

Genesis and Evolution of the Taliban^{*1}

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Abstract: The article analyzes the main stages of the evolution of the Taliban' movement. Considering the transformation of the military-political activity of the movement, the author identifies five main stages: the birth of the Taliban', the first reign, a period of calm, a period of revival and re-rule. According to the estimates presented in the article, the main goals and objectives of the Taliban' have not changed much over 20 years, but the composition of the movement has changed, which was reflected in changes in the prohibition policy.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban', military-political movements.

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Introduction

The development of strategies for military-political movements is influenced by many factors, including social and political ones, so goals and objectives may change over time. The Taliban* movement has been one of the main participants in the military-political life of Afghanistan for 29 years. They have gone through different stages, demonstrating a high level of vitality. Although the Taliban* used violent methods to achieve their goals, they are the reality of Afghan life. This is one of the reasons why the international community today has to engage with them. After the Taliban* came to power again in 2021, the question

¹ *The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). URL: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>; 18+

of their genesis and evolution is again relevant and is the subject of a special in-depth study. In this paper, we will focus on the analysis of the main stages in the evolution of the Taliban* associated with country factors.

An analysis of the transformation of the military-political activity of the Taliban* over the 29 years of its existence allows us to distinguish five historical stages:

1. The birth of the Taliban* movement (1994–1996);
2. First reign (1996–2001);
3. Quiet period (2001–2003);
4. Renaissance period (2003–2021);
5. Re-rule (2021–present).

Materials and methods

The sources of the study are reports of international organizations, statements by officials, materials from foreign analytical centers and periodicals.

The scientific basis of the study was the monographs of domestic (V.Ya.Belokrenitsky [3], R.R.Sikoev [7] and others) and foreign (S.M.Akimbekova [1], A.Rashid [6], T.Koglan [9], D.Edwards [10] and others) authors, including Afghan (N.Azimi [12], B.A.Ansari [13], V.Mozhdy [14] and others).

The author used well-known scientific methods such as system analysis, synthesis, method of comparative analysis and comparison of data.

Results

The Rise of the Taliban*

The transition of power in Afghanistan (1992) into the hands of the Islamists led to a sharp weakening of the left political camp. Islamic political movements intensified, effectively gaining control over most of the country. However, their combined influence was weakened by internal contradictions that took on the character of an armed struggle in the first half of the 1990s. During this period, interethnic disagreements began to play a large role in the formation of political alliances and associations. Anarchy and the actions of local warlords provoked an increase in discontent on the part of society. Interethnic conflict was driving the country towards fragmentation. Centrifugal processes and the dominance of non-Pashtun politicians in the political arena of the country provoked discontent among the population, especially the Pashtun. These are the conditions for the emergence of a new military-political force aimed at ending the civil war, establishing order and dominating the Pashtuns.

The Taliban* movement (the name refers to the students studying in the madrasah) first announced itself in October 1994 in the Spinbuldak district of the southern province of Kandahar [7:17]. The decisive role was played by the replenishment of the number of Afghan refugees who were in Pakistan. They were trained in a madrasah in the Afghan-Pakistani border area, which was under the control of Pakistani Islamist parties and enjoyed the patronage of the security services. Part of the Pashtun officers of the former left-wing democratic government of the country went over to the side of the Taliban* [3:15]. The origins of the Taliban* were representatives of the poor Pashtun strata, who lived mainly in rural areas in southern Afghanistan, and there were no Shiites in its leadership. Therefore, the movement had a clearly defined social, religious and ethnic character.

Researchers consider the genesis of the Taliban* in different ways. Some see its roots in the ethnic factor, that is, they believe that the Taliban* emerged as a Pashtun nationalist movement that aims to unite the country and end the civil war [11]. Others believe that religious doctrines originally played a dominant role in the movement². It is believed that the Deobandi religious school and the views of the Pakistani Jamiat-e Ulama e Islam party [3:29] had the strongest influence on the formation of the Taliban*'s worldview. At the same time, some researchers attribute the Taliban* to the followers of a separate Deobandi (Afghan) school, which broke away from the Indo-Pakistani [13:56]. There are opinions that the way the Taliban* operate can be linked to their "rural" identity [10]. A number of authors believe that the Taliban* should have played a key role in the struggle for huge oil and gas reserves in Central Asia and the establishment of resource transportation [6]. Between the Taliban* and those that emerged in the 1970s. Afghan Islamist parties can find common features associated with historical memory. The founder and most of the leaders of the Taliban* fought in the Mujahideen units against the Soviet troops and the pro-Soviet governments of Afghanistan, which allows us to call the Taliban* "children" of the Mujahideen, deprived of power [7].

