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TALIBAN AND ISIS: AN ANALYTICAL COMPARISON

Abstract

A complex relationship between Taliban and ISIS is often assumed, but it has not been yet systematically investigated. In this paper we will attempt to compare the two groups in the areas of their social origins, how each appeared in the Islamic arena, organizational characteristics, the influence of other ideological movements or tribal mechanisms on their organizational system, political agenda, faith, theology, jurisprudence, ethics, and Mysticism by exploring the commonalities and differences that exist between the two groups. This paper also contributes towards the conceptualization of the immediate and long-term political and security implications of the Taliban's return to power. In addition to that, the paper discusses the relations of these two groups with the ethnic fabric of their societies and their relationship with the rest of the ideological movements in the Islamic world. These two groups cannot be understood without delving into the deep roots of their theological foundation.

Keywords: Taliban, ISIS, Dayesh, terrorism, extremism

Introduction

After spending more than 2 trillion USD and causing more than 220,000 war deaths, America retreated from the Afghanistan in 2021. The Taliban took over Ka-

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bul in just 10 days after taking over the first province of Afghanistan.⁴ A year after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the academic debates and policy discussion regarding the origins, similarities, and distinction of Islamist insurgencies and terrorist groups in the Islamic world has gained new momentum. Many assume that the symbolism of the West's failure in the War on Terror" and the Taliban's triumph could reenergize terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham or ISIS, creating another cycle of violence, fragility, and conflict in the South, Central, and West Asia.

To understand the immediate and long-term political and security implications of the Taliban's return to power on the re-emergence of ISIS, one should understand the theoretical and structural similarities and differences between the Taliban and ISIS. By examining the social origins, organizational characteristics, dominating political worldviews, theological genealogy, and jurisprudential theories of the Taliban and ISIS, this paper argues that there is an overwhelming commonality in the mission and purpose of these two organizations.

The Social origins of the Taliban and ISIS

ISIS has been around since 2004 and currently has 15.000 members who are actively involved. Historically, the origin of ISIS cannot be separated from Tauhid wa al-Jihad, the organization that opposed the American and coalition forces. The Tauhid wa al-Jihad allied with several kabilah and tribes in Iraq in October 2006. The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) was established by the coalition of Tauhid wa al-Jihad and other Iraqi tribes, and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi was chosen as its leader.⁵ In 2010, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi was killed, and ISI was inherited by Abu Bakar al-Husseini al-Qurashi al-Baghdadi. He expanded his military operations to Syria in April 2013 in collaboration with rebel group of Jabhat al Nusra.⁶ After the death of Osama bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda forced al-Baghdadi to instruct his army to leave Syria and because of this disagreement, on 17 April 2013, ISI officially separated itself from Al-Qaeda and rebranded itself in ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).⁷ Contrary to the ISIS, the origin of Taliban can be traced back to the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. After Russian withdrawal, the quest for power and supremacy in Afghanistan led to a conflict of interests among different groups, which dragged Afghanistan into civil war.⁸ The civil war ended in 1996 with the victory of the Taliban, who ruled the country until the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and ousted them from power. However, the existence of ISIS in Afghanistan has exacerbated the Afghan conflict as its success will have grave consequences for peace and stability.⁹

4 Filippo Boni, Afghanistan 2021: US Withdrawal, the Taliban return and Regional Geopolitics, *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXXII, 2021, pp. 375-391.

5 Makrum Makarum, Tracing the Historical and Ideological Roots of ISIS: Shi'ite or Sunni?, *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2016, pp. 209-240.

6 Aaron Zelin, "Al-Qaeda Announces an Islamic State in Syria", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 9. 2013. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/al-qaeda-announces-islamic-state-syria> (accessed November 15, 2022).

7 Muhammad Reno, *ISIS: Kebidaban Konspirasi Global*, Bandung, Noura Books, 2014.

8 Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, Phoenix, London, 2002.

