

The Role of Religion, Idea, and Identity in Taliban Alliance with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan

Mohammad Ayub Mirdad¹ and Vinsensio Dugis²

¹Ph.D. Program Study of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Airlangga
²Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Airlangga

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Abstract: This study examines the alliance between Al Qaeda and the Taliban from 1996-2001. The alliance between Taliban and Al Qaeda was transformed since the Taliban governed Afghanistan. The Taliban regime and Al Qaeda terrorist network were sharing similar world, the Taliban sheltered Osama bin Laden and also allowed him to operate various terrorist camps in Afghanistan in which militants all over the world could be trained in terror tactics. Mullah Mohammed Omer, the Taliban leader, wanted Afghanistan to be a pure Islamic state, while Osama bin Laden had the same objective for the entire Islamic world. Both hated the West, especially the US. The Taliban provided security and a sanctuary for Al Qaeda where they trained thousands of recruits, established a state-of-the-art network, and planned various operations, including September 11. This study has found that the Taliban and Al Qaeda alliance in Afghanistan can be analyzed based on three factors religion, idea and identity: the particular goal is to replace corrupt and heretical government with the rule of "Sharia" (Islamic law) and establish an Islamic state. The paper first present the introduction and literature review of the study, and next the methodology and result, and in the discussion section addressing the role of three factors between the alliance of Taliban and Al Qaeda, and conclusion of the study.

1 INTRODUCTION

The waves of violence that have repeatedly damaged Afghanistan over the past 38 years have also revealed the assiduity of non-state actors to play a role in the future of global events. Terrorist groups led by the central leadership of the Taliban and Al Qaeda have proven to be a long-lasting and adaptable and enduring threat to US forces and overall global security (Skinner, 2011).

Since 1978, Afghanistan has been in a state of continuous conflict that has resulted in extraordinary social, political and economic upheaval and dislocation. Although the great physical casualties of the conflict in Afghan infrastructure are clear, deep disruptions and the destruction of some of Afghanistan's traditional values, customs, and processes have left a similarly destructive scar on the people and institutions of government. In the context of Afghanistan's modern history, the two occupying forces have sought to consolidate control and support the weak regime through occupation: the Soviets between 1980 and 1989 and the US-

NATO alliance between 2001 and 2018, which persists (Johnson, 2013: 3).

In the 1980s, when Afghanistan was occupied by the Soviet Union, the US handed over billions of dollars to revolutionary militia forces who named the mujahedeen through CIA secret operations. Unfortunately, in 1989 not long after the Soviet Union was withdrawn from Afghanistan rather than the mujahideen factions, who came together to oust the Russians, almost instantly turned against each other and started a new civil war when it was proven that the coalition government was founded after the Soviet invasion has failed to overcome their ethnic, clan, and religion differences (Roraback, 2004). It was in this chaotic environment of civil war that extremist religious groups emerged victorious. The Taliban, a name derived from the Arabic word for students, is composed of young people who have barely lived in Afghanistan since they were in refugee camps, and attended radical religious schools in Pakistan (Rubin, 1999).

In a Taliban-controlled region, its growing zeal for religious issues began to draw criticism and spread uneasiness among the people. The vast

majority Afghans resented the strict reading of the group from an ancient tribal social code called Pushtunwali, because they have never been exposed to such restrictions before (Ruiz, 2002). Far from being a legitimate government, the Taliban rule is only recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The international institutions such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Conference also did not give official recognition to the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan (Bajoria, 2011).

The Taliban regime and Al Qaeda terrorist network share the same world, the Taliban protect Osama bin Laden and also allowed him to operate various terrorist camps in Afghanistan where militants around the world can be trained in terror tactics. Mullah Mohammed Omer, the leader of the Taliban, wants Afghanistan to be a pure Islamic state, while Osama bin Laden has the same goal for the entire Islamic world. Both hate the West, especially the US. This collaboration turned Afghanistan into one of the most ideal locations for terrorism. At the same time, these were very important indications showing how Afghanistan became a main base for Al Qaeda to implement its terror campaign against the US before 9/11 (Kinzer, 2007).

As a matter of fact, Rotberg in, "Building a New Afghanistan" talks about how profound relationship with Al Qaeda transformed the Taliban from a nationalist group of fighters in to a more extremist group, "the Taliban provide security and sanctuary for the Al Qaeda where they trained thousands of recruits, established a state-of-the-art network, and planned various operations, including September 11. Al Qaeda's support comes in several forms: they provide much needed financial resources, training Taliban fighters in their conflict with the opposition in the north. Most importantly, Al Qaeda ideologically influenced the Taliban leadership, which in many ways resulted in their extreme vision," (Rotberg, 2006).