One of the difficult problems in studying the origins of the Taliban*'s ideology is their connection with jihadist Salafism. The beginning of this interaction took place during the wars of the 1970s. It was carried out at various levels, including religious education and the creation of political movements. The geographical factor could not help but play its role: at that time, Al-Qaeda*³ was concentrated mainly in the Pashtun regions in the southeast of Afghanistan, in areas bordering Pakistan, where the formation of the Taliban* took place. This circumstance was the reason for the ideological interaction of the Taliban* with Al-Qaeda* and the Taliban* falling under the influence of this group.

² Lister S. Understanding State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan // Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics, 2007.

³ *The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>. (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

First Period in Power

The next strengthening of the Taliban* movement took place in the autumn of 1996. On September 12, 1996, the Taliban* took the strategically important city of Jalalabad, and on September 24 of the same year, the capital of Afghanistan, Kabul. The Taliban* themselves called the form of their state structure, characterized by researchers as a "military-theocratic regime", the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) [3:57]. At the initial stage, when the political ambitions of the Taliban* were not yet clear, their appearance was received positively, but after the capture of Kabul, the assessments changed. One of the first steps was that the Taliban* executed former President Mohammad Najibullah, who was hiding in the UN office.

As their power spread, the Taliban* established the rules and norms of the state and social structure in accordance with their understanding of the principles of Sharia. Restrictions were introduced affecting various areas of life. Let us name the main features of the first rule of the Taliban*.

Women were deprived of basic rights. They were forbidden to: get an education, work, go out without being accompanied by a "mahram" (close male relative). Women were required to wear a veil. During the entire period of the first rule (1996–2001), the decision of the Taliban* to ban women from education and work was temporary. The Russian Afghanist R.R.Sikoev describes the situation of women as follows: "A woman was deprived of all rights, completely isolated, excluded from public life, her existence turned out to be completely limited by the family and home" [7:168].

The position of representatives of the religious minority began to deteriorate. According to Iranian authors, the Shiites did not occupy either high government positions or middle-level positions in state structures. Their general situation was also influenced by the punitive actions of the Taliban* against the Hazaras in the provinces of Bamiyan and Balkh [3:53].

One of the first steps taken by the Taliban* was to take control of the national broadcasting corporation. After that, the only official media in the country was the Voice of Sharia radio. Listening to music and owning musical instruments was considered a crime.

The Taliban* acted as carriers of the idea of Pashtun political and religious dominance, which to a large extent turned the conflict into a confrontation between the Pashtuns and the ethnic minorities of the country. In this regard, the strengthening of the Taliban* after 1996 led to the consolidation of ethnic forces on the anti-Taliban* platform. As a result, it became possible to form a broad anti-Taliban* bloc (Northern Alliance) from numerous Afghan military-political groups opposed to the Taliban* [1].

It would seem that the rural and ethnic origins deprive the Taliban* of non-Afghan ambitions, but not everything was clear. The very assignment of the title "amir ul-muminin" (ruler of the faithful) to the leader of the movement, Mullah Omar, opened up scope for the broad aspirations of the Taliban*. Their allied relations with extra-Afghan jihadist groups

(Al-Qaeda*, IMU, etc.)⁴ were seen as an opportunity to export the Taliban* socio-political model to neighboring countries [8].

The degree of interaction between the Taliban* and Al-Qaeda* reached the point that the Taliban* provided its members with military-political asylum until they themselves became a victim of the group's activity. From the territory of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda* organized the September 11 operation, which ultimately led to the launch of the US operation in Afghanistan and the collapse of the Taliban* government.

Period of Calm

After the capture of Kabul in 1996, the Taliban* were unable to quickly establish control over the entire country. They expanded their zone of influence gradually – by October 2001, they managed to capture almost 95% of the territory of Afghanistan. However, the beginning of the US operation against the Taliban* led to a change in the political situation. After the September 11 terrorist attack, having received broad international support, the United States, in cooperation with the Northern Alliance, quickly removed the Taliban* from power. From December 2001 to August 2002, the Taliban* movement actually collapsed: there were no signs of the existence of the current leadership and structure. From the point of view of security problems, the period 2001–2003 can be described as the most prosperous in the entire history of the Afghan conflict. Many people remember these years as a time when it was possible to move freely around the country, visiting any areas. The military and political activity of the armed opposition during this period was low, so it was remembered as the “golden stage of the post-Taliban* period”⁵.

