

INSIDE THE TALIBAN

Governance, Perspectives, Strategies



International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA)

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Governance, Perspectives, Strategies

August 2023- August 2024

Developing a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), governance structure, and policies, identifying a framework for further analysis.

A Study by

International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA)

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Disclaimer

This report is the result of in-depth research conducted by the International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA) team in collaboration with a team of Afghan consultants and experts. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the current governance of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), including its structure, worldview, and policies.

The research team conducted extensive interviews between August 2023 and August 2024, in the remote and bordering areas of Pakistan, as well as within Afghanistan. This included engaging with more than hundred religious scholars, tribal elders, social activists including Afghan leaders, ministers, officials, political activists, and other key stakeholders. The objective of these efforts was to gather comprehensive insights into the priorities of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) and its perspectives on local, regional, and international issues.

While the report presents findings based on these extensive consultations, readers should be aware that the political landscape in Afghanistan is subject to rapid change, and some information may not accurately reflect the current situation. IRCRA disclaims any responsibility for the misuse of this report. Readers are encouraged to interpret the findings with caution and consider the evolving context within Afghanistan

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Glossary

Ameer ul Momineen:	Title of the Taliban Supreme Leader of Afghanistan, meaning leader of the faithful.
Daral Uloom / Madrassa/ Jamia:	A religious seminary or school or any educational institution.
Dars-e-Nizami:	Dars-i Nizami is a study curriculum or system used in many Islamic institutions (madrassas) and Dar UI Ulooms, which originated in the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century and can now be found in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
Darul Ifta:	Institution that issue religious decrees.
ETIM:	East Turkestan Islamic Movement.
Hadith:	A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad, which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran.
Idara Taftesh:	Organization for investigations.
Loey Raies:	Director General
TTP:	Tehreek Talibaan Pakistan, A Pakistani Millitant Organization based in Afghanistan and Pakistan's border areas.
Madrassa Jihadia:	Newly established madrassas focusing on the traditional religious education.
Masuol:	The person incharge
Maulana/ Mullah/ Molvi/ Mufti:	A Muslim man revered for his religious learning or piety. This is a title, mostly in the Indian subcontinent, preceding the name of respected Muslim religious leaders, in particular graduates of religious institutions, e.g. a madrassa.
Mohtamim:	Administrator, head, principal of a religious institution, madrassa, etc.
Mueen:	Deputy Minister

Pir/Sajjada Nasheen:	A Sufi, the custodian of a shrine; The Sajjāda nashīn the one who sits [at a] prayer mat") or Gaddi Nashin is a term of Persian origin, used chiefly within the Sufi traditions of South Asia referring to the successor or hereditary administrator of a Sufi master who typically functions as a custodian or trustee at his shrine.
Sheikh ul Hadith:	The most senior religious teacher who teaches hadith; a course that is being taught in the last class of the madrassa degree.
Shahadatul Aalmia:	Shahadatul Aalmiya is the last degree of the madrassa curriculum that has been recognized as equivalent to an M.A. in Arabic and Islamic Studies by the higher education commission of Pakistan.
Waali:	Governor
Wilayat:	Province
Wazarat:	Ministry
Wazir:	Minister
Ulama Shura:	Advisory and monitoring body of religious scholars monitoring performance of governance at local and provincial level.
Ulaswal:	District Administrator

About International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA)

The International Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA) was established in 2013 as a non-profit, non-governmental think tank and research organization. IRCRA orchestrated forums that brought together religious scholars, academics, community leaders, and other professionals to engage in discussions and dialogues about social, political and regional stability issues. IRCRA has expanded its development portfolio to encompass support for Inter/ Intra Faith Peacebuilding, Education & Awareness, Promotion of Democratic values, Production of Religious Journals & Publications, and Advocacy. A central theme that runs throughout IRCRA's programmatic endeavors is the enhancement of understanding and the role of the religious community in challenging extremist narratives.

IRCRA's programming has yielded multi-faceted impacts. Graduates of our workshops and programs have undertaken a multitude of initiatives within their respective communities, aimed at countering extremist ideologies, fostering inter-religious and inter-tribal tolerance, promoting social harmony, and safeguarding vulnerable communities from extremist violence, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

IRCRA ENGAGEMENT WITH AFGHANISTAN

IRCRA has been engaging with Afghanistan formally and informally since 2013. IRCRA has conducted many successful activities related to Afghanistan. The objective of IRCRA is to promote regional integration by bridging the gaps in business, culture, education between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Moreover, IRCRA endeavours to capacitate academia & religious key actors to promote democratic ideologies in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Till August 2024, IRCRA has implemented nine projects engaging diverse communities and stakeholders in Afghanistan for different educational, mediation, development, research and capacity building purposes. These projects are listed below with brief description.

1. Inside the Taliban- Governance, Perspectives and Strategies – An IRCRA research Report (August 2024)
2. Intra-Islamic Dialogue for Stable Afghanistan (May 2023)
3. IRCRA study on 'Pakistani influential religious actors on engaging with Afghanistan (March 2023)
4. Hosting Afghan Religious Leaders Delegation (2020)
Collaboration: Ministry of foreign Affairs/ Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad

5. **Establishment of Af-Pak Women's Association (APWA) (2022)**
Purpose: To provide assistance to Afghan women in Pakistan specially Education and Health related issues.
6. **Understanding Transformation of Muslim democrats through exchange program between Pakistan & Afghanistan. (July 2021- December 2021)**
7. **Post-withdrawal Afghanistan and Pakistan: Perils and Prospects (June 2021)**
8. **Bridging the business gaps between Pakistan and Afghanistan (2019)**
9. **Polio Eradication through Religious Engagement in Pakistan and Afghanistan (2013-2017)**

Introduction

IEA continues to hold an important position for the regional and global politics. However, the functioning and position of the government is poorly understood by the outsiders. A nuanced understanding of the IEA structure and processes, both formal and informal, is particularly imperative for regional states. In the humanitarian landscape, the concerns regarding the Taliban's treatment of women and minorities (religious and ethnic) remains a growing concern for international community. The Afghan Taliban's alleged policy towards the transnational terrorist groups poses an area of disagreement with regional states. Further apprehensions are expressed regarding the possible consolidation of the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) due to the transition from the US-led forces to the Taliban.

IEA continues to hold an important position for the regional and global politics. However, the functioning and position of the government is poorly understood by the outsiders.

The following questions guided the research:

1. How does the governance structure under the IEA operate?
2. What strategies can be adopted to enhance diplomatic engagement with the Taliban?
3. What are the dominant views of the Taliban on:
 - a. Their government's performance.
 - b. Taliban's view of an inclusive government.
 - c. Women's rights, especially the right to education.
 - d. Views on Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State of Khurasan Pakistan (ISKP).
 - e. Relations with Pakistan and other neighbouring states.
 - f. View regarding the international community.

