

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban Topics for IRAD

Research Division

USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

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22 CV 5312

US 2345

Presentation Topics

- Origin and Rise
- 1996-2001 Governance
- 2001-2021 Structure and Practices
- Finance
- Interim Government 2021
- Targeted Classes
- Resources

Origin

- Formed in the early 1990s by Afghan mujahideen (Soviet resistance)
- Joined by younger Pashtun tribesmen who studied in Pakistani madrassas (Taliban is Pashto for “students”)
- Attracted popular support, promising to impose stability and rule of Sharia law after four years of conflict (1992–96) among rival mujahideen groups.
- Took crime-ridden Kandahar in November 1994; Kabul in Sept. 1996
- Declared Afghanistan an Islamic emirate, with Mullah Mohammed Omar, a cleric and veteran of the anti-Soviet resistance, leading as *amir al-mu’minin*, or “commander of the faithful.”

1996-2001 Rule

- Imposed strict and oppressive order (women, beards, music)
- Religious police and Islamic courts enforced their ultra-conservative interpretation of Islamic law (Pashto Hanafi)
- Punishments included stoning, flogging, amputations for theft, and public execution for adultery and murder
- For lesser infractions, militiamen often judged accused offenders on the spot and meted out punishments such as beatings
- Poor prison conditions
- Arbitrarily arrest and detention
- No privacy rights

1996-2001 Rule

- Taliban military tactics forced tens of thousands of civilians to flee their homes.
- Bombarded civilian areas indiscriminately and harassed, detained, and killed members of relief organizations.
- Civil war conditions and the actions of competing factions effectively limited freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association.
- Freedom of religion severely restricted; conversion from Islam to Christianity or Judaism was punishable by death.
- Freedom of movement also was limited.



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Post 2001: Shadow Government

- Clandestine system of governance operated by Taliban representatives at the local level
- From 2006 onward, appointed its own informal district governors, police chiefs, and judges
- In principle mimicked the Kabul government's structure with multiple commissions (varying presence depending on Shura)

Shadow Government

- **Power distribution department** that only collected payments for electricity delivered by Kabul's power department.
- **Agriculture Commission** largely idle; staff members assigned other tasks, such as writing up threat letters on behalf of intelligence department
- **Local Commissions** managed provincial and district governors, who had a mixed military and governance role
- **District governors** handled day to day relations with community elders
- **Provincial governors** conducted more military-oriented tasks.
- **Justice Commissions** managed systems of courts

Shadow Government

- **Education Commissions** funded and managed a network of madrasas in Afghanistan, deployed cadres to monitor the activities of state schools, paid teachers to carry out propaganda
- **Health Commission** supported combat units with medics and doctors and maintained some clinics open to villagers
- **Companies Commissions** taxed all economic activities
- **NGO Commissions** regulated humanitarian and development access
- **Ulema Commissions** advised the Taliban's leaders and paid salaries to pro-Taliban clerics, who preached in favor of the Taliban.

Human Resources: 2017

- The total manpower, including combatants and support elements, exceeded 200,000
- About 150,000 fighters, of whom around 60,000 were in fulltime, mobile units and the rest were local militias.
- The mobile units were mostly based in Pakistan and Iran and deployed to Afghanistan during the fighting season, in part for logistical reasons and also because many fighters have family in those countries
- Leave system (Taliban fighters are entitled to 3 months of leave a year) – rarely more than 40,000 active fighter in Afghanistan

Fighter Profile

- Fighters are typically young, 16-25 years old.
- Those with some skills or charisma would be promoted during his 20's, and become team commander.
- In 2015-17 there has been a shift away from local militias, towards mobile, full time forces, which tend to be recruited more in line with official Taliban rules (i.e. no under-age recruitment)
- Many fighters tend to quit the Taliban once they get married and have children, because of the risk involved; they can usually quit without problems if their commanders agree with their request (usually reported to the Taliban command as 'family reasons').
- Physical fitness is a factor that has prevented most fighters from staying in combat groups after the age of 30: a lot of running has been required for the average Taliban fighter to stay alive.