9 Mairaj ul Hamid and Sher Hassan, ISIS and Taliban: US Strategies and Prospects, *Pakistan Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1,

Knowing the social origin of political organizations is crucial in decoding the political and social practices, characters, and worldviews. For ISIS, 65.4% of the ISIS recruits and members were from middle-class roots, with 18.7% and 3.8% coming from working and upper-class families, respectively. These urban middle-class youths were driven by the Salafist interpretation of Islamic texts and traditions. In Iraq, for instance, most of those who joined Daesh, the Arabic name of ISIS, were either urban Salafi youths or members of the Baath Party, whose religious fervor gained more strength after the invasion of Kuwait and the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991.¹⁰ In Syria, too, most ISIS recruits urbanites with modern education. The overwhelming majority of nearly 40 thousand foreign recruits of ISIS were also educated and were familiar with modern technologies and material representations of today's civilizations.¹¹ However, the Taliban members come from impoverished rural communities that are mostly incompatible with urban values and find peace in returning to rural and desert values.

ISIS has a defined vision and objective, whereas the Taliban's demands remain vague. In other words, the Taliban, a primitive group, knows what they do not want but not what they do. The Taliban rejects the entirety nation-state based on modern urban values and characteristics, whether they are political, legal, or technical. In defining their ideal political system, they employ non-measurable, non-technical, and frequently meaningless phrases. ISIS, unlike the Taliban, knows both what it wants and what it does not want.¹²

The ambiguity of what the Taliban wants lures many who might be able to impose their agenda on them. For example, Pashtun nationalists aim to turn the group into a formidable political force capable of enforcing Pashtun ethnic hegemony and managing the conflicting interest of countries like Russia, Pakistan, India, China, and the United States in Afghanistan.¹³

In the eyes of Pashtun nationalists, the Taliban looks like a giant robot. If they succeed in hacking its software, they can easily manipulate and use it for their purposes and interests. Because of this growing obsession with the useability of the Taliban, so many foreign players are tempted to invest in the group.¹⁴ However, the organizational and political rigidity of ISIS is not alluring in this sense, and no one bothers to deal with it. As an organization, ISIS has the historical experience of al-Qaeda and jihadist Salafism in its memory and considers itself the best successor to those groups. The founders of Daesh, such as Abu Musab Zarqawi, Abu Hamzah

2022.

10 Anne Speckhard and Molly D. Ellenberg, ISIS in Their Own Words, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2020, pp. 82-127.

11 Richard Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate, Foreign Fighters and Threat of Returnees", The Soufan Center, 2017.

12 Rath A. Byman and Daniel L. Byman, "Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different Goals, Different Targets", Brookings Institution, April 29, 2015. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/comparing-al-qaeda-and-isis-different-goals-different-targets> (accessed October 25, 2022).

13 Charles Lister, "Al-Qaeda versus ISIS: Competing Jihadist Brands in the Middle East", Middle East Institute, November 7, 2017. Available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/al-qaeda-versus-isis-competing-jihadist-brands-middle-east> (accessed September 25, 2022).

14 Ibidem.

Muhajir, Abu Omar Baghdadi, and then Abu Bakr Baghdadi, have their intellectual and organizational descent from the same groups.¹⁵

Interestingly, the same feature and political characteristic of ISIS, which terrifies global powers and discourages engagement with the group, attracts the more stubborn elements among the fundamentalist groups, including the Taliban, and significantly increases ISIS' recruitment potential across the Islamist spectrum. The recruits consider the Taliban an unprincipled opportunistic organization that, under Islamic slogans, betrayed the cause of Jihad, signed a peace deal with the US, facilitated its safe exit from Afghanistan, and is ready to deal with any other foreign power.