LIMITATIONS:

There was limited existing data regarding these questions. Therefore, the methodology adopted for the report involved researchers and consultants of the Research Team from both Afghanistan and Pakistan, who conducted extensive field visits in Pakistan's New Merged Districts (NMD) and Balochistan, as well as regions in Afghanistan. To develop a comprehensive analysis, the research team met with more than hundred individuals in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Despite the political situation arising from the refugee crisis, cross border tension at the time of the

study, the researchers were able to reach out to important individuals. They were generally well-received and the Taliban officials went out of their way to explain their government's position. The report lays out the key findings and observations. Briefly, some of the observations are as follows:

GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE:

The non-Taliban Afghans agree that the law and order situation in Afghanistan has improved under the Afghan Taliban. They also admit that corruption at the government offices has significantly declined. However, these people also air reservations about the Taliban's policy regarding women's right to education and employment. However, the Taliban officials have adopted a self-congratulatory approach to evaluating their performance.

The Afghan Taliban almost unanimously agree that Pakistan is important to them and that the two countries are linked inseparably.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT:

The Taliban considers their existing structure as sufficiently inclusive since it includes individuals from various regions and ethnicities. When confronted with international community's demands that the Taliban should include individuals with diverse worldviews into their power structure, they usually respond that such a concession is not granted by incumbent governments to the former rulers even in the democratic countries. The Taliban also reject the idea of political parties and groupings due to its destabilizing effect on the current order.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION:

Researchers observed diversity of opinions regarding Women's Education. There are very few officials opposing women's education. Direct opposition to women's right to access education is rare among government officials. The Taliban generally held that the government wishes to resume education for women at all levels. However, they expressed that such measures would be initiated once the conditions become more conducive in accordance with their view of Sharia and the Afghan culture.

RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN:

The Taliban almost unanimously agree that Pakistan is important to them and that the two countries are linked inseparably. However, some within the IEA criticize Pakistan's policies. A few officials attribute the lack of friendly relations with Pakistan to a lack of understanding, while others attribute it to malice and the Western influence on Pakistan.

DEMOCRACY:

The Taliban reject democracy for being a western idea. They allege that democracy does not distinguish between knowledgeable and ignorant. They also expressed that democracy is a stumbling block to the imposition of Sharia in the Muslim states. They claim that the Taliban's system of Shura (Consultation) is more consistent with the teachings of Islam.

RELATIONS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

The Taliban claim that they wish to develop cordial relations with international community. However, they hold that such relations have to be on equal footing. They have assumed a triumphalist attitude towards the West. They also share their concern that the Western countries are trying to actively undermine the regime due to its Islamic identity. Alleged Western support to the resistance movements against the IEA Government is seen with suspicion by the Afghan Taliban.

POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN THE TALIBAN:

Power remains highly centralized. Closeness to the Supreme Leader is considered a mark of influence in the system. While some people believe there is a power struggle between Kandahar and Kabul, our research team has found that, over the past three years, there have only been minor conflicts, with no major issues arising between the two. In fact, it appears that the true source of power rests with Ameer ul Momineen, indicating a more stable dynamic than commonly believed.

Internal Dynamics of the Afghan Taliban:

The organization appears unified, with no significant conflicts reported in the past three years. However, some experts informed the research team that there are some internal and regional differences. These variations offer opportunities for growth and collaboration, showcasing the organization's diverse perspectives and contributing to a more dynamic and resilient structure. Discussions with officials and analysts indicated that these internal differences can be broadly categorized into three areas: ideological distinctions (hardliners versus moderates), tribal and regional affiliations (notably among intra-Pashtun factions, such as those from Kandahar or Paktika), and organizational dynamics (highlighting the disconnect between on-ground fighters and political leadership). It is crucial to acknowledge that these categories often overlap, evolve, and become blurred over time.

Particularly, some researchers identified a notable division between the Kandhari region and the Loya Paktia region. However, this division is not recognized by the Taliban leadership, and there have been no significant conflicts between these factions over the past three years.

Particularly, the some researchers identified a notable division between the Kandhari region and the Loya Paktia region . However, this division is not recognized by the Taliban leadership, and there have been no significant conflicts between these factions over the past three years. Furthermore, ethnic distinctions within the Pashtun community and organizational differences contribute to the intricate internal dynamics of the Taliban, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the movement.

TALIBAN ADMINISTRATION'S STRUCTURE:

One influential region, which we can refer to as the Kanadhari region, is composed of religious clergy and Jihadi commanders from the Loy (Broader) Kandahar region. This region includes provinces such as Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, and Uruzgan, as well as parts of Nimruz and Zabul. This region holds considerable influence in the current Taliban regime since Kandahar remains the power center. Moreover, the movement's supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah

permanently lives in the city. In contrast to other regions, such as the Lveya Pakhtia region, some of the experts observed that the Kandhari region has more conservative approach because this conservatism stems from the region's history and culture as well as during wartime conditions, some of the Taliban leadership of this region connected to the remote areas of Balochistan such as Chaman, Killa Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Kuchlak, and the outskirts of Quetta where women's education and rights have not been widely accepted. Furthermore, some members of this region spent considerable time in the mountains waging insurgency against the NATO forces which has further influenced their perspectives and practices.

The leadership of Loya Paktia region is viewed as relatively moderate, pragmatic, and internationally oriented.

This region is conservative in some respects; for instance, some of the leaders in this region, compared to those in Loya Pakhtia and Kabul oppose girls' education because they believe that such a concession would blur the lines between democracy and Sharia in the Islamic Emirate's system. In the Loy Kandahar region, where tradition and religious values are closely held, differing opinions are managed swiftly to preserve unity and safeguard the achievements of the movement.

Another region is the Loya Paktia region, primarily operating in Kabul and regions of Loya Paktia, including Khost, Paktia, and Paktika, as well as parts of Logar. Several Afghan Taliban leaders from this region have had exposure to more developed and urbanized Pakistani cities, such as Islamabad, Bannu, Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan and New Merged Districts of Khyber Pkhatunkhwah. During the war time due to close links with Foreign Jihadist Organization such as al-Qaeda, connections with the TTP, and experience of living in urban areas, this faction has exposure to modern education. This exposure has likely broadened their perspective on urban development, governance, and social progress. Within the Afghan Taliban, the leadership of this region is viewed as relatively moderate, pragmatic, and internationally oriented.

TALIBAN ADMINISTRATION'S STRUCTURE:

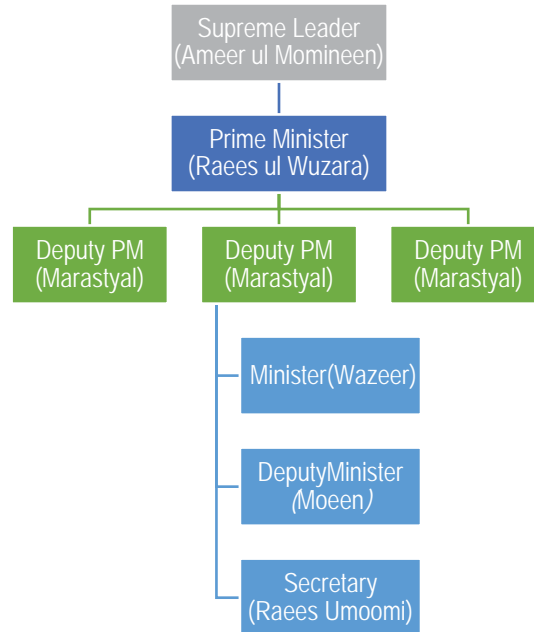
The research teams sought to understand and study the political and administrative framework of the Taliban administration during our discussions. This exercise aimed to comprehend decision-making under the current administration.