Revival Period

Since the summer of 2003, attacks by Taliban* groups of 100-200 people have become more frequent. They succeeded in taking large areas in the countryside out of control of government forces, especially in the eastern and southern parts of the country. In the revival of the Taliban*, internal and external factors played a role, the most significant were: 1) the dominance of the military-political opponents of the Taliban* in power, which minimized the possibility of a deal with them; 2) ignoring the Taliban*, and in their person - a part of society in the Bonn process aimed at the formation of state institutions; 3) underestimation of the Taliban*'s ability to resist; 4) shifting US attention to the Iraqi campaign [5].

The ideological center of the Taliban* movement was still considered Mullah Mohammad Omar and his inner circle. He enjoyed great prestige in the movement, but

⁴ *The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>. (accessed: 25.06.2023);18+

⁵ Kava A. The role of Karzai and Ghani in the democratic defeat in Afghanistan. Hashi-Sobh, 27.11.2021. Available from: <http://8am.af/the-role-of-karzai-and-ghani-in-the-defeat/> [In Persian].

his actual participation in the command of the armed opposition raised serious doubts [9:138-139]. Apparently, the so-called. “shuras” (councils or collective bodies) located on the territory of Pakistan and created after 2003: Kvet shura (high council), Mirakab shura, Peshawar shura, Miramshah shura. The Shuras were distinguished by their influence over individual units of the Taliban*. For example, the Peshawar Shura coordinated the activities of the Haqqani Network, while the Mirakab Shura coordinated between the councils and non-Taliban* groups. It should be emphasized that the name of the bodies and groups of the Taliban* in honor of certain territories is almost a convention.

In our opinion, one of the key changes in the activities of the Taliban* after 2003 is the “Arabization” of the Afghan conflict - the massive use of suicide bombers in Afghanistan, which was not previously on such a scale. After the start of the US operation in Afghanistan, the Taliban* became ideologically even closer to jihadist currents, and the Taliban* war acquired a more Salafi coloring. The use of al-Qaeda* tactics helped to strengthen the position of the Taliban* in the war with the Americans, but at the same time it became a weak point of the Taliban*: as a result of theoretical confusion and confusion with al-Qaeda*, some members of the Taliban* acquired more explicit takfiri views, which subsequently led to a split within the movement and the outflow of these members to ISIS-X*. After coming to power in 2021, the Taliban* justified their actions by saying that life under occupation left them no other choice, although killing people when attacking the enemy was not discussed, according to researchers, it contradicts the teachings of deobandism [13].

A serious challenge for the Taliban* was the appearance in Afghanistan in 2015 of the Khorasan branch of the IS (ISIS-X*)⁶. At a certain stage, not only foreign radicals located in the country, but also individual factions of the Taliban* began to join him. The Taliban* command saw a threat in the new group because of the ideological “proximity” that allowed the Khorasan branch to easily lure Taliban* manpower to itself. Subsequently, the conflict between the parties took on an armed character. For 2017-2018 only, there were 207 clashes between the Taliban* and ISIS-X* in 14 out of 34 Afghan provinces⁷. Although the conflict between the parties continued, the Taliban* managed to prevent a large exodus of their supporters to ISIS-X*⁸.

During the armed struggle of the Taliban*, restrictions affecting various spheres of life of the population were in effect in most areas under their control. However, the ban on girls' education was ambivalent. In a number of places, the Taliban* did not allow them to attend schools, especially girls under the age of 12.

Another feature of this period was the weakening of the Taliban*'s Pashtun-centric policy, which allowed including representatives of other ethnic groups in the armed struggle, including Tajiks and Uzbeks from the north. This tactic increased the effectiveness

⁶ The goal of ISIS-X* was the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Central and South Asia.

⁷ Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K)*. CSIS, 09.11.2018. Available from: <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/past-projects/terrorism-backgrounders/islamic-state-khorasan>.

⁸ Has the outflow of Taliban* commanders to ISIS* stopped? Iranian Center for Strategic Studies “Shark”, 18.11.2019. Available from: <https://www.iess.ir/fa/event/1087/> [In Persian].

of the movement during the years of armed struggle and became one of the main success factors. Thanks to inter-ethnic consolidation, the Taliban* have dramatically expanded the area under their control, intensifying their activities in the north of the country.

