to consider about women's safety is that because they cannot leave their homes unaccompanied, women cannot obtain adequate access to health services. Especially if they are war widows (of which Afghanistan has many thousands) with few or no male relatives, their chances of surviving a medical emergency are slim.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*, 146.

^{xxxviii} White House Fact Sheet, Office of the Press Secretary, *Taliban Persecution of Women and Girls in Afghanistan* (December 6, 1999). See also "Report on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan," submitted by Mr. Kamal Hosain, Special Rapporteur in accordance with the Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/70, E/CN.4/1999/40.

^{xxxix} Hatch Dupree, 146, 150.

^{xl} U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Afghanistan, Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (September 9, 1999), http://www.afghan-politics.org/Current_Af...rd_Qtr_1999/USDos_Annual_Int_Religioms.htm, 3.

^{xli} *Ibid.*, 1.

^{xlii} Daoud Yaqub, Afghanistan Foundation, Washington, DC, telephone interview with author, November 21, 1999. Mr. Yaqub points out that the Taliban leaders are not "real mullahs" in the sense of religious scholars.

- ^{xliii} U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Afghanistan, Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (September 9, 1999), http://www.afghan-politics.org/Current_Af...rd_Qtr_1999/USDos_Annual_Int_Religions.htm, 8.
- ^{xliv} Maley, 20.
- ^{xlv} Maley, 8.
- ^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, 15.
- ^{xlvii} Hatch Dupree, 145.
- ^{xlviii} Rubin, *Persistent Crisis Challenges*, 3. Revival of *ijtihad* is part of the Islamist platform.
- ^{xlix} Sura 7, Verse 189 “It is He Who created you from single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love).”; Sura 42, Verse 11 “(He is) the Creator of Heaven and Earth: He has made for you pair from among yourselves.”; Sura 16, Verse 72 “And Allah has made for you mates (and Companions) of your own nature.” interpretation from Zieba Shorish-Shamley, “Women’s Position, Role, and Rights in Islam,” <http://www.angelfire.com/on/wapha/islam.html>.
- ^l Sura 4, Verse 32 “And in nowise covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: But ask Allah of his bounty. For Allah hath full knowledge of all things.”; Sura 4, Verse 7 “From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large—a determinate share.” <http://www.angelfire.com/on/wapha/islam.html>.
- ^{li} Hadiths are nonrevelational sayings of the Prophet. They include, “Seeking knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, man or woman.”; “The Father, if he educates his daughter well, will enter Paradise.”; “A Mother is a school. If she is educated, then a whole people are educated.” <http://www.angelfire.com/on/wapha/islam.html>.
- ^{lii} Thompson, 39-40.
- ^{liii} *Ibid.*, 42-43.
- ^{liv} Marc Gopin, “Contemporary Analysis of War and Peace in Judaism and Islam: A Critique”, (unpublished, revised version in idem, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of Religion Violence and Peacemaking* (forthcoming Spring 2000)), 20-21.
- ^{lv} *Ibid.*, 38.
- ^{lvi} Neamatollah Nojumi, interview with author, Medford, Massachusetts, 8 November 1999.
- ^{lvii} Sachedina, 19.
- ^{lviii} Marc Gopin and Bryan Hamlin, Report on trip to Israel (unpublished), November 1999.
- ^{lix} My thanks to Marc Gopin for this insight.
- ^{lx} Sachedina, 10.
- ^{lxi} See eg., Farhan Bokhari, “Signs of chic behind the veil emerge on streets of Kabul,” *Financial Times*, February 22, 2000, 14.
- ^{lxii} Hatch Dupree, 150-151. In this sense, the “lures of women” and “corrupt city ways” may not be so bad.
- ^{lxiii} Hatch-Dupree, 158. The Deputy Minister of Public Health, Abdul Sattar Paktis, is cited as an example of a professional, an orthopedic surgeon, whose reputation is “world renowned.”
- ^{lxiv} Mohammed Abu-Nimur, “Conflict Resolution in an Islamic Context,” *Peace & Change* (January 1996), 22, 34-35.
- ^{lxv} In a recent UN report, the correspondence between the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Taliban leadership was recorded. The UN Special Rapporteur sent a letter to the Taliban leadership on May 23, 1999, to which Maulvi Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, spokesman and adviser to the leadership of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan responded on June 8, 1999. The UN Special Rapporteur proceeded to send four letters to the Taliban spokesman and one letter to President Rabbani, none of which received a reply. Interim Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, prepared by Mr. Kamal Hossain, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, September 30, 1999.
- ^{lxvi} Ahmed Rashid, “The Taliban: Exporting Extremism,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1999), 22, 33.

^{lxvii} Richard Lapper and Farhan Bokhari, "UN fears growth of heroin trade," *Financial Times*, February 24, 2000, 1. See also, Farhan Bokhari, "Afghanistan doubles opium output," *Financial Times*, February 24, 2000, 4.

^{lxviii} Ibid.

^{lxix} Davis, 71.

^{lxx} Roy, 210.

^{lxxi} Peter Tomsen, "A Chance for Peace in Afghanistan: The Taliban's Days Are Numbered," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000, 179, 180.

^{lxxii} Rashid, 34. Regarding the possible spread of the Taliban, Davis pointedly remarks, "For Pakistan to hope to remain immune from the consequences of the events it has set in motion would be wishful thinking in the extreme." Davis, 71.

^{lxxiii} Rubin, "Women and Pipelines," 295.

^{lxxiv} Indeed, expatriate Afghans retain great interest in the affairs of their homeland. The former Afghan monarch Zahir Shah organized a moot conference of Afghan delegates in Rome last year to sign a resolution to ask the warring factions within Afghanistan to end the twenty years of violence. After discussing ways to implement peace proposals, the meeting concluded with the delegates calling for the convention of the Loya Jirga, a traditional Afghan grand assembly. Marianne Babar, "Rome Meeting Convened by Former Afghan Monarch," *The Jang*, 23 November 1999. The presence of the former Afghan monarch and the call for the Loya Jirga does not necessarily mean that the Taliban leaders would be excluded from the grand assembly. In fact, if the Taliban were not part of such a discussion, it is unlikely that concrete progress could be achieved.

^{lxxv} Ibid., 296.

^{lxxvi} Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "The Nonviolent Crescent: Eight Theses on Muslim Nonviolent Action," in *Arab Nonviolent Political Struggle in the Middle East*, Ralph Crow, et al., eds. (Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 1990), 25, 38.