Organizational Characteristics

The organizational model of ISIS combines the hierarchal leftist and clandestine Islamist extremist organizations such as Al-Jihad, Al-Qaeda, etc. In the 1960s and 70s, other groups such as Al-Jamaa al-Islami, Al-Jihad al-Islami, and Al-Takfir and Hijra also embraced the model. In this organizational model, the leader is placed at the top of the pyramid, followed by the leadership council members, committees, local operatives, and various on-the-ground branches of the organization. To survive the powerful and repressive security and intelligence institutions and systems across the Middle East, the left and Islamist organizations, throughout their operations, have become more complicated and agile.¹⁶

In Iraq, for instance, to survive the US-led international military campaign, Daesh masterfully combined the heritage or organizational resilience of the Ba'ath Party and the security and intelligence apparatus of the collapsed government of Saddam Hussein. As a result, Daesh survived despite the several casualties and confronting formidable enemies such as the United States and Iran. To understand the Daesh's organizational and structural resilience, one should consider its similarities with the communist, fascist, and other Islamist organizations.¹⁷

Unlike ISIS, The Taliban are deep rooted in Pakistan's Deobandi Islamic madrasahs. Except for the Haqqani Network, the rest of the Taliban are unfamiliar with the modern organization. Initially, the Haqqanis were too unfamiliar with modern organizational systems and structures. Some evidence suggests that throughout the last two decades, Pakistani intelligence officers have trained and prepared Haqqanis, aiming to present them as a successful example to Kashmiri, Uighur, Chechen, and other fundamentalist armed forces in the region.¹⁸

The organizational model of the main body of the Taliban is a combination of the hierarchical pyramid of Sheikh Al-Hadith-major Talib-minor Talib and the macro

15 Robin Wright, J. M. Berger, and William Braniff, *The jihadi threat: ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Beyond*, United States Institute of Peace, 2016.

16 Charles Caris and Samuel Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria", Middle East Security Report Washington: Institute for the Study of War, June 13, 2015. Available at: www.understandingwar.org (accessed on June Sep 19, 2022).

17 Jennifer Jefferis, "ISIS Administrative and Territorial Organization", IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2016, Washington, p. 41.

18 Glenn Cameron, "Al Qaeda v ISIS: leaders & structure", Wilson Center, 2015. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-leaders-structure> (accessed September 10, 2022).

clan/village lord-farmer. This model is rooted in the traditions of pre-modern societies and belongs to the mysterious old world, filled with the ancients' myths and legends. In the hierarchy within Deobandi schools, the senior teacher, often the sheikh al-Hadith, is considered the spiritual successor of the Prophet Mohammad and the inheritor of his spiritual legacy. Based on this perception, the religious status of Sheikh al-Hadith is like those of Prophet Mohammad's companions. Therefore, ordinary people are unbelievers who must be guided to the truth. There is only one problem with the fundamentals of this notion. The Sheikh al-Hadith is not exactly a prophet, his disciples are not the Prophet's companions, and people are not unbelievers. Some understand this juxtaposition but consider the Sheikh al-Hadith as a spiritual and semi-sacred figure regardless of it. The Sheikh al-Hadith senior students have the fortune of succeeding him, and younger students should follow the method and character of their elders and masters as much as possible. In this model, centralized power is formed secretly. The limits of authority in power are not clear. However, informally, the students are morally obliged to obey the orders issued by Sheikh Al-Hadith. It is a sin to oppose them, even if Sheikh al-Hadith orders to close schools and declare Jihad, as happened in Pakistan in the 1990s.

The Taliban organization model is built based on the Deobandi madrassas structure. In exercising power elements of that organizational model mix with the Taliban's tribal characteristics. The Taliban leader's spiritual status blends into the character of the head of the tribe, creating a cocktail of spiritual-tribal power and influence. No one knows whether the name Hibatullah, God's awe, was chosen for the mysterious and unseen leader of the Taliban coincidentally or intentionally. Some argue that Hibatullah is a pseudo name for him. Either way, the name's literal meaning conveys the notion that the authority of Amirul Momineen is an embodiment of awe and the glory of God. Even another form of his name, Hibat Allah, which often surfaces in the Taliban documents, means divine gift. That also has an aspect of divineness and holiness in it.¹⁹

Whether the whole persona of Hibatullah is real or fictional, some believe that like Mullah Omar, the founder of the Taliban, the current supreme leader of the group possesses no actual power and influence over the group, and the organization is run and managed by the leading architects of the Taliban project. Overall, the Taliban's penetrable organizational structure and the ambiguity of the group's political mission have created hype among foreign players to recruit the Taliban for their grand political projects in South and Central Asia.