Before conducting the field research in Afghanistan, the study of previous literature indicated a high-powered *Rahbari Shura* (leadership council). With little clarity, previous accounts asserted that this body like the Iranian Guardian Council comprises distinguished religious scholars

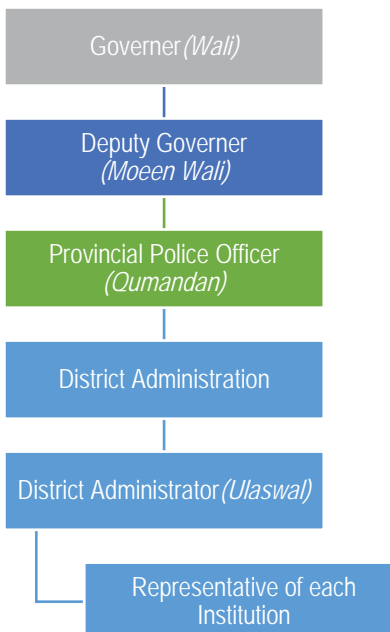
maintaining a check on the functioning of the ministries and setting the overall policies and direction of the state, like the Soviet Politburo. It was noted that the body is consulted by and works under the headship of Ameer Haibatullah. However, after thorough and meticulous field research, including interviews with high-level officials, we discovered the following:

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE:

(Federal Government Structure)



(Provincial Government Structure)



The Ameer holds the ultimate authority over both the religious and political spheres. Haibatullah Akhundzada is the first Ameer who is also a Sheikh-ul Hadith. His respect within the Taliban increased for his reputation as a judge who enforced internal discipline.

Supreme Leader (Ameer al-Mu'minin):

Holding the title of *Ameer al-Mu'minin*, Haibatullah Akhundzada occupies the office of the Supreme Leader. The Ameer holds the ultimate authority over both the religious and political spheres. All accounts surrounding the Taliban's decision-making processes emphasized the central role of Akhundzada and his inner circle of religious advisors. Akhundzada hails from Panjwayi Valley in Kandahar. He rose to prominence as a religious scholar. Interestingly, within the Taliban, he is the first Ameer who is also a Sheikh-ul Hadith. His respect within the Taliban increased for his reputation as a judge who enforced internal discipline. Unlike the military commanders who previously led the movement, Akhundzada established his standing on unwavering rule enforcement. His unwavering loyalty to the movement is often emphasized by the fact that he sacrificed his son for one of its major operations. Despite being a symbol of strength and authority, Ameer ul Momineen governs the people not only with power but also through moral leadership. The Afghan Taliban trust his honesty and intelligence, and he actively takes measures against corruption and disloyalty, removing individuals from their positions when necessary. Because of these characteristics among the leaders of the Afghan Taliban, he holds a highly esteemed status and rank.

The centrality of the Ameer to the movement can hardly be overstated. However, it was reported to the research team that on many occasions, on issues such as girls' education, other members of the movement took contrasting opinions. Specifically, some cabinet members reportedly disagreed with his approach, advocating for more flexibility. Akhundzada, however, remained firm in his stance on account of both his ideological convictions and political motivations.

Prime Minister holds full executive authority in managing the administration.

Prime Minister (Raees ul Wuzara)

According to official Afghan sources, the Prime Minister holds full executive authority in managing the administration, except for certain critical matters in which guidance is sought from Kandahar. The Prime Minister is supported by three deputy prime ministers, and under their supervision, each department is led by a minister. Additionally, every ministry is assisted by a deputy minister, and the secretariat of each ministry includes a Secretary (Raees-e-Amoomi).

Once a week, the Prime Minister convenes a cabinet meeting (shura) at the Prime Minister's House, where all significant matters are discussed and finalized with the Prime Minister's approval. Attendance at this meeting is mandatory for all ministers. In case a minister is unable to attend, the deputy minister participates as their representative.

Governor (Wali)

Similarly, at the provincial level, executive authority is held by the Governor (Wali), who is supported by a Deputy Governor (Naib Wali). Each province also has representatives from key ministries, referred to as provincial ministers, responsible for overseeing their respective sectors within the province. In addition, a provincial Police commander (Qumandan) is appointed to manage security and law enforcement.

District Administrator (Ulaswal)

At the district level, referred to as the "Uleswali," administrative control lies with the District Administrator (Uleswal). Each district also has representatives from various institutions, who report to the Uleswal to ensure the effective administration and governance of their respective sectors at the local level.

Afghan Religious Scholars Council (Shura Ulema Afghan):

In order to ensure transparency and prevent the misuse of authority within the Afghan governance system, a non-governmental body known as the Afghan Religious scholars Council (*Shura Ulema Afghan*) has been established by Supreme Leader. This council (*Shura*) operates directly in conjunction with Ameer ul Momineen and has subsidiary organizations at the provincial level. Its primary role is to oversee the actions of ministers, governors, and other officials, ensuring that they do not misuse their authority or engage in misconduct against the public.

If a governor, minister or any other Government Official is found to be involved in wrongful actions, the Shura has the authority to investigate based on evidence. If the official does not comply with the findings or recommendations, the Shura reports the matter to Ameer ul Momineen, who is empowered to take necessary actions, including dismissing the individual from their position.

Maintaining good ties with Pakistan remains a priority for the Taliban administration.

Experts note that while members of the Shura are not official government personnel, they are considered close associates of Ameer ul Momineen and play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of the governance system. This structure reflects the Taliban's efforts to enforce accountability and uphold their commitment to ethical governance in Afghanistan.

TIES WITH PAKISTAN:

The bilateral ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan are marred by multifaceted challenges. In our research expeditions, two issues stand out: The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) matter and the forced expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Moreover, historical propaganda against Pakistan and the Taliban during previous Afghan governments has added complexity to the relationship.

Mullah Shirin, Kandahar province's governor and a close aide of Haibatullah, in early January (2024) visited Islamabad to meet Pakistani officials to discuss the ties between the two countries. In discussions with our research team in Kandahar, he admitted that problems with Pakistan have increased. However, he said that maintaining good ties with Pakistan remains a priority for the Taliban administration. According to Sharia, he noted, fostering good relations with neighbors, both Muslim and non-Muslim, is crucial. While there may be misunderstandings, it's essential to bridge the gap, he added.

In sections of the Afghan populace, there is a deeply held belief that Pakistan is almost exclusively responsible for the instability in Afghanistan. On the one hand, anti-Taliban individuals expressed that the Taliban were propped up and brought back into power by Pakistan. On the other hand, however, even the Taliban rank and file accuse Pakistan of backing the USA and other powers. For this reason, Pakistan remains the central focus of discussion on Afghan media and social media. One respondent confided to us that he has to face a barrage of abuse from his audience when he says something slightly supportive of Pakistan.