Ethnicity

- The large majority are Pashtuns
- Minority of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Baluchis, and several hundred Hazara
- In some areas the Taliban are predominantly non-Pashtuns, as they draw recruits from the local population (Badakhshan Tajiks)
- Miran Shah Shura is the only one that explicitly bans the recruitment of Shi'as in its ranks; all other shuras have some Shi'as, usually local militias operating at the southern fringes of Hazarajat

Code of Conduct

- In 2009, the Taliban Quetta Shura issued a code of conduct for its fighters, partly to foster a positive image (not widely implemented)
- States that the Taliban will only use suicide attacks to target high-ranking officials and that it will take steps to avoid civilian casualties
- Prohibits kidnapping for ransom and compelling donations from people
- Some punishments for wrongdoers, but also continued reports of racketeering, kidnappings for ransom, and murders

Command and Control

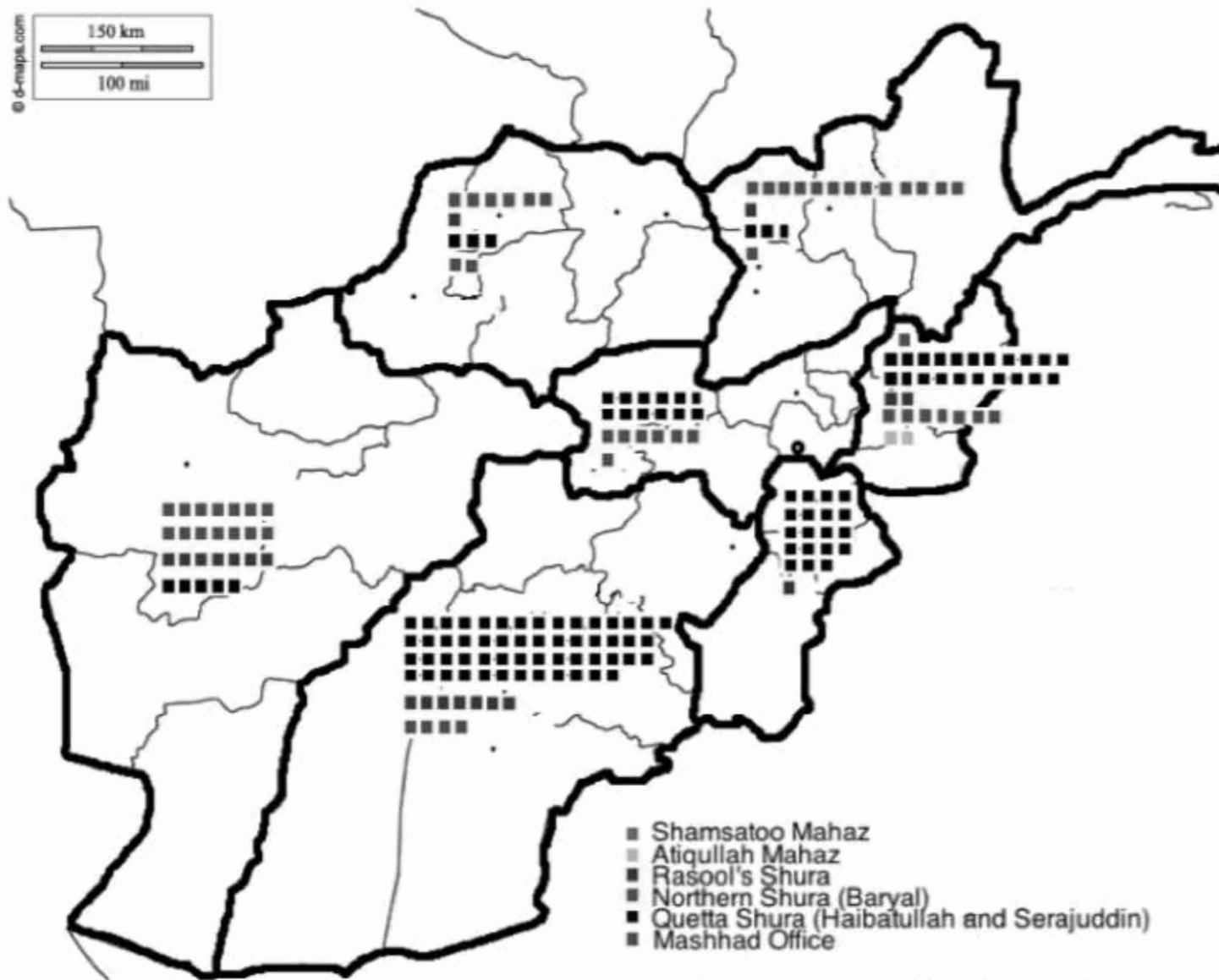
- Theoretically at the top of the Taliban's structure is the Amir al Muminin (Mullah Omar until 2015; Akhtar Mohammad Mansur to May 2016; Haibatullah Akhundzada to present)
- Some centralized functions but largely decentralized
- Coordination is difficult even though many Taliban are adept at using the internet, cell phones, and social media
- Separate Shuras with conflict
- Some competition between older and younger members
- Top/middle layers to include suicide squads, media outlets, specialized training units on IEDs, finance, intelligence, research and development, recruitment