After the 2001 terror attacks in New York and Washington, the Taliban and Al Qaeda are increasingly seen as two sides of the same coin, as manifested in the reasons behind armed intervention launched in Afghanistan to change the regime and constrain the Taliban's ability to operate. Analysts of transnational mobilization often see a joint identity as a key factor, mostly with an emphasis on ethnicity, sometimes also on other religious or other identity foundations (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006). The Taliban alliance with Al Qaeda has changed since the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. The Al Qaeda network has to a large extent itself on alliances with

the Taliban, based on three factors religion, ideas and identity, contributing to their local combat while at the same time seeking to influence them ideologically, supporting and recruiting activists for its own global war. (Hoffman, 2004 & Leheny, 2005).

Since the US invasion in late-2001 in Afghanistan, there have been many scholars and experts who have written about Afghanistan and more specifically about the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Josh Schott (2012) states that the Taliban had three goals from 1994 to 2001: cleans Afghanistan of the corrupt warlords, create a functioning government grounded in Sharia law, and gain international recognition. In contrast to the Taliban, Al Qaeda has a global perspective, expanded horizons, and long-term goals. Similarly, Franzen Simon (2012) examines that the complex relationship between the Taliban and Al Qaeda is generally assumed based on misinformation, misunderstanding or misrepresentation of historical events. The Taliban and Al Qaeda can in many ways be seen as sharing common values, although their ultimate goals remains very different.

Different from above is a study by Peters (2009) and Shanty (2006) observing the relationship between the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and drug trafficking. Drugs have long played a supporting role in the Afghan conflict also transform through deepening ties between insurgents based on ideology and driven by profit. Over the past twenty-five years the opium trade has provided a vast source of funding for the Afghan Mujahideen, the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Other noted studies have also provided findings Shafiee (2013) and Dorrnsoro (2005), they addressing that the Taliban continuing their rebellion against the Afghan government and focus on rebuilding the Islamic Emirate, by receiving assistance and training from various circles in Pakistan, and any every successful fight against this group depends upon the elimination of their sanctuaries in Pakistan. The Taliban strategy has so far been successful. They have achieved most of their objectives in South and East Afghanistan, and they are making inroads in the North. For the Taliban, their close relationship to the global Islamist struggle has been a mixed blessing. As Tarrow points out, it is not uncommon for local groups to face undesirable outcomes when they enter into global alliances (Orenstein & Schmitz, 2006; Tarrow, 2005). For the Taliban, their relationship with Al Qaeda has accelerated its isolation by the international community, and became a precursor to its demise as a regime. Similarly, Zahab and Roy

(2004) they argue that without the role played by Al Qaeda, the Taliban, who have never been accused of playing an active part in the September 11 attacks, are likely to continue in power. And, even if the Taliban do not share in the globalist jihad agenda, it has been radicalized through its relationship with Al Qaeda, first and foremost at the leadership level.

The review of the literatures in the alliance between Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, which gives details about the Taliban and Al Qaeda relationships and operations in Afghanistan, has focused merely on partial explanations. There has been no attempt to see the role of factors in the Taliban and Al Qaeda alliance in Afghanistan. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of religion, idea, and identity factors between Taliban and Al Qaeda alliance in Afghanistan. This study focuses on the following question, to what extent are religious, idea and identity factors contributing to the ongoing alliance between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist groups in Afghanistan?

This study is clarified in the following discussion sections. Section one presents the introduction and literature review of the study. Section two explains the methodology of the study. Section three is the result. Section four is the analyses on alliance between Taliban and Al Qaeda based on the three mentioned factors. Section five is the conclusion of the study and bibliography of the research.

2 METHODS

This research is an explanatory research, exploring how the factors of religion, idea and identity function as essential factors in forging the continuing alliance between Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Given the critical situation in Afghanistan, the author was unable to reach and interview active members of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. In this study used data collection techniques through literature study. Therefore, the discussion of the data is based more on the secondary data. The method of collecting secondary data is taken from books, articles, journals, internet, mass media information, and other literature sources.

3 RESULT

When the Soviet Union was defeated in Afghanistan, it encouraged non-state actors involved

in Afghanistan's theater to replicate the same experience elsewhere against their own enemies. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan fell into a brutal civil war between rival mujahideen groups and warlords. Different groups and warlords occupied several regions, but no organization succeeded in occupying large part of the country (Hussin, 2005). Taliban-ruled Afghanistan soon become safe havens for other terrorist groups. Osama bin Laden solidified his relationship with the Taliban and operated in Taliban-controlled territories in Afghanistan (Commission 9/11, 2004). The Al Qaeda and Taliban alliance can be in the following mode of cooperation:

Mode one, the training camps in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan was founded by Bin Laden and his network to provide troop fighters against Taliban enemies in times of need, especially whenever they open up fronts to the Northern Alliance in their military efforts in the north (Peters, 2009: 99).