TTP remains a persistent irritant in the already difficult relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Afghan Taliban have expressed concerns about certain actions taken by Pakistan. While they acknowledge Pakistan's support during the difficult times, they also feel that some of its subsequent policies were unfavorable. These past experiences have left lasting impressions, making the relationship between the two sides delicate and complex

TEHREEK E TALIBAAN PAKISTAN (TTP) ISSUE:

TTP remains a persistent irritant in the already difficult relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Under various Afghan governments, from Hamid Karzai to Ashraf Ghani and now the Taliban, Pakistan's allegations regarding the TTP's presence in Afghanistan have caused tensions. Taliban leadership admitted that the TTP operated in Afghanistan before their arrival in August 2021.

The governor of Kandahar Mullah Shirin said that Pakistan has expressed a desire for immediate action against the TTP. However, he said that it is a complex issue that requires a nuanced approach:

“We are committed to gradually reducing their presence and currently focus on preventing them from reaching border provinces and migrating north. As part of this strategy, 2000 houses have been built in alternative provinces to facilitate their relocation after winter.”

“We are committed to gradually reducing their presence and currently focus on preventing them from reaching border provinces and migrating north. As part of this strategy, 2000 houses have been built in alternative provinces to facilitate their relocation after winter,” Shirin told the research team in Kandahar.

Another Taliban official said that Supreme Leader Haibatullah took notice of a recent attack in Chaman (A border town on the Pakistan side) that killed policemen and residents. The Taliban administration offered to either hold trials in their courts or provide compensation to the victims' families.

The research team's discussion reveals three main viewpoints within the Afghan Taliban regarding the TTP:

Distance and Denial:

Other Taliban members maintain a stance of official non-involvement with the TTP. These leaders declared that the TTP is an independent Pakistani group with a pre-existing presence in Afghan provinces like Kunar, Nangarhar, and Khost. This distance, they argue, stems from both the TTP's Pakistani origin and the Taliban's desire to avoid jeopardizing their fragile grip on Afghanistan.

Acknowledgment of TTP's Presence with Concerns:

A smaller segment acknowledges the TTP's presence within Afghanistan and recognizes the risks it poses to the Taliban administration. They express concerns that the TTP's presence and strength pose challenges to the Taliban administration in the country. The individuals express their fear that in case of the use of force against the TTP, the TTP fighters could potentially join rival groups, such as ISKP, posing a threat to the stability of the Taliban administration. This perspective suggests an internal understanding of the TTP's destabilizing potential. However, they also believe that taking action against TTP can also create a divide among the ranks of Taliban militants: "Our primary concern is to prevent TTP from resorting to suicide bombings in Afghanistan; if we use force against TTP, it could become another ISKP that targets our leadership," said a top Taliban official in Kandahar. He also said that the Taliban faces immediate domestic challenges like the ISKP and local opposition and addressing these threats likely takes precedence over confronting the TTP.

Solidarity and Support:

Some of the Afghan Taliban, especially those who fought on the ground, view the TTP as fellow mujahideen who fought alongside them during the insurgency. They advocate for reciprocating support, citing the TTP's assistance in Afghanistan and the hardships they faced in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Afghan authorities expressed fears that the substantial influx of returnees might facilitate the infiltration of elements associated with the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)

EXPULSION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES FROM PAKISTAN:

Following the Taliban's takeover, the activities of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) increased in Pakistan's new merged districts and remote areas of Balochistan, leading to ongoing border conflicts and challenges in managing Afghan refugees. In response to these developments, on 3rd October 2023, the Pakistani government made the decision to repatriate some Afghan refugees, resulting in a significant number returning to Afghanistan. This situation gave rise to various misconceptions regarding the process of repatriation and the circumstances surrounding it.

Recent reports also indicated that many refugees have successfully navigated their return to Pakistan through various routes.

Despite Pakistan issuing an order granting refugees a one-year extension, exaggerated claims surfaced amidst the turmoil, suggesting that between 1 to 1.5 million people had been expelled, largely fueled by misinformation. In contrast, both Pakistani authorities and international migration organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), confirmed that the number of repatriated refugees was approximately half a million. Recent reports also indicated that many refugees have successfully navigated their return to Pakistan through various routes.

Adding a concerning dimension to the refugee issue, some of the Afghan authorities expressed fears that the substantial influx of returnees might facilitate the infiltration of elements associated with the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Furthermore, an official highlighted that taking legal action against individuals among the refugees based on intelligence reports not only instills fear among migrants but also fosters negative perceptions of the AfghanTaliban administration.

Rather than isolating the Taliban, a more proactive and collaborative approach may help influence positive changes.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION:

Since the Taliban's takeover, the issue of international recognition has been a key concern for both the Taliban government and the global community. Many countries remain cautious due to concerns over human rights, particularly the treatment of women, which are core values for much of the international community. However, the Taliban seeks recognition without preconditions, aiming to establish their legitimacy on their own terms.

However, recent diplomatic and economic interactions indicate that some countries, especially those neighboring Afghanistan, are exploring pathways toward engagement. These nations, including Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, have emphasized the importance of certain preconditions for recognition. These include the establishment of an inclusive government, a commitment to human rights, and efforts to prevent cross-border violence.

Rather than isolating the Afghan Taliban, a more proactive and collaborative approach may help influence positive changes in their behavior. For the time being, maintaining constructive engagement while carefully assessing the conditions for full recognition could foster a more stable and cooperative environment in the region.

The preferred strategy for the international community has been "engagement without recognition."

The preferred strategy for the international community has been "engagement without recognition." This allows for a level of interaction with the Taliban, primarily focused on delivering humanitarian aid and tackling immediate issues like food insecurity. However, it falls short of the full diplomatic recognition the Taliban regime desperately seeks.

Although some security experts believe that al-Qaeda's presence on the ground is now almost nonexistent, the international community remains concerned about security due to the Taliban's suspected links to jihaddists groups like al-Qaeda. In recent times, the ISKP has come out as a threat to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Therefore, there is no probability of a nexus between the two. However, the concerns regarding other groups such as AQ, ETIM, and TTP have yet to be sufficiently addressed by the Taliban administration.

Challenges to International engagement with the Taliban

The lack of a unified approach can hinder effective engagement and create conflicting messages for the Taliban.

Engaging with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan presents several complex challenges for the international community.

Divergent objectives within the Members of the International Community: Different leading states have varying priorities. Some may focus on delivering humanitarian aid and relief to the Afghan people, while others might prioritize counter-terrorism (CT) efforts or seek international recognition for the new regime. This lack of a unified approach can hinder effective engagement and create conflicting messages for the Taliban. The Taliban are aware of the rifts in the international community over the Ukraine and Palestine situation. They understand that they can use these to their advantage both domestically and internationally.

Opaque power dynamics: Experts observed that the internal power dynamics within the Taliban leadership are complicated. Within the Taliban, there are diverse perspectives on international recognition; some leaders see it as vital for the group's legitimacy, while others believe that the world is aware of their presence and that the West and the U.S. are reluctant to recognize them due to their previous military engagements in Afghanistan.