Command and Control

- **The Quetta Shura** (aka Rahbari Shura) formed in 2001 by Taliban leaders after the US invasion of Afghanistan.
- Members are veterans of the Taliban regime and are typically mullahs (Islamic clerics)
- In 2015, several groups broke from Quetta to form their own Shuras and exert regional influence.
- In 2016, the breakaway Peshawar Shura declared it was financially bankrupt and was re-absorbed into the Quetta Shura.

Command and Control

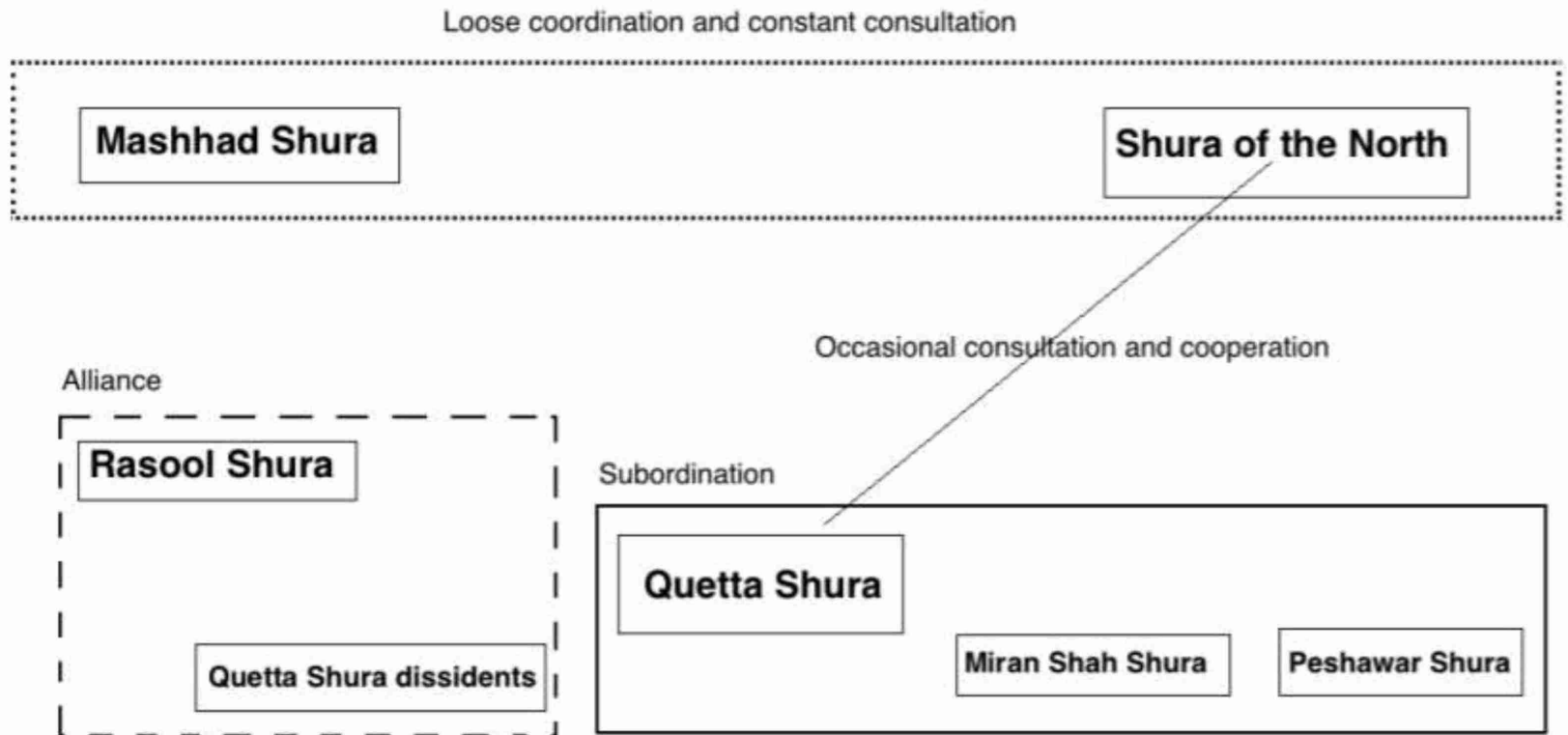
- **The Shura of the North** emerged out of the defunct Peshawar Shura at the end of 2015 and operates out of Badakhshan Province.
- **The Mashhad Shura** is based in Mashhad, Iran, and is one of the largest of the autonomous Shuras. Controls Taliban operations in Herat, Badghis, Ghor, Nimruz, and Farah Provinces. In 2017, the Shura was noted to have expanded operations in Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Faryab, Jowzjan, Kunduz, and Ghazni Provinces as well.
- **The Rasool Shura** operates in limited areas of western and southern Afghanistan, however, it claims authority over the entire country.
- The Shura of the North, the Mashhad Shura and the Rasool Shura do not recognize the authority of the Quetta Shura, of its shadow governors, military leaders and courts.