The turning point in the activities of the Taliban* is the beginning of peace negotiations with the Taliban*), which subsequently led to the emergence of a new center of influence within the movement and, accordingly, to a change in the balance of power in it. The peace process was prompted by a change in US policy on Afghanistan - preparations for the completion of the Afghan mission. As part of the peace process, in 2013, with the assistance of the United States, a Taliban* representation began to function in Qatar. On February 29, 2020, a peace agreement was signed between the United States and the Taliban*⁹. One of the main conditions of the agreement was intra-Afghan negotiations (negotiations between the government of Afghanistan and legal political movements, on the one hand, and with the Taliban*, on the other), which were to end with the formation of a coalition government. However, the matter did not come to real negotiations - they repeatedly failed due to the actions of President A.Ghani and the existence of a huge gap between the political views of the Taliban* and the views of other Afghan political forces. As a result, the withdrawal of the last groups of the US military, which turned out to be unexpected for Kabul, provoked the fall of the government and the rise to power of the Taliban* [4].

Re-ruling Period

The circumstances leading up to the re-emergence of the Taliban* to power in 2021 are described in many publications (4). With the collapse of the government of A.Ghani on August 15, 2021, the Taliban* managed to quickly extend control over the entire country. For the first time in more than 40 years, Afghanistan has completely come under the control of one military-political force.

In establishing the rules and norms of the state and social structure, the Taliban* largely repeat what they did during the previous rule (1990s). The most resonant was the decision to deprive the female part of the population of the opportunity to receive a secondary education and have full access to work.

In other areas, the Taliban* also adhere to the "old line". However, it should be noted that a number of prohibitive measures were softened compared to the 1990s: some of them were introduced gradually, for example, the ban on listening to music was officially adopted only in June 2023, although in practice it had been in effect earlier. Also, we pay attention to the less negatively attitude towards Shiites¹⁰, although the analysis and monitoring group at the UN Security Council accused the Taliban* of pursuing a "Pashto-

⁹ The official title of the document is: "An agreement on peace in Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which the United States does not recognize as a state and is known as the Taliban* movement, and the United States."

¹⁰ For example, the post of Deputy Minister of Economy is occupied by a Hazara Shiite Abdul Latif Nazari. It is worth noting that the Taliban* leaders periodically hold meetings with representatives of the Hazara community.

centric" policy, violating the rights of religious minorities and maintaining links with terrorist groups¹¹.

There is no reliable data on the breakdown of relations between the Taliban* and extremist groups. In August 2022, the United States announced the elimination of Al-Qaeda* leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in the center of Kabul with the help of a UAV, which was evidence of continued cooperation between the Taliban* and non-Afghan groups. In June 2023, the authoritative publication "Long War Journal" reported on the appointment of a number of Al-Qaeda* activists to positions in the security structures of the Taliban*¹².

Despite this, after coming to power, the Taliban* declared "war" on the followers of Salafism, officially banning the activities of movements with a Salafist orientation, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir*¹³, Jamiat-e Eslah and the Najm organization*¹⁴.

Conclusions

If in the last years of the armed struggle there was a slight weakening of the Pashtun-centric policy of the Taliban*, which allowed them to strengthen their position in the north, then after coming to power, the reverse process began¹⁵.

An analysis of the main directions of the Taliban*'s policy after they came to power again leads to the conclusion that the main goals and objectives of the Taliban* have not changed in 20 years - they are still striving to establish the same order that they were moving towards in the past. However, the composition of the movement has changed over the past 20 years. Probably, this can explain some easing and slowing down in the prohibitive policy. Now the camp of "moderate" Taliban* looks more numerous than in the 1990s.

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¹¹ Fourteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. Available from: https://www.hronikatm.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2023_06_01_afghanistan_taliban_un_report.pdf

¹² Al Qaeda* leaders are prominently serving in Taliban* government. LWJ, 10.06.2023. Available from: <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2023/06/al-qaeda-leaders-are-prominently-serving-in-taliban-government.php>

¹³ *The organization has been recognized a terrorist organization by the Russian Supreme Court. Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (as of June 25, 2023). URL: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>. Available from: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm> (accessed: 7.05.2023); 18+.

¹⁴ The Taliban* banned the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir* in Afghanistan. Independent Persian, 25.11.2022. Available from: <https://www.independentpersian.com/node/286131/> [In Persian].

¹⁵ For example, the Taliban* conducted punitive operations against a number of influential commanders from among the representatives of Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras who were dissatisfied with the policy of the movement's leadership.

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