Deep-Seated Distrust: The 20-year war has left a legacy of deep distrust between the Taliban and the international community. This mistrust makes it difficult to establish a foundation for constructive dialogue and cooperation, hindering progress on critical issues like humanitarian aid delivery, counter-terrorism efforts, and regional stability. The countries that appear to have greater legitimacy include states such as China.

Taliban's Triumphalism: The Taliban's experience of resisting a powerful international intervention has fostered a sense of exceptionalism and adherence to their ideology. This makes them less likely to compromise on core values, even when it hinders international cooperation on issues of mutual concern.

Instrumentalization of Women's Rights: The Taliban's restriction of women's education is not simply a domestic issue. It creates a moral dilemma for the international community. Withholding aid to pressure change can disproportionately harm the Afghan people, particularly women and girls. Furthermore, it reduces the leverage the international community has to secure concessions on other critical issues, such as counter-terrorism (CT) efforts. Additionally, it appeared to us that the Taliban used the rigidity over the issue to retain leverage in negotiations.

Indicators of potential Taliban willingness to diplomatically engage:

Religious diplomacy is particularly effective since it does not evoke opposition from within the Taliban ranks.

Diplomatic Activity: Increased visits by Taliban ministers and governors to regional countries like Pakistan and welcoming foreign delegations signal a willingness to engage in international diplomacy.

Multilateral Engagement: A demonstrated openness to dialogue with a diverse set of international and regional players, including neighbours (Iran, Turkmenistan, etc.), the UN, the OIC, and Western nations, suggests a willingness to address international concerns.

Religious Outreach: The Taliban's receptiveness to visits from prominent Ulama (religious scholars) from Pakistan, such as JUI-F, Jamia Haqqania, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), indicate a willingness to deliberate on external perspectives during negotiations. Religious diplomacy is particularly effective since it does not evoke opposition from within the Taliban ranks.

Key Strategic Plans Achievements of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, under the leadership of the Taliban since their return to power in August 2021, has focused on several key areas in its governance and planning. While their governance is shaped by an emphasis on their religious interpretations and traditional values, some of the major priorities and achievements have included:

1. Economic Revival

- The Afghan economy has faced severe challenges since the Taliban's return, including sanctions, frozen assets, and loss of international aid. The Islamic Emirate has prioritized stabilizing the economy by seeking new trade deals, opening economic relations with regional partners (especially China, Iran, and Pakistan), and trying to attract investment in Afghanistan's rich natural resources.
- The Taliban government is working on economic initiatives, including approving projects worth billions of Afghanis to stimulate economic growth. For instance, the National Procurement Commission approved contracts for 12 projects valued at around 10 billion Afghanis. These projects aim to improve infrastructure, agriculture, and industrial development, with a focus on creating jobs.
- They have improved revenue collection through taxes and customs, stabilized the currency, and increased exports. However, this progress has been referred to as a "famine equilibrium," meaning the economy remains in a fragile state despite these efforts.
- Efforts have been made to encourage self-sufficiency in agriculture and mining, emphasizing Afghanistan's rich mineral resources to generate revenue, including minerals like lithium.

2. Security and Stability

- The Taliban claim to focus on establishing internal security and preventing insurgencies, especially from groups like ISIS-K (Islamic State Khorasan Province). They have emphasized maintaining peace and order within the country to avoid a resurgence of civil war or unrest.

3. Enforcement of Islamic Law (Sharia)

- One of the top priorities of the Islamic Emirate is to enforce Sharia across all aspects of Afghan society, including legal, educational, and social systems. They have implemented laws concerning public behavior, dress codes, and women's rights, with women facing restrictions on education, work, and mobility.

4. International Recognition and Diplomacy

- Gaining international recognition remains a crucial goal. The Taliban have been engaged in diplomatic talks with neighboring countries and global powers, aiming for legitimacy on the global stage, which would also unlock access to frozen financial assets and aid.

5. Humanitarian Aid and Assistance

- In light of Afghanistan's worsening humanitarian crisis, including poverty, food shortages, and displacement, the Taliban government has requested assistance from international organizations. They have engaged with the United Nations and NGOs to ensure the flow of aid while trying to maintain control over how the aid is distributed.

6. Infrastructure and Development

- Despite limited resources, the Taliban have expressed interest in infrastructure development, including improving roads, telecommunications, and public services. Access to basic utilities, water, and electricity has improved in some areas, though frequent power shortages persist. Projects such as the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline and the CASA-1000 electricity project are part of their broader infrastructure goals, aimed at connecting Afghanistan to regional energy networks

7. Education and Religious Schools

- The Islamic Emirate has made religious education a cornerstone of its educational policies. Although restrictions on girls' education have drawn international criticism, the Taliban have encouraged the expansion of religious madrassas and Islamic curricula for boys.

8. Controlling Narcotics

- The Taliban have stated that they intend to reduce or eliminate the cultivation of opium, which has been a significant part of Afghanistan's economy. They have declared bans on poppy cultivation, though enforcement and alternatives for farmers remain challenges.

9. Combating Corruption:

- The Taliban government has claimed to prioritize anti-corruption measures, dismissing officials accused of misconduct or misuse of power.
- They established mechanisms to oversee the functioning of provincial governors and ministers, with the supreme leadership directly involved in supervising governmental activities

Expert Recommendations from Pakistani Religious Scholars

The following recommendations have been derived from consultations with religious experts, scholars, and influential figures in Pakistan to foster meaningful dialogue and cooperation with the Afghan Taliban leadership. The recommendations are categorized into actions on the Pakistani side and on the Afghan side, both aiming to promote stability, inclusivity, and mutual understanding in Afghanistan.

ON PAKISTAN'S SIDE

Formation of Multi-Party Working Groups:

Establish multi-party working groups within Pakistan as the first step toward structured engagement with the Afghan Taliban. These groups should include Pakistani political parties, both from the government and opposition, to ensure an inclusive approach.

Long-term engagement should be prioritized with yearly work plans, quarterly meetings, and a focus on building trust through consistent interaction over time.

Religious Political Parties' Engagement with Taliban Leadership:

Pakistan's religious political parties should be actively involved in engaging the Taliban on common issues like border management, refugees, climate, educational, political and cultural exchanges etc. These parties can act as mediators, promoting consultative approaches.

Consultative dialogue involving Pakistani religious leadership and Afghan Taliban representatives can facilitate mutual understanding on contentious issues.

Capacity Building for Religious Scholars:

Organize dialogue sessions with leading religious scholars in Pakistan to raise awareness and enhance their capacity on major topics such as inclusive governance, counterterrorism, the Doha Agreement, and compliance with international law and treaties.

Establish a Working Group of influential religious scholars, who would engage Afghan diplomats in Pakistan. This group can brainstorm approaches for dialogue with the Afghan Taliban, fostering a better understanding of both sides' concerns.

Consultative Sessions Organized by Influential Madrassas:

Engage madrassas with significant influence to organize consultative sessions focused on educational issues like women role and leadership in Muslim societies, relations with

neighbouring countries and respect of International Law. Alumni of the madrassa, along with Afghan ministers, can be invited to Pakistan for a constructive dialogue on these topics.