19 Muhammad Waseem, "Origins and growth patterns of Islamic organizations in Pakistan", in: *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia*, Satu P. Limaye, Mohan Malik, and Robert G. Wirsing (eds.), Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, 2004, p. 17.

Political Agenda

The Political Agenda has been defined as the list of issues significant enough to be addressed (Walgrave et al., 2008, p. 815). The agenda of political organizations enable political players to engage or disengage with a particular organization. Daesh, for instance, has a clear and well-defined mandate. It wants to establish and expand the Islamic caliphate and rule the Islamic world and establish Muslim Umma based on Sharia law. In a Trumpian sense, they intend to revive Islam and restore it in its former glory. However, Daesh's medieval vision of establishing a fanatical Sunni Islamic caliphate is not attainable that indicates the disconnect and multifaceted nativity of Daesh ideologies with realities of modern global power and politics. Nevertheless, the mission and agenda remain the same in the eyes of ISIS followers.²⁰

Interestingly, Daesh does not require a theory or articulation of its political objectives. Islamic fundamentalist groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, and others, have postulated the idea of an Islamic caliphate decades before the emergence of ISIS. They did the work for ISIS. The only difference between Daesh and other fundamentalist groups is its pragmatism in doing what others were passively theorizing. In fact, by establishing the short-lived Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria between 2014-2018, Daesh outperformed and outsmarted its rival within the Islamic world, creating further division and competition. Daesh's global political agenda has threatened the sociopolitical status, networks, and resources of the rest of the Islamist groups worldwide.²¹

Unlike Daesh, the Taliban lacks theoretical depth as they are not capable of theorizing its vision. The group's leaders and so-called ideologues are illiterate and rural Pashtuns with minimum to zero knowledge of Islamic legal systems, history, and governance. Unlike most other fundamentalist groups that have emerged spontaneously, the Taliban is a byproduct of the US-led global project of countering the Soviets during the Cold War. Once Pakistan's intelligence agencies suspended their investment in former Jihadi parties of Afghanistan after the collapse of the last communist regime in Kabul, they nurtured the Taliban and propelled them into the scene as a group that did not have a political agenda of its own. Therefore, establishing an Islamic caliphate or aspiring transitional Islamic ambition has never been part of the initial design of the Taliban. However, it doesn't mean that the Taliban does not have any political agenda. Any military group with the ability to exert power, even if it lacks national support or legitimacy, develops a self-governing logic throughout its maturing process and Taliban is no exception.²²

Now, the Taliban pursue two strategic objectives simultaneously. One is the

20 Charles Lister, "Al-Qaeda versus ISIS: Competing Jihadist Brands in the Middle East", Middle East Institute, November 7, 2017. Available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/al-qaeda-versus-isis-competing-jihadist-brands-middle-east> (accessed September 15, 2022).

21 Katja Mielke and Nick Miszak, "Making Sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A Social Movement Perspective", Bonn International Center for Conversation, 2017.

22 Filippo Boni, Afghanistan 2021: US Withdrawal, the Taliban return and Regional Geopolitics, *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXXII, 2021, pp. 375-391.

group's ethnic agenda that focuses on building a Pashtun-only polity by excluding other ethnic groups like Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras and removing any possibility of their meaningful political participation in matters of national significance. They do this under the disguise of Islam. The second strategic objective is to form strategic alliances with the rest of the Islamic fundamentalist groups when and if their rule in Afghanistan is consolidated. They are pursuing these two strategic objectives in two phases. In the first phase, they want to end the internal conflict over power in Afghanistan through violence and suppression. In the second phase, they want to become a transitional Islamic force taking over the leadership of other jihadist groups in the region and the Islamic world.²³

The idea of the Islamic World leadership is a tempting notion for so many Islamist organizations, parties, and polities in the Islamic world. From the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Erdogan's Turkey, and Qatar have long been competing to become the ultimate leader of the Islamic world. Of course, not all of them have equally explicitly expressed their ambitions. However, their strategic positioning and investment in the rival military and political organizations indicates that leadership of the Islamic world remains a battleground for all, including the Taliban. They believe they have defeated the world's only superpower, purified Afghanistan's society, and removed all non-Islamic manifestations of life, culture, and politics. Therefore, they assume to be the most qualified contender to lead the Islamic world and unify all fundamentalist groups under a single banner.