Mode two, gathering support for the Taliban regime amongst Arab sympathizers of Al Qaeda was another milestone achieved by Al Qaeda and which strengthens their alliance. Arab sympathizers began to send millions of dollars of alms money to the Taliban regime as well as weapons and equipment ranging from four to four vehicles for small arms (Peters, 2009: 80).

Mode three, the Afghan Taliban regime also provides sanctuaries for sectarian militant's outfits of Pakistan, presumably at the behest of Al Qaeda. Sectarian terrorist outfits such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) were proscribed by the state of Pakistan and most of the leadership of banded sectarian groups found safe havens in Afghanistan only when they colluded with Al Qaeda and received training at Al Qaeda run training camps (Peters, 2009:86).

Mode four, most importantly, the killing of northern alliance leader Ahmad Shah Masoud, by two Arabs posing as Belgian-Moroccan journalists was sent by Al Qaeda leadership to eliminate the most potent threat to the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Subsequent investigations led to exposure to the important role played by Al Qaeda leaders in the assassination of Ahmad Shah Masoud. It was an act to show the Taliban leadership of their loyalties and proving Al Qaeda as an asset to the Taliban regime rather than a liability (Peters, 2009).

Mode five, Chechen Islamists fighting against the Russian forces also joined hands with Al Qaeda under the Taliban regime's care. After facing defeat in the Second Chechen War (1999-2000) most Chechen leaders have nowhere else but Afghanistan to seek refuge. Chechen Islamists later became an

asset for Taliban forces during their military offensive against Northern Alliance forces and against the US-led invasion after the 9/11 attacks (Peters, 2009).

Mode six, the Taliban are also cooperated with Al Qaeda as far as the opium issue is concerned. There is much evidence of Taliban and Al Qaeda cooperation in this field. The cash starved Taliban needed money to run the government and get no support except from Saudi Arabia and rich Arab sympathizers. Al Qaeda needs funds to run its camps and recruit more Islamist radical youth around the world, and of course to conduct terrorist operations (Peters, 2009).

4 DISCUSSION

Al Qaeda and Taliban alliances in Afghanistan also have mission statements. A "story of the US versus them", distinguishes "pure from the impure", creates group identity and can be considered as "the glue that holds even the most tenuous organizations together" (Stern, 2003: 142). Their mission statement focuses on expelling the US and other Western troops from Afghanistan and by holding hostages and bombings. Also Taliban and Al Qaeda alliances in Afghanistan their objectives and strategies can be analyzed based on three factors religion, ideas and identity. The ultimate goal is to replace corrupt and heretical government with the rule of Sharia (Islamic law) and establish an Islamic State. The purpose of the "Re-establishment of Muslim State" and the abolition of foreign presence, especially America (Moore, 2001). According to Hoffman, they believe that the only way to overcome these objectives and the only language that the West understands is the logic of violence, and thus the jihad which is the Arabic word for "to strive" is the only option (Hoffman 2003: 13).

Bin Laden reiterated the characterization of the so-called "new crusade led by the United States against Islamic countries," and emphasized his belief that an emerging conflict between Islam and the West would be fought "between the Muslim world and America and their allies" (Pakistan Daily, 1997). Bin Laden argues that the Islamic world should see itself as a one seamless community, or *umma*, and that Muslims are obliged to unite and defend themselves. Changing its focus to the internal politics of the Islamic world, Bin Laden urged Muslims to find a leader to unite them and establish "pious caliphate" to be governed by Islamic law and follow the principles of Islamic finance and social

conduct (Everyday Pakistan, 1997). Bin Laden has repeatedly stated that Afghanistan had become a model of an Islamic state under its Taliban ally and used religious rhetoric to call for support for the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan (Al Jazeera, 1999). Their target is violence against non-military individuals and their property. This blind and broad-minded violence is intended to intimidate and coerce the government, and in order to achieve this, the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan use "fatwas" (religious decrees) issues religious instructions and decisions in order to justify their actions (Associated Press, 2006). The alliance between Taliban and Al Qaeda can be analysed based on three factors:

4.1 Connectivity based on Religion

Understanding the role that religion plays for the Taliban and Al Qaeda also depends on one's analytical approach. The important difference in this regard is whether the role of religion is approached through the level of individual or organizational analysis (Rassler, 2012). For example, what religion has to do with the Taliban and Al Qaeda will be understood differently when viewed from the lens of the individual fighter versus the organization (s) to which that person affiliated. At the individual level, especially when death or martyrdom is near certainty, religion is often a strong motivational factor. However, at the organizational level, religion can be seen as part of the organizational stratum calculus, an instrumental tool used to influence the basis and identity of groups, goals and visions, methods, and the narratives and justifications uses for violence (Rassler, 2012). The purpose of religion in this paper is at the organization level.

The role of religion in political conflict is merely instrumental. This contest is a popular view that in the case of Taliban alliance with Al Qaeda religion serves as a mechanism to gain political legitimacy and is being misused for purely political purposes. The religion factor between the Taliban alliances with Al Qaeda had a major role and makes their cooperation even stronger. They represented nobody but themselves and they recognized no Islam except their own. For example, Soon after the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996, the Taliban formulated their policies under their own self-style interpretation of sharia, they forbidden women from working outside or studying, women's limited access to health care, banning music and TV and men are enforced to wear beard and etc. As slain leader of Al Qaeda Abu Mustafa al Yazid said: *We participate with our brothers in the Islamic Emirate in all fields;*

this has a large positive effect on Taliban self-esteem in Afghanistan (NBC News 2010).

Al Qaeda and the Taliban emphasized monotheism as the basis of Muslim beliefs, which stipulated, "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his last messenger. For both of them this monotheistic concept defines Islamic traditions at both the individual and collective levels, for instance, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan and their effort with Al Qaeda was to establish an Islamic Caliphate, the concept of "There is "No God but Allah" not only has a ritualistic connotation. Al Qaeda and Taliban also draws the perspective that God's concept is synonymous with authority. Any political system or other authority that refuses to be subservient to God's will effectively erases a form of polytheism (Shahzad, 2011). The word (No God but Allah) symbolizes rebellion against the any man-made system. Muslims who adopt this stance automatically reject the system of governance based on democracy, socialism, or any ideology that dependent on the human made laws as polytheistic, and argues that Muslims should struggle against such a system.

4.2 Connectivity based on Idea

The idea behind Al Qaeda is the formation of a base that will unite different terrorist Islamist groups such as the Taliban and others to coordinate their activities. Many of those who attracted to Al Qaeda were non-Arabs, both Taliban and Al Qaeda groups comprising Sunni Muslims and both beliefs in in a very strict form of Islamic law known as sharia law. The Al Qaeda militant dream of establishing a new Islamic state, imitating the medieval caliphate. The restored caliphate will be ruled in accordance to sharia law and will cover all the current and former Muslim lands that stretch from Southeast Asia to Western Europe. Ultimately, the caliph will serve as the platform from which the whole world will be brought to Islam (Mendelsohn, 2016).

Therefore, the Taliban's extremely strict and anti-modern idea has been described as an innovative form of sharia law and combining with the Pashtun tribal codes (Richard et al., 2003), or Pashtunwali, with Deobandi's interpretation of radical Islam and Saudi Wahhabis being influenced major over Taliban ideology and teachings at madrassas during the Soviet-Afghan war by providing teachers and supporting from Saudi Arabia (Blanchard, 2008). As they study in madrassas, the Taliban are often classified as Wahhabis belonging to the austere, puritanical form of Islam while the ties of Wahhabis

idea between the Taliban and Al Qaeda are tight. The Taliban and Al Qaeda have reject differences in nationality, ethnicity or sect among Muslims. For example, the shared ideals between them the establishment of an Islamic state and the enforcement of sharia law as the only way to build an Islamic society, and the perception that Islam is threatened by Western influences. This is regarded as a direct consequence of the formation of the Taliban government in Afghanistan (Literalist, Extremist).

4.3 Connectivity based on Identity

Goffman states that a person has two specific identities, one that we keep to ourselves, *back stage* and one that we present to others, *front stage* (Goffman, 1959:112). In this study, it is the front stage presentation of Al Qaeda and the Taliban towards outsiders. By applying the main points of the terrorist identity to the messages, photos and videos released by Al Qaeda and Taliban the idea is to identify patterns within the jihadist groups outward presented identity.

The purpose of identification in this study refers to the "terrorists" identity of both groups. Terrorism comes into two varieties local and global, according to their actions creating fear and threats at local and global levels to civilians and government. Therefore, the identity factor between the Taliban and Al Qaeda alliances is clearly terrorist and their target is to create violence against civilians, foreigners, coalition forces, and Afghan government forces (Denbeaux, 2011). For example, using suicide bombings, IED and rocket attacks, as well as raids and shootings, assassinations, guerrilla warfare and massacres, they are believed to have a high-profile assassination corps, specifically trained and utilized for assassinations and targeted killings of individuals they called Jihad (Pape et al., 2010).

5 CONCLUSION

The Taliban and Al Qaeda mission statement focuses on expelling U.S. and other Western forces from Afghