

EMPERORS OF THE GRAVEYARD

AFGHAN STATE BUILDING UNDER THE TALIBAN



AAMER RAZA

MUHAMMAD ISRAR MADANI





MUHAMMAD ISRAR MADANI is the Founder and President of the International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA), a leading Pakistan-based organization promoting inter-faith harmony, religious coexistence, and peace through dialogue and research. He was formerly a scholar at Darul uloom Haqqania (Akora Khattak) where he also taught for several years. His current work focuses on countering violent extremism, religious diplomacy, and youth engagement across South and East Asia. He also serves as Editor of Tahqiqaat.pk, fostering informed debate on religion and society. He works closely with the government and international organizations to promote better and more nuanced understanding of the cultural, religious and political dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan region.
ircra313@yahoo.com



DR AAMER RAZA is a political scientist and Head of the Afghanistan Research Cell at the University of Peshawar, where he also teaches in the Department of Political Science. A Fulbright scholar and PhD graduate from the University of Massachusetts, his research focuses on conflict, governance, and political transitions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He regularly contributes to local and international media on these subjects.
aameraza@uop.edu.pk

EMPERORS OF THE GRAVEYARD

AFGHAN STATE BUILDING
UNDER THE TALIBAN

EMPERORS OF THE GRAVEYARD

AFGHAN STATE BUILDING
UNDER THE TALIBAN

AAMER RAZA

&

MUHAMMAD ISRAR MADANI



VANGUARD BOOKS

Lahore | Karachi | Islamabad

*Copyright: © 2026
by Vanguard Books (Pvt) Ltd.,*

All rights reserved

*This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part,
including illustrations and pictures, in any form without
written permission from the author and publisher*

ISBN:



VANGUARD BOOKS

**Plot No. 226, Block A-III,
Guru Mangat Road, Gulberg III,
Lahore, Pakistan**

Phone: +92 42 3575 4275

Email: publisher@vanguardbooks.com
www.vanguardbooks.com

Printed at:
AF Printers, Lahore.

Contents

Acknowledgement	vii
Preface	viii
Introduction	x
Chapter – 1	1
Modernization and Women	
Chapter – 2	16
The Rise and Fall of the Taliban (1996-2021)	
Chapter – 3	40
The Taliban Returns	
Chapter – 4	55
Amir ul Mominin	
Chapter – 5	73
The Internal Dynamics and the Structure of the Emirate	

Chapter – 6	98
Ideology and Worldview	
Conclusion	111
Glossary	113
Bibliography	118
Index	121

Preface

In August 2021, as the world looked on with shock and dismay, the Afghan Taliban strolled into Kabul. Abandoned by its American benefactors, the republic quietly collapsed. The world most famed militant group returned to power without much bloodshed, or the need for it. Political maneuvering and local negotiations, actions hardly associated with the group, had paved the way for their return. For many outsiders, a darkness appeared to have descended on Afghanistan. For us, sitting only miles from the country, the return of the Taliban was a call to pause and reflect: What if our projections on the Taliban, Afghanistan, and its people have trumped our perceptions?

This book attempts to look beyond the simplifications. We trace the origin of the Taliban as ideologues and their evolution as strategists and politicians. We attempt to understand the environment and the worldviews that shaped them. We do not justify their actions. We do not romanticize their return. We put it in perspective – as a victory for one idea of Afghanistan over the other. We put the battle for the ideas of Afghanistan in the historical context, without which we believe you cannot understand Afghanistan.


As a researcher and academic who grew up in Peshawar, I have lived with the long shadows cast by the war in Afghanistan. My co-author, Muhammad Israr Madani, has unique positionality. He went to Darul Uloom Haqqania to live and study with, and later teach, Afghan students, many of whom became leaders and members of the Taliban. This allowed Israr to observe and understand the Taliban and other Afghans like no other. It also gave him a level of empathy for all Afghans that I have rarely witnessed with anyone else. If there is someone who can look past the caricature of the Taliban usually presented in the media, it would be him. Admirably, he does so without losing sight of the many shortcomings of the group.

More than anything else, the book confronts the narrative fallacy on the Taliban and the state they are building. This should serve as a

reminder that not everything fits a neat description. The Taliban are here. The reality is that they are the rulers of Afghanistan. Whatever one thinks of them, it is undeniable that we need to engage with them – diplomatically, politically, and in other ways. Useful engagement requires that we understand them – not as primitive creatures from another age, but a by-product of a political order that world powers brought about.

We hope that the book draws a starting line for such understanding.

Aamer Raza and Israr Madani



Emperors of the Graveyard examines the Taliban's emergence through the lens of the country's historical tension between the rural periphery and the urban center, and modern Afghanistan's struggle to come to terms with the changing world. Drawing on extensive field research, rare access to Taliban networks, and first-hand engagement with actors across Afghanistan's diverse ideological and political landscape, Aamer Raza and Muhammad Israr Madani offer a nuanced analysis of the Taliban's evolving system of governance.

Stepping beyond prevailing security-centric and ideological explanations, the book situates the Taliban within the broader context of state formation, legitimacy, and resistance. It explores how traditional authority structures, religious networks, and local power relations coalesce into a distinctive mode of rule that challenges conventional state-building paradigms. Through its empirical depth and conceptual clarity, *Emperors of the Graveyard* provides an essential contribution to understanding contemporary Afghanistan and the changing nature of political order in post-conflict societies.

ISBN: 978-689-402-709-6



9 786894 027096



VANGUARD BOOKS

www.vanguardbooks.com