Nevertheless, given the Taliban's inherent incapacity to govern and their ties with international terrorism, the group leadership pretended they had no political agenda beyond Afghanistan. They know that any indication of a transnational and global Islamic ambition at this stage will unite the world and lead to their defeat, as it did after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The nature of power is such that it is never contained by itself. The Taliban will never stop aspiring to become an Islamic hegemon knowing that they have the resources and opportunity to form a mega-state that is capable of sponsoring and harboring Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists worldwide. The return of Al-Qaida's leadership to Kabul following the collapse of Afghanistan's republic on August 15, 2021, is a testament to the Taliban's conviction of becoming an Islamic hegemon.²⁴

In this sense, there is no fundamental difference between ISIS and the Taliban. The minor difference between them is that Daesh does not have an ethnic agenda and has opened its doors to all tribes from the first day and has gone straight to establishing a caliphate. In contrast, the Taliban are focused on consolidating their ethnic rule first and establishing a caliphate afterward.

23 Raffaello Pantucci and Abdul Basit, Post-Taliban Takeover, *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2021, pp. 1-7.

24 Ibidem.

Faith and Theology

Ideologically, ISIS belongs to the broad spectrum of Salafism. The lineage of Salafism goes to Ahl al-Hadith, meaning the people of hadith, whose enmity with Ahl Rai, proponents of the use of independent legal reasoning to arrive at legal decisions, dates to the first centuries of Islamic history. The most crucial difference between these school of thoughts was how to interpret the Qur'an and accept the traditions attributed to the Prophet of Islam. The Ahl al-Rai were inclined towards a rational interpretation of the Qur'an and strictness in getting narrations, but the Ahl al-Hadith was the opposite. This difference of opinion showed itself more than anything else in theological matters, which was called *aqaid* or faith by Ahl al-hadith, and *Ilm al-Kalām* or science of discourse/theology by the Ahl Rai.²⁵

The *science of discourse* or Theology was the rational formulation of belief propositions. At the same time, Ahl al-Hadith considered this work illegal and emphasized the formulation of belief based on the appearance of verses and hadiths. Theology was the most critical matter of faith that caused a difference of opinion. The theology of Ahl al-Hadith was based on the appearance of texts and depicted God in a human form, having hands, feet, fingers, face, eyes, and the like, and sitting, standing, leaning on the throne, on the shoulders of angels. In Ahl al-Hadith's theology, God would be carried away. He would get angry; he would be happy; he would laugh; he would reconsider his actions; he would change his mind after knowing the results of a task, and so on. This image of God was the abstract form of earthly kings projected and attributed to God. The theology of Ahl al-Hadith was placed in the category of likeness and embodiment theology, and their critics called them likeness and embodiment. Several researchers, such as Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid, consider this type of theology to be a type of pagan theology, which depicts God in an embodied form and representation.²⁶

Ahl al-Rai, which includes Mu'tazila, Matridi Hanifis, and several philosophers and mystics, regardless of some differences in the details, established their theology based on *tanziyyah*, which is the opposite of Ahl al-Hadith's theology. According to Ahl al-Rai, the divine world is fundamentally different from the material world as humans do not have direct access to the divine world, even at the level of perception and imagination. Any description of it becomes metaphorical and symbolic and must be understood and interpreted in such a way that it fits with the characteristics of the divine world. It should be interpreted within the boundaries of *tanziyyah*. Throughout the history of Islam, the mentioned theological differences and distinctions have influenced various faculties of Islamic thought and knowledge, including anthropology, prophethood, revelation, the nature of the Quran, the nature of faith

25 Shadi Hamid and Rashid Dar, "Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A primer", Brookings Institute, July 15, 2016. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer> (accessed November 5, 2022).