1 square = 1000 men incl. support, part-timers

Command and Control

2.2 FIGURE 1: THE TALIBAN'S SHURAS AND THEIR INTERACTION AT LEADERSHIP LEVEL



Source: Antonio Giustozzi 2017

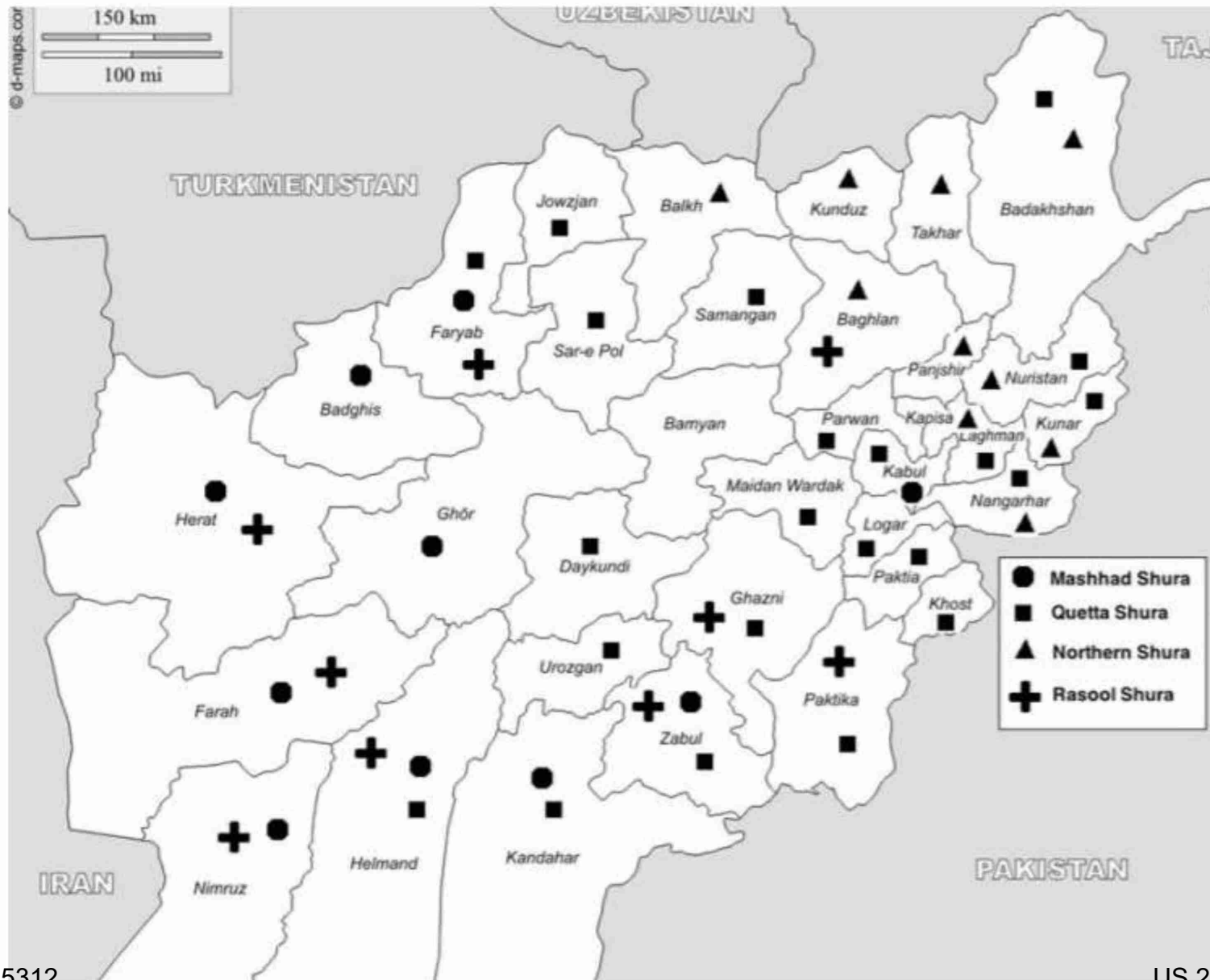
Command and Control

- There are also groups of 'free Taliban' who are only concerned with their villages and do not recognize any superior leadership.

Command and Control

- There is only one Taliban propaganda office, under the Quetta Shura, publishing on non-military aims in consultation with other Shuras
- Some reject non-military functions
- Some overt armed conflict between Taliban factions

2.2 MAP 1: PRESENCE OF INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENTS OF THE QUETTA, MASHHAD, NORTH AND RASOOL SHURAS AS OF 2017



Intelligence

- Kabul city has had at least three different overlapping Taliban intelligence organizations: the Haqqanis', the Quetta Shura's and the Mashhad Office's
- 1,500 spies in Kabul, distributed in all 17 districts

Finance

- The Taliban maintained sophisticated financial operations
- Annual expenses were estimated at \$200 - \$400 million
- Poppy/opium production represented a major revenue stream
- Taxation (checkpoints, wheat, import of perfume/cigarettes)
- Extortion and kidnapping
- In Helmand the Taliban ran 25 to 30 illegal marble quarries in Taliban-controlled areas
- In 2021, commandeering customs checkpoints (\$33.5 million)

Cultural and Media Commission

- News agency called "*al-Emarah*," which is Arabic for "the emirate."
- Many journalists in Afghanistan receive statements from the Taliban directly in their inboxes.
- Secret groups on social media to discuss messaging and disseminate through fake accounts, sometimes targeting individuals

Twitter
Facebook
Telegram
WhatsApp
Viber
Telegram

Interaction with Civilians

- The Taliban have employed a mix of coercion and cooptation to woo local support (e.g. schools, courts)
- The attitude of the Taliban to local traditions and customs varies, but over time they have tended to seek accommodation (deference to tribal elders at times)
- Elements hostile to the Taliban and government collaborators are usually warned to mend their ways or cooperate with the Taliban