Informal Visits and Third-Party Engagements:

Arrange an informal visit of a Pakistani Ulama delegation to Afghanistan, enabling them to understand the internal dynamics of the Afghan government, which could lead to better-informed strategies for engagement.

Facilitate meetings between influential leaders from both countries in neutral third-party locations, such as Indonesia, Turkey, or Doha. These neutral grounds can provide a conducive environment for dialogue on pressing issues, allowing leaders from both Pakistan and Afghanistan to engage more freely.

ON AFGHANISTAN'S SIDE

Enhance Transparency and Information Dissemination about Governance Systems:

Afghanistan should prioritize the establishment of mechanisms that ensure greater transparency and accessibility of information regarding governance structures, decision-making processes, and power dynamics within the government. This can be achieved by:

- ◆ **Conducting Comprehensive Research and Reporting:** Regularly publish reports detailing the functioning of various governmental systems, including how policies are developed and implemented. This should involve stakeholder consultations to capture diverse perspectives and ensure inclusivity.
- ◆ **Creating Public Awareness Campaigns:** Initiate campaigns to educate citizens about the government's operations, their rights, and the avenues available for civic engagement. This would empower the populace, fostering a more informed citizenry capable of actively participating in governance.
- ◆ **Establishing Open Forums for Dialogue:** Implement community forums where citizens can discuss governance issues, share grievances, and provide feedback. Engaging local leaders, including religious scholars, can help bridge the gap between the government and the community, ensuring that the voices of ordinary citizens are heard in the policymaking process.

Promote Girls' Education and Inclusive Governance:

Afghan leadership should prioritize girls' education and ensure inclusive governance that represents all segments of society, including women and minorities.

Afghan leadership should engage religious scholars and community leaders to facilitate a cultural shift, highlighting the compatibility of education with Islamic principles.

Adopt Religious Diplomacy for Peace and Stability:

Leverage the influence of religious scholars to promote peace-building and counter violent extremism within Afghanistan. Engage with Islamic scholars to address the influence of violent extremist groups.

Afghan religious leaders should work alongside regional experts to develop religiously grounded approaches to counterterrorism.

Capacity Building in Governance and Human Rights:

Afghan leaders should participate in training programs facilitated by Pakistani scholars to improve their understanding of human rights treaties, counterterrorism laws, and inclusive governance. This will help align Afghanistan with international norms while respecting its unique cultural and religious context.

Engage in Regional Dialogue and Cooperation:

Afghan leaders should actively participate in dialogue with regional partners, including Pakistan, to strengthen diplomatic ties and create a united front against extremism. Religious diplomacy can play a pivotal role in these discussions, fostering a shared vision for peace and stability.

Specific Recommendations

For the Current Afghanistan Government (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – IEA):

- The report recommends for the IEA - Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban government) to develop a Constitution of the country based on Islamic principles and requirements of the modern age. They might consider taking help from constitutional experts from the Muslim countries especially from Pakistan for the constitutional development.

For the Muslim world and neighbouring countries:

- Muslim and neighbouring countries in particular and international community in general needs to form working groups to jointly develop a strategy for countering violent extremism and removing the threat posed by extremist groups like ISKP, Tehreek Taliban Pakistan and others similar groups.
- It is essential for the Muslim world to actively engage with Afghan leadership on the critical issues of girls' education and the inclusion of women in all aspects of society. Such dialogue should emphasize the importance of respecting international conventions and mutual agreements regarding women's leadership according to Islamic Ideological Countries and gender inclusion.

Given diplomacy as an art of possibilities, it can be helpful to engage the current Taliban regime in the spirit of Doha agreement and commitments made in it.

For International Community:

- The current Taliban regime can still be engaged at some level by International community even in the process before any decision about their formal recognition.
- Given diplomacy as an art of possibilities, it can be helpful to engage the current Taliban regime in the spirit of Doha agreement and commitments made in it.
- The international community can foster safe and constructive engagement through targeted short- and medium-term projects focused on poverty alleviation, humanitarian assistance, and educational development.

- Taliban regime officials and stakeholders should be provided opportunities of training and capacity building particularly about norms and working of international relations and conventions / agreements, constitutional processes, international law particularly about UNDHR and Oman, Makkah Cairo, Pegham-e-Pakistan and other relevant Declarations where there is a consensus of the international community. Muslim experts and countries can be instrumental to work with international community to help bridge the gap in this regard.
- To achieve sustainable economic development, it is essential to strengthen trade relations between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and neighboring countries. Initiatives like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline serve as a prime example of how regional cooperation can enhance energy security and stimulate economic growth. By fostering trade partnerships, these nations can unlock new opportunities, create jobs, and promote stability, ultimately contributing to a more prosperous and interconnected region. Collaborative efforts in trade, exemplified by projects like TAPI, can pave the way for a brighter future for all involved.

Engageability: Maximizing Effective Engagement in Discussions and Negotiations

Drawing from comprehensive interviews and field research, the report recommends the following strategies for engaging with the Taliban:

- a) **Multilayered and Phased Approach:** Engagement with the Taliban Government should occur across all diplomatic channels, not just at the highest levels. Cooperation in areas such as humanitarian assistance and counter-terrorism (CT) efforts can begin immediately, while more complex issues can be addressed over time.
- b) **Building Trust through Interaction:** The Taliban's perspective is often shaped by conspiracy theories due to their limited contact with the international community. Increasing direct interaction will help foster trust and reduce misunderstandings.
- c) **Religious Diplomacy:** Religious diplomacy is an important and effective mechanism. During discussions, some officials of the Afghan Taliban expressed that the Supreme Leader of Afghan Taliban places great importance on the visits of religious scholars. Therefore, there should be a consistent exchange of visits between Islamic scholars, especially those from Pakistan. Sustained dialogue through influential Islamic scholars (Ulama) from countries with established democratic practices and inclusive ideologies can help bridge ideological divides and encourage more inclusive governance.

ANNEXURE 1

IEA GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE



Important Ministries

 Qari Fasihuddin Fitrat Chief of Staff	Acting Education Minister Mas'avi Habbullah Agha	Acting Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development Mohammad Younus Akhundzada	Ministry of ANOMA Mullah Noorullah Tamabi
	Acting Information and Culture Minister Khanullah Khanikhes	Acting Minister for Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice Sheikh Mohammad Khalid	Ministry of Public Health Mullah Noor Jalala Jalali
	Acting Minister of Water and Energy Abdul Latif Mansoor	Acting Minister for Mines and Petroleum Mohammed Isa Akhund	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Mullah Abdul Marwan Akhund
	Acting Minister for Public Works Abdul Qadus Hamidi	Acting Minister for Civil Aviation and Transport Hamidullah Akhundzada	Ministry of Agriculture Mas'avi Azaullah Omani
	Acting Minister for Refugees Khaliq-Rahman Haqqani	Acting Minister for Higher Education Mullah Nida Muhammad Nadeem	Ministry of Telecommunication Najibullah Haqqani
 Abdul Haq Wasiq Intelligence Head	Acting Hajj and Religious Affairs Minister Mohi Noor Mohammad Saqib	Acting Telecommunications Minister Najibullah Haqqani	Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Al-Haj Mullah Abdul Najed Akhund
		Afghanistan Independence Civil Service Commission Mas'avi Abdul Raqi Haqqani	

Supreme Leaders' inner circle

- **Sheikh Khalid Hanafi**
 - **Sheikh Fariduddin Mahmood**
 - **Haji Yusuf Wafa**
 - **Mullah Shirin**
- Heads the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice
Previously served as a minister and led the Afghanistan Academy of Sciences.
Currently Governor of Balkh province, previously held the governorship of Kandahar.
- Governor of Kandahar and Deputy Head of the Taliban's Militancy Intelligence and Strategy department.