26 Naseem Razi, Theological Extremism and Its Effects: Pakistan perspective, *Journal of Social Science for Policy Implications*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2014, pp. 59-72.

and disbelief, etc., which have been recorded in detail in theological sources.²⁷

Theoretically, since the Taliban belong to the Hanafi school of thought, they should have also believed in the theology of Ahl al-Rai. Their supposed intellectual compatibility with the theology of Ahl al-Rai would have shaped them differently, improving their characteristics and behavior as a Hanafi Islamist organization. Practically, however, contrary to the Taliban's claim of being Hanafi, they are close to Salafists and Ahl al-Hadith.

Throughout the history of Islam, the problematic ascendance of Ahl al-Hadith theology over Ahl al-Rai evolution is linked to various intellectual, political, and historical events. One could recall the defeat of the Mu'tazila or Mutazilites as the fore-runner of Ahl al-Rai against the Ahl al-Hadith, the retreat of the Matridians in favor of the Ash'ari, the suppression of philosophy and intellectualism in the Islamic middle centuries, the dominance dogmatic and non-critical thinking in the Ottoman era, the collapse of the Hanafi school in Central Asia, the emergence of Shah Waliullah Dehlavi and the foundation of the Ahl al-Hadith approach within the Hanafi system, the establishment of the Deoband school, the birth of Pakistan and the production of the Pakistani version of Deobandism and finally the spread of Salafist ideas during the Jihad era among Afghan immigrants in Pakistan as the major turning points in the course of theological currents.²⁸

The totality of these factors affected the entirety of the intellectual heritage of Ahl Rai, particularly that of Imam Abu Hanifah, the founder and the chief ideologic of Hanafi Islamic school thought. Unfortunately, the expansionist Salafists and Ahl al-Hadith theology are taking over the world of Sunni Islam, replacing reason, tolerance, and dialogue with dogmatism, intolerance, and violence. The Taliban are an embodiment of this distorted version of Hanafi Islam. On issues of faith, theology, and spirituality, the Taliban are indistinguishable from Ahl al-Hadith. The Taliban are at war with Ahl al-Ra'i and Muslim rationalists. To understand the secret of the alliance between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and recognize the distinctions between the Taliban and ISIS, one should understand the historical evolution of various Islamic theologies, particularly those of Ahl al-Rai and Ahl al-Hadith.

Jurisprudence

In matters of jurisprudence, Daesh is Salafist and does not attribute itself to a specific school of jurisprudence but takes advantage of all Sunni schools of jurisprudence. They are more open-minded than the Taliban in this regard. Like other Salafists, Daesh is not accepting all jurisprudential heritage. They examine and approach jurisprudence issues according to Ahl al-Hadith's criteria and discard what they find

27 Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, "Taliban and Salafism: A Historical and Theological Exploration, Open Democracy", Open Democracy, December 1, 2013. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/taliban-and-salafism-historical-and-theological-exploration> (accessed September 21, 2022).

28 Ahmad Rashid, *Dar al-Ulum Deo-Band: Bartañwi Hind men Musalmanu Ka Nizam Talim, A Critical Analysis*, Maktaba-e-Jadeed, Lahore, 2020.

contrary to the method of Ahl al-Hadith. Nevertheless, it similarly benefits from the four Islamic religious sects' traditional sources. Just as they use the views of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim in their interpretation of Islamic texts, they also use the views of Ibn Hazm, Ibn Al-Hammam, Nawī, Ibn Qudama, Ibn Hajar, Ibn Al-Jawzi and others, except in cases where it is incompatible with the Salafist approach. In this sense, the work of the Salafists and Daesh is more advanced compared to the Taliban.²⁹