- The killing of hostile elements and collaborators as example and intimidation

How insurgents
come to power
dictates what
kind of
government
they'll form.

- Barnett Rubin

Senior Fellow and Director
Center on Int'l Cooperation
New York University



Government Upon 2021 Takeover

- Many of the newly appointed leaders in the Islamic Emirate are actually old Taliban leaders. More than a dozen of them were first sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council in early 2001. Some new faces have joined them.
- Many of the Taliban leaders discussed below have either current or historical ties to al Qaeda. Some of them worked closely with al Qaeda throughout their careers. Some them are U.S.-designated terrorists.
- Six of the newly-appointed Taliban leaders were once held at the detention facility in Guantánamo. Five of them were exchanged for Bowe Bergdahl in 2014.
- Most persons appointed to the interim government were of a clerical background, and few seemed to have any higher non-religious educational background or other competencies specifically related to the post they were appointed.

Government Upon 2021 Takeover

- Over 30 Ministries, largely mirrors prior government
- Afghanistan Country Focus, Annex 1: Appointments to the Taliban's interim government and other positions, EASO, Jan. 2022

Leadership

- **Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada** is the current “Emir of the Faithful,” or top leader of the Taliban. He has served as the Taliban’s emir since 2016. At some point during the jihad against the Soviets, Akhundzada reportedly fought within the ranks of the Hezb-e-Islami group led by the mujahideen commander Yunus Khalis. After the Taliban took over most of Afghanistan, ruling from 1996 to 2001, Akhundzada was a religious scholar, judge and head of the judiciary branch.
- As the top judicial figure, Akhundzada issued fatwas, or religious decrees, justifying all aspects of the Taliban’s operations, including suicide attacks. His son, Hafiz Abdul Rahman, killed himself in a suicide attack against Afghan forces in Helmand province in 2017. Ayman al Zawahiri, the head of al Qaeda, swore allegiance to Akhundzada in 2016. The Taliban’s “Emir of the Faithful” has never disavowed Zawahiri’s oath.