ANNEXURE 2

LIST OF KEY RELIGIOUS AND INFLUENTIAL LEADERS (AFGHANISTAN)

No	Name	Designation	Location	IEA govt	Significance	Influence Area
1	Molana Muhammad Hasan Akhund	Acting Prime Minister	Kabul	Yes	He is Acting Prime Minister of IEA . He is an Influential leader and closely related to the Supreme Leader.	Governance
2	Mulla Abdul Ghani Baradar	Acting Deputy Prime Minister	Kabul	Yes	He is Acting Deputy Prime Minister of IEA and signatory of DOHA Agreement.	Governance
3	Molana Abdul Kabir Haqqani	Deputy PM	Kabul	Yes	During the Taliban's first regime, he remained the governor of Nangarhar province and now acting as Deputy Prime Minister.	Governance
4	Khaleefa Sirajuddin Haqqani	Minister of Interior	Kabul	Yes	One of the most powerful leaders after the Supreme leader.	Governance / security
5	Mufti Noor Muhammad Saqib Haqqani	Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs,	Kabul	Yes	Former Chief Justice of Afghan Taliban 1st Government	Hajj and Religious Affairs
6	Mullah Muhammad Shirin Akhund	Governor of Kandahar/ Deputy head of Military Intelligence and strategy/ Former head to discuss border control	Kandahar and southern regions	Yes	Kandahar's role as the central hub for issuing decrees and directives is why Mullah Haibatullah has strategically appointed Mullah Shirin to oversee operations there.	Kandahar/ IEA policy and decrees
7	Molana Habib Ullah Agha	Minister of Intermediate Education	Kabul	Yes	He is close to the Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada. Agha, the new education minister, was a judge during the first regime of the Taliban between 1996 and 2001. He is son of Tayyab Agha (chief negotiator in Doha)	Education policy
8	Shiekh Khalid Hanafi	Minister for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Evil / Inner Circle	Kabul	Yes	Member of the exclusive Inner Circle of Supreme Leader Haibutllah Akhundzada	Governance
9	Haji Yousuf Wafa	Governor Balkh	Balkh		Member of the exclusive Inner Circle of Supreme Leader Haibutllah Akhundzada	Balkh

No	Name	Designation	Location	IEA govt	Significance	Influence Area
10	Mullah Abdul Manan Omari	Minister for Labor and Social Affairs	Maiwand, Kandahar/ Kabul	Yes	Due to being the brother of Mullah Omar, he commands great respect and influence within Taliban circles, and his opinion holds significant importance in policy matters.	Policy making
11	Molana Zabihullah Mujahid	Spokesperson of IEA as well as of Supreme Leader	Gardez District of Paktia province	Yes	In April 2023, Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada relocated Mujahid from Kabul to Kandahar. Akhundzada has been relocating officials closer to himself for better performance. He served as spokesperson of Taliban insurgency.	Communication and linkages across Afghanistan
12	Molvi Syed Tahir Agha	In charge of the <i>Shuhada</i> Ministry in Kandahar	Kandahar	Yes	He is the official responsible for the welfare of martyred families in Kandahar, as ensuring the well-being of these families is a top priority for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA).	Kandahar/ families of martyred
13	Molana Khalil ur Rahman Haqqani	Minister of Refugee and Returnees	Kabul	Yes	He is brother of Jalaluddin Haqqani (late founder of Haqqani group and prominent tribal leader) and uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani (the Interior Minister of Afghanistan). He holds a prominent position within the Haqqani Group, which is recognized as the largest region within the Tehrik-i-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA).	Involves jirgas to resolve internal issues between different factions of Afghans.
14	Hafiz Mohibullah Shakir	Council General Peshawar	Peshawar	Yes	He is an influential diplomat currently Council General in Peshawar. He is close to the Supreme Leader. Formerly was shadow governor of Kabul and Minister of Religious Affairs.	Diplomacy/ Foreign relations
15	Sheikh Muhammad Zahir Ullah Khan	Coordinator of Ulama Shura Council	Kabul (from Nangarhar, Shirzad district)	Yes	This Shura Council is not formally part of the government but all government officials are supposed to abide by its advice/ orders. It is directly connected to Ameer ul Momineen.	Monitoring /influencing decision making at government department.
16	Molana Anas Haqqani	Advisor in Interior Ministry	Kabul	Yes	As the brother of the Interior Minister and a senior leader within the Haqqani Group, he played a significant behind-the-scenes role in the Doha agreement, despite not being physically present at the negotiations.	Communication and negotiations

No	Name	Designation	Location	IEA govt	Significance	Influence Area
17	Sheikh Abdul Baqi Haqqani	Head, Afghanistan Independence Civil Services Commission/ Former Minister of Higher Education	Kabul	Yes	He was appointed Minister of Higher Education in Afghanistan, where he was a supporter of girls' education. He has now been transferred to serve as the head of the Afghanistan Independence Civil Services Commission.	[Supporter of Women education]
18	Sheikh Abdul Sami Ghaznivi	Religious Leader Sheikh ul Hadis in a Jihadi madrasa.	Kabul	Yes	He has direct relation with <i>Ameer ul Momineen (the supreme leader)</i> . He is considered Influential and Engageable. (He is the Sheikh ul Hadees of all the Govt Msdrassas)	Religious education and other policy issues. He is an ideologue of IEA.
19	Mullah Noorullah Noori	Minister for Border and Tribal Affairs	Kabul (from Zabul)	Yes	Former governor of Laghman, Baghlan and Balakh, a former jihadi served 13 years in Gitmo, he holds influential position in IEA.	Border region and IEA border policy.