The Taliban are vehemently opposed to *ijtihad*, the independent reasoning by an expert in Islamic law, or the thorough exertion of a jurist's mental faculty in finding a solution to a legal question. They also resist any innovative approach in jurisprudence. Their way of engaging with matters of jurisprudence is divergent from those of original and historical Hanafi jurisprudence. The Taliban are influenced by the recent mix of Hanafi-Salafist way of thinking that has emerged in the era of the decline of Islamic civilization and focuses on blind imitation and intellectual petrification.³⁰

According to the dominant form of Hanafi jurisprudence adopted by groups like the Taliban, no other school of jurisprudence is right. They consider converting from one Islamic sect to another a sin. Their interpretation of Islamic texts and verdicts is not reflective of the inherent tolerance Hanafi school towards reasoning and intellectual faculty. The Hanafi school's bottlenecks during the centuries of decline and collapse of Islamic civilization were not exclusive to the Hanafi sect only. All Islamic schools of jurisprudence, without exception, have been impacted by the Islamic world's multiple social and intellectual crises. The current Hanafism is a regressive form of Hanafism that has distanced itself from global consciousness. Its connection with the spirit of the time and its needs have been severed. Today's Hanafism is a dogmatic ideology incapable of responding to Islamic societies' pressing intellectual and social needs. The Taliban's endorsement of this version of Hanafism confirms their disconnect with the realities of time and their ineffective jurisprudential framework.³¹

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the Salafist jurisprudence, to which ISIS belongs, is much more advanced than the Taliban jurisprudence. The Salafist jurisprudence, relying on the original forms of Islamic text, eventually reaches the same impasse in which the Taliban jurisprudence is caught. The sterility of the Salafist school has been evident for over two hundred years. At the peak of its prosperity, the Salafists have not been able to produce a person of the stature of Ibn Taymiyyah, let alone Ghazali and Ibn Rushd and Ibn Arabi or Maulana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi. Today, both the Taliban and ISIS jurisprudences are alien to the spirit of the times and unable to help solve the problems of Islamic societies. At the level of

29 Farhad Bayani, The Jurisprudence Trace Behind the DAESH Trench: Theoretical Basis of Islamic Fundamentalism Focusing on Kurdistan Province of Iran, *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2019, pp. 370-386.

30 Meirison Meirison, The Alleged Extremism of The Taliban And Its Relation With The Hanafite Jurisprudence, *Jurnal AL-AHKAM*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2021, pp. 29-44.

31 Ibidem.

detail, however, the Taliban jurisprudence is harsher and more primitive and makes life even more difficult for people.

Morality and Mysticism

In the history of Islam, morality and ethics have been intertwined with Sufism and mysticism. Muslim scholars had written independent books and articles on theorizing Islamic morality and ethics. It was Sufis and Muslim mystics, however, which promoted good morals in the society and, in doing so, did not limit themselves to the practical training of people but also contributed to the theoretical articulation of Islamic mysticism. As a result of their endless effort, the jurisprudential face of Islam was refined, and its mystical character stole many hearts and institutionalized and internalized part of the moral values among Muslims for centuries. No civilization is complete without ethics, and Islamic culture remains a crippled and defective civilization without the precious heritage of Muslim mystics.³² Like all branches of Salafism, ISIS is incompatible with Sufism and mysticism, considers the mystical interpretation of Islam as a deviant interpretation, and considers Muslim Sufis to be heretics and unbelievers.

The Taliban, whose intellectual lineage reaches the school of Deoband. Theoretically, they should not be openly hostile to Sufism. Some prominent Deobandi sheikhs, such as Ashraf Ali Tahanwi, were Sufis, and there are still Sufis among the Deobandis. However, this is not the case with the Taliban. Sufism acceptable to Deobandis is not the general Sufism but rather a Sharia-infused version of Sufism that has been cut from the main sphere of mysticism and become more rigid. The conversion of authentic Sufism into a Deobandi version started a century before Shah Waliullah in India by Sheikh Seyyed Ahmad Sarhindi, known as Imam Rabbani. Shah Waliullah and his students further developed it. According to them, the branch of Sufism mixed with theoretical mysticism and has deep theoretical foundations, such as the teachings of Ibn Arabi, Suhrawardi, and others, is incompatible with Sharia and is rejected as a result. On the rejection of real Islamic Sufism, the Deobandis unite with the Salafists and favor the rigid representations of Sharia over Islamic spirituality. As a result, jurisprudential Islam prevails over mystical Islam, and moral and spiritual-oriented religiosity gives way to outward and Sharia-oriented religiosity.³³

The Taliban, however, do not have a middle ground with Sufism as much as the Deobandi Shaikhs. Due to the spread of Salafist ideas and behaviors in the last few decades, they are at odds with the Sufis. During the Taliban's first reign, Sufis were under considerable pressure. The Taliban limited their religious ritual and practices. In the last twenty years, Takfiri tendencies among the Taliban have gained more strength, and their relationship with Sufism and mysticism is darker than in the past.

32 Abdurezak Abdulahi Hashi, *Islamic Ethics: An Outline of Its Principles and Scope*, *Revelation and Science*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2011.

33 Brannon Ingram, "Is the Taliban Anti-Sufi? Deobandi Discourses on Sufism in Contemporary Pakistan", in: *Modern Sufis and the State: The Politics of Islam in South East Asia and Beyond*, Katherine P. Ewing and Rosemary R. Corbett (eds.), Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 81-91.

Even if the Taliban reconcile with Sufism one day, they will only reconcile with its Sharia-infused jurisprudential version of Sufism, not with the wide range of Muslim mystics and their philosophies.³⁴

With the infusions of radical Salafi/Wahhabi ideologies into the curriculum of the much enlarged numbers of Deobandi madaaris in Pakistan, the image and of God instilled in pupils has become almost the exact opposite of the images of God that Khorasani mystics such as Rumi, Sana'i, 'Attar, Jami, Ansari, Bidil, Sa'di and others have depicted, as was briefly discussed earlier. That is, the images constructed of God in present day Deobandi Madaaris seems to be the epitome of harshness, vengefulness, reprisal, and His primary tasks are to proscribe, forbid, punish and keep people accountable for every minor infractions.³⁵

Conclusion

To conclude, the Taliban have differences from ISIS at the foundational (i.e., theological, and jurisprudential) and non-foundational (social basis, organizational characteristics, and political agenda) levels. These differences, however, are not significant or consequential. A more detailed examination of the commonalities and differences between the Taliban and ISIS indicates an overwhelming similarity in their interpretation of Islamic texts, theology, and history. In simple words, if someone joins the Taliban, he has traveled 80% of the way to becoming an ISIS member. Only a short distance is left, which will be completed by joining the organization and pledging allegiance to its leadership. If there is to be an honest and meaningful confrontation with Daesh or the Taliban, it is necessary to go to the deepest theological roots and foundations of their thinking.

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³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Bashir Ansari, "Afghanistan's 'Traditional' Islam in Transition: Deep Roots of the Taliban Extremism", in: *Modern Afghanistan: The Impact of 40 Years of War*, M. Nazif Shahrani (ed.), Indiana University Press, 2018.

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ТАЛИБАНИ И ИСЛАМСКА ДРЖАВА: АНАЛИТИЧКО ПОРЕЂЕЊЕ

Сажетак

Сложен однос између Талибана и Исламске државе је често истицан, али никада није систематски истражен. У овом раду ми покушавамо да упоредимо ове две групе из угла њихових почетака, како су приступили исламској арени, организационим карактеристикама, утицају других идеолошких покрета и племенских механизма на њихове системе, политичке агенде, вере, теологије, права, етике и мистицизма. Овај рад доприноси концептуализацији тренутних и дугорочних политичких и безбедоносних импликација повратка Талибана на власт и њихов утицај на друштва и њихове односе са осталим идеолошким покретима унутар исламског света. Ове две групе не могу бити схваћене без разумевања њихових идеолошких основа.

Кључне речи: талибани, Исламска држава, ДАЕШ, тероризам, екстремизам