Leadership

- **Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund** is the acting head of state. Akhund was a close compatriot of Mullah Omar. During the Taliban's first regime from 1996 to 2001, Akhund served as the governor of Kandahar, foreign minister, and first deputy of the Taliban's council of ministers. On behalf of the Taliban's senior leadership, Akhund refused to turn over Osama bin Laden after al Qaeda carried out the August 1998 U.S. embassy bombings — the deadliest attack by bin Laden's network prior to 9/11. "We will never give up Osama at any price," Akhund said, after the U.N. threatened to impose sanctions if bin Laden wasn't handed over. Akhund was sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council in Jan. 2001. As of 2009, Akhund was one of the Taliban's "most effective" insurgent commanders. He was also member of the Taliban's supreme council.
- Taliban-linked social media accounts have shared multiple images of Akhund in recent days, including photos of him meeting with other senior Taliban officials. One image can be seen on the right.



Leadership

- **Sirajuddin Haqqani** is the acting interior minister. In that role, he will likely have great power within the Taliban's newly resurrected Islamic Emirate. Indeed, Sirajuddin issued guidance to the Taliban's commissions and judges as the jihadists took over the country this year.
- Sirajuddin is the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, who served as a commander in Yunus Khalis's Hezb-e-Islami group, but became more widely known as a notorious powerbroker in the region. Jalaluddin was the founder of the so-called Haqqani Network, which is an integral part of the Taliban. The Haqqanis have benefited from the support of Pakistan's military and intelligence establishment.
- In Oct. 2001, Jalaluddin was appointed the head of the Taliban's military forces. In that role, he helped Osama bin Laden escape the American manhunt in late 2001, while also publicly defending the al Qaeda founder. Indeed, Jalaluddin was one of bin Laden's first benefactors and helped incubate al Qaeda in the Haqqanis' own camps in eastern Afghanistan during the 1980s. Al Qaeda issued a glowing eulogy for Jalaluddin after the Taliban announced his death in 2018, and continued to honor him in the months that followed.
- Years before Jalaluddin's demise, Sirajuddin inherited the leadership of the Haqqanis' network. He has overseen it for much of the past two decades. At the same time, Sirajuddin quickly rose up the Taliban's ranks, serving as one of two deputy emirs to Akhundzada since 2016, as well as the head of the Taliban's Miramshah Shura.
- Sirajuddin has worked closely with Al Qaeda throughout his career, so much so that it is often difficult to tell the Haqqanis and al Qaeda apart. A team of experts working for the United Nations Security Council recently reported that Sirajuddin may even be a member of al Qaeda's "wider" leadership. Regardless, there is no question that Sirajuddin is an al Qaeda man. The Haqqanis main media arm has even celebrated the unbroken bond between the Taliban and al Qaeda. And al Qaeda's general command has referred to Sirajuddin and Akhundzada as "our emirs in the Islamic emirate." The U.S. government has listed Sirajuddin as a specially designated global terrorist, offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to his capture and prosecution.



Leadership

- **Mullah Yaqoub** is the acting defense minister. He is the son of Mullah Omar, the founder and first emir of the Taliban. Omar repeatedly refused to hand over Osama bin Laden to the U.S. both before and after the 9/11 hijackings.
- Alongside Sirajuddin Haqqani, Yaqoub has served as one of the Taliban's two deputy emirs since 2016. Yaqoub was also named as the group's military commander. Yaqoub previously served as a member of the Quetta Shura and the military commander of 15 provinces.
- In a recent video blaming America for the 9/11 hijackings, Yaqoub openly praised the Taliban's suicide squads, saying they will continue to play a leading role in the defense of the Islamic Emirate. The Taliban did not previously release pictures showing Yaqoub's face, but some images (including the one on the right and others) were shared via social media within the last day.



Leadership

- **Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar** is the acting first deputy head of state. Baradar cofounded the Taliban with Mullah Omar, and served at the most senior levels within the Taliban between 1996 and 2001, including as deputy minister of defense. The Trump administration negotiated Baradar's release from prison in Pakistan, where he was detained for approximately eight years, in order to give negotiations between the two sides the appearance of gravitas. Baradar then headed the Taliban's delegation in Doha, Qatar and secured the deal that led to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. That agreement paved the way for the Taliban to seize control of the country. Baradar was sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council in Feb. 2001.