ANNEXURE 3

LIST OF KEY RELIGIOUS AND INFLUENTIAL LEADERS (PAKISTAN)

No	Name	Designation	Location	Pol Party	Significance	Influence Area
1.	Maulana Fazal ur Rehman	President, Jamiat Ulama- e-Islam (Fazl); Guardian, Wafaq ul Madaris	Countrywide	President, JUI-F	Head of the lead Deobandi political party with support in Pashtun belt, in particular areas bordering areas with Taliban presence. Extremely strong influence on the management of the Deobandi-Sunni madrassah board. Strong tribal connections across the border.	Centre, North and South Regions of Pakistan
2.	Maulana Hamidul Haq	Vice Chancellor of Jamia Haqqania, Akora Khattak	KP, Islamabad	JUI-Sami	Considered as successor of Maulana Sami ul Haq, who enjoyed immense respect among the Taliban. Administrator of the Haqqania, most influential seminary on the Taliban.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
3.	Maulana Anwarul Haq Haqqani	Administrator, Jamia Haqqani Akora Khattak; Senior Vice President, Wafaq ul Madaris Alarabiya (Pakistan)	KP, Balochistan		Brother of Sami ul Haq; most senior member of the Haqqania seminary, the most influential seminary on the Taliban; SVP of the Deobandi-Sunni madrassah board, which leads 65% of the country's madrassahs. Can be upfront on issues with the Taliban.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
4.	Mufti Taqi Usmani	President, Wafaq ul Madaris Al-Arabiya; President, Darul Uloom Karachi; Member, OIC Adviser	Karachi		Foremost religious authority in Deobandi Islam, with publications in multiple languages including Pashto; Head of the Deobandi madrassah board; also part of international platforms like OIC; issued a fatwa against terrorism and wrote a letter to Taliban in support of girls education.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
6.	Sheikh Muhammad Idrees	Sheikh ul Hadees, Darul Uloom Nomania Utmanzai, Charsadda; also teaches at Haqqania	KP	JUI-F	Foremost expert on religious pedagogy, public speaker and orator, with significant followers including among the Taliban. Head of Provincial Committee, JUI-F.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan

No	Name	Designation	Location	Pol Party	Significance	Influence Area
7.	Qari Muhammad Romaan	Principal, Jamia Raheemia Taleem ul Quran, Miranshah, North Waziristan	KP (NMD)		Can serve as focal person among different conflicting parties. One of the most influential persons on the Taliban esp Haqqanis and TTP; has mediated between Taliban and Pakistan; believes in ceasefire and treaties	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
8.	Maulana Muhammad Anwar Badakhshani	Sheikh ul Hadith, Jamia Uloom-e-Islamia Binori Town, Karachi	Karachi		Strong scholarly profile, who translated Quran in Dari. His books are taught in Afghanistan. Relative of Taqi Usmani; migrated from Afghanistan (Badakshan).	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
9.	Maulana Abdal Qadir Luni	Principal, Jamia Abubakkar Siddiqui; JUI (Nazriati)	Balochistan	JUI (N)	JUI-N is the only party to have openly defended the Taliban. His workers have fought alongside the Taliban. He is linked with the Taliban's Kandahar leadership and had resolved their disputes in Pakistan.	South Regions of Pakistan
10.	Maulana Salahuddin Ayubl	Member of National Assembly, JUI-F	Balochistan, Islamabad	JUI-F	Have openly defended Taliban in the parliament; his constituency is part of the wider Kandahar belt and his own tribesmen straddle on both sides of the border.	South Regions of Pakistan
11.	Maulana Hafiz Muhammad Yousaf	Principal, Jamia Islamia Chaman; JUI-F	Balochistan	JUI-F	Generational linkages: His father was among the principle supporters of Mullah Omer and his Taliban movement.	South Regions of Pakistan
12.	Mufti Muhammad Qasim	Principal, Jamia Dar ul Uloom Islami, Chaman	Balochistan	JUI-F	Generational linkages: His father was top religious and tribal leader. His is one of the largest tribes on both sides of the border. He has played active role in resolving border conflict; most influential mediator in resolving localized conflict.	South Regions of Pakistan
13.	Maulana Zahid ur Rashidi	Secretary General, Pakistan Shariat Council; Sheikh ul Hadith, Jamia Nusrat ul Uloom, Gunjranwala	Punjab, Islamabad		His father was a top Deobandi-Sunni figure. One of the few scholars who writes on mainstream media, something which the Taliban admires him of. Founding member of World Islamic Forum, based in UK.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
14.	Maulana Tayyab Tahiri	Principal, Dar ul Quran, Swabi, KP; Head, Wahdat ul Madaris			His students, Panjpiris, are considered a fringe, with links to Salafis. Alumni have joined TTP (and have potential of switching to ISKP). Heads his own board, with 2000+ madrassahs registered.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan

No	Name	Designation	Location	Pol Party	Significance	Influence Area
15.	Maulana Noorul Haq Qadri	Head of his khanqah, Khyber District	KP, Islamabad	PTI	Generational linkages: He comes from a spiritual family in bordering Khyber district with followers in Afghanistan. His brother Senator Abdul Malik is the custodian of the shrine.	Centre Regions of Pakistan
16.	Maulana Mehmood Aalam Advocate	Principal, Tahfiz ul Quran, Wana, South Waziristan; tribal elder; JUI	KP (NMD)	JUI	Deputy Interior Minister under Taliban's first govt.; tribal elder; close aide of the Haqqanis	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
17.	Maulana Bashir Ahmed	Custodian, "Khanqah Peer Sabaq" shrine, KP	KP		Has been a spiritual leader of many Afghan Taliban. When his father died, the border was opened for people to offer funerals.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
18.	Mufti Ghulam ur Rehman	Head, Jamia Usmania, Peshawar; Head, Usmania Postgraduate College	KP		Was part of the delegation that met Taliban. Is an educationist, whom the Taliban respects. Also offered the Taliban support in governance structure. Travels regularly to the UK.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
19	Mufti Abdul Ghani Shah	Principal, Jamia Haleemia, Lakki Marwat	KP		His madrassah is one of the largest in southern KP, with Afghans among the alumni. Three of his cousins are current Taliban ministers. Also influence on the Kandahar. His father-in-law was secretary of Mullah Omer.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
20.	Sheikh Aziz ul Hassan	Principal, Jamia Masjid Darwesh, Peshawar	Peshawar		Generational: Son of a slain religious scholar. Mullah Omer had asked Aziz's father for a fatwa on girls education. He said girls education was allowed. He is principal of the second- largest madrassah of KP.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
21.	Maulana Yousaf Shah	Spokesman, Jamia Haqqania	KP, Islamabad	Secretary General, JUI-S	Come up as a negotiator. Focal person of all sorts of negotiation between Haqqania and others. Also served as negotiator with the TTP.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
22.	Mufti Abdul Ghani Advocate	District khateeb, Bannu	KP		Served as mediator/negotiator among different conflict parties in particular TTP	Centre Regions of Pakistan

No	Name	Designation	Location	Pol Party	Significance	Influence Area
23.	Senator Abdul Rasheed	All Parties Secretary General, JUI; ex-Senator	Islamabad		Sheikh ul Hadith of one of the largest madrassahs in Bajaur. JUI-Bajaur has close ties with the Taliban.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan
24.	Mualana Imdadullah Yousafzai	Sheikh ul Hadith, Jamia Uloom-e-Islamia Binori Town, Karachi	Karachi	Nil	Deputy Secretary General of Wifaq al-Madaris; one of the prominent madrassahs. He participates in polls.	Centre and South Regions of Pakistan

EMPERORS OF THE GRAVEYARD

AFGHAN STATE BUILDING UNDER THE TALIBAN



AAMER RAZA

MUHAMMAD ISRAR MADANI