Leadership

- **Khalil al Rahman Haqqani** is the acting minister of refugees. He has played a leading diplomatic role in Kabul since it fell, accepting pledges of loyalty to the newly restored Islamic Emirate from various parties. Flanked by arm guards, Khalil was also seen preaching in the Pol-e Khishti Mosque, the largest mosque in Kabul. Khalil is a brother of Jalaluddin Haqqani and the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani. He has served as a key fundraiser, financier, and operational commander for the Haqqani Network. When the U.S. Treasury Department designated Khalil as a terrorist in 2011, it noted that he “acted on behalf of” al Qaeda’s military, or “Shadow Army,” in Afghanistan. In 2002, when the U.S. was hunting Osama bin Laden, Khalil deployed men “to reinforce al Qaeda elements in Paktia Province, Afghanistan.” The U.S. State Department’s Rewards for Justice Program has offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to his capture and prosecution. It is likely that at least some of al Qaeda’s personnel are considered “refugees” in Afghanistan, meaning they will be included in Khalil Haqqani’s portfolio.



Leadership

- **Qari Fasihuddin** is the acting chief of army staff. An ethnic Tajik, Fasihuddin commanded the Taliban's forces in northern Afghanistan during the group's final conquest in the spring and summer of 2021. He also led Taliban troops during the recent offensive in the Panjshir Valley. Fasihuddin has served as the deputy head of the Taliban's military commission. He has ties to foreign jihadist groups such as the Turkistan Islamic Party and Jamaat Ansarullah, a Tajik terrorist organization. Fasihuddin was the Taliban's shadow governor for Badakhshan province. After the province fell in the summer of 2021, he put Jamaat Ansarullah in command of five districts.



Leadership

- **Abdul Haq Wasiq** is the acting director of intelligence. Wasiq was the deputy minister of security (intelligence) during the Taliban's first regime. He was sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council in Jan. 2001. The U.N. reported that Wasiq was a "local commander" in Nimroz and Kandahar provinces before being promoted to deputy director general of intelligence prior to 9/11. In that capacity, according to the U.N., Wasiq "was in charge of handling relations with al Qaeda-related foreign fighters and their training camps in Afghanistan."
- Wasiq's al Qaeda ties were also documented by JTF-GTMO's analysts. U.S. military-intelligence officials found that Wasiq "utilized his office to support al Qaeda and to assist Taliban personnel elude capture" in late 2001. Wasiq also "arranged for al Qaeda personnel to train Taliban intelligence staff in intelligence methods."



Leadership

- **Mohammad Fazl** is the deputy defense minister. Fazl had the same role, or a similar one, in the Taliban's first regime. He was sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council in Feb. 2001. At the time, Fazl was the Taliban's deputy chief of army staff.
- Fazl was a "close associate" of Mullah Omar and "helped him to establish the Taliban government." The U.N. found that Fazl "was at the Al-Farouq training camp established by al Qaeda." Fazl "had knowledge that the Taliban provided assistance to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan...in the form of financial, weapons and logistical support in exchange for providing the Taliban with soldiers." The IMU worked closely with al Qaeda at the time. Fazl also commanded a fighting force "of approximately 3,000 Taliban front-line troops in the Takhar Province in October 2001."
- According to JTF-GTMO, Fazl had "operational associations with significant al Qaeda and other extremist personnel." Fazl allegedly conspired with Abdul al-Iraqi, one of Osama bin Laden's chief lieutenants and the head of al Qaeda's Arab 055 Brigade, to "coordinate an attack" on the Northern Alliance following the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud in Sept. 2001.



Leadership

- **Noorullah Noori** is the acting minister of borders and tribal affairs. Noori was sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council in Jan. 2001. At the time, he was both the Taliban's governor of the Balkh Province, as well as the "Head of the Northern Zone of the Taliban regime." According to JTF-GTMO, Noori was a "senior Taliban military commander" prior to his detention. Noori allegedly "fought alongside al Qaeda as a Taliban military general, against the Northern Alliance" and also "hosted al Qaeda commanders." Along with Mohammad Fazl (below), Noori was suspected of committing "war crimes," "including the murder of thousands of Shiite Muslims" prior to the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.



Recognition

- Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA)
- Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were the only countries to accord diplomatic recognition to the Taliban while they were previously in power (1996-2001).
- 2021+ No country has officially recognized the IEA , and the UN referred to the Taliban as the 'de facto' authorities.
- Some countries kept their embassies open in Kabul: China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran and Qatar

Targeted Classes

- Afghan security forces, police, and pro-government militias
- Government officials or accused government spies
- Those working for foreign military troops (interpreters, drivers)
- Civilians perceived as supportive of the government or national or international security forces (farmers, shopkeepers and students)
- Education sector personnel
- Religious scholars (expressed pro-Government views or condemned civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements)
- Humanitarian workers
- Tribal elders (pro-government)
- Enemies of the Taliban (Jamiat-i Islami; Hezb-e Islami)
- Journalists, media workers, and human rights defenders
- Hazara and Shia minorities

Targeted Classes in 2022?

- Former Afghan security forces, police
- Former government officials and judges
- Those who worked for foreign military troops (interpreters, drivers)
- Civilians perceived as supportive of the former government or national or international security forces (e.g. Panjshir shopkeeper)
- Journalists, media workers, and human rights defenders
- “Feminists”

Targeting of Hazaras/Shias?



Targeting of Hazaras/Shias?

- Risk pattern for Hazaras/Shias being targeted, merely for their ethnicity or sect, includes attacks on Mosques, gatherings, religious commemorations, and demonstrations in cities (IS-K)
- Fear of Taliban return to power (mass killings of Hazaras in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 and in central Bamian Province in 2000 and 2001; more recent Taliban offensives in the provinces of Ghazni and Uruzgan)
- Evictions for hundreds of families in Central Highlands (Daykundi, Bamiyan) on claim they don't own the land
- No representation in current cabinet
- Attitudes that they are westernized and not "right Muslims"

Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men – new investigation (Amnesty International, Aug. 19, 2021)

EASO: Afghanistan Country Focus (January 2022)

Hazaras: Complexity

- Some Hazara communities and Taliban assisted each other in fight against Islamic State
- Two Taliban shadow governors or provincial-level military leaders are Hazara
- Several hundred Hazara fighters in the Taliban ranks (local militias from the southern fringes of Hazarajat joining the Taliban for local infighting)
- Hazara cooperation to achieve security and autonomy (control local communities under Taliban name)
- Hazara commander fighting alongside the Taliban in Kunduz
- See Hezb-e Wahdat TRIG Report

Other Risk Profiles

- LGBTIQ+
- Apostates (most often converts to Christianity)
- Those seen as “Westernized”
- Musicians, Artists, those in Salon & Fashion industry

EASO: Country Guidance: Afghanistan (December 2020) – excellent content on risk profiles (PSGs)

EASO: Afghanistan Country Focus (January 2022)

Targeting Procedures

Procedure for targeting individual collaborators is

1. Identify them;
2. Find their contact details (address or telephone);
3. Warn them at least twice;
4. Interrogate and have them go through the Taliban's courts;
5. Include them in the blacklist if they fail to comply with Taliban injunctions
6. Wait for a suitable opportunity to strike at them

Night Letters

1. 'Night letters' (*shabnamah*) used for years to threaten individuals and organizations
2. Conflicting assertions about current use; some reports indicate reduction after 2015
3. Fraudulent letters sold; Range of formality (hand-written or typed, official Taliban seal or not) makes authentication difficult
4. Recently the Taliban is using messaging services and apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter
5. (2022) Taliban used a 'night letter' to inform family members of their relative's death sentence (former translator)
6. (2022) Night letters used to demand taxes from local farmers and to remind the farmers that women are not allowed to work

Resources

RAIO Research:

- [RAIO Research Unit Afghanistan Country Page](#)
- [COI Bank](#) document on Afghanistan (hosted on Teams)

Taliban:

- [Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure](#), LandInfo, Aug. 2017
- [Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and the intimidation campaign](#), LandInfo, Aug. 2017

Resources

- [EASO: Afghanistan Country Focus](#) (January 2022)
- [EASO: Afghanistan Security Situation Update](#) (Sept. 2021)
- [EASO: Report on Security Situation by Province](#) (June 2021)
- [EASO: Country Guidance: Afghanistan](#) (December 2020) – excellent content on risk profiles (PSGs)

- [EASO: Situation of Hazaras and Shias \(2018-2020\)](#) – Query Response July 2020
- [“Even if You Go to the Skies, We Will Find You”, LGBT People in Afghanistan After the Taliban Takeover](#), Human Rights Watch (Jan. 2022)

- [PiXToday](#) (Can create account with .gov email) – Afghanistan section with conflict tracker
- [UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan \(UNAMA\)](#) - Quarterly and Annual Reports
- [Afghanistan Analysts Network](#)

Areas of Control

- Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan (2000-2021), Long War Journal
- Pix content on areas of control:
<https://pixtoday.net/article/article/76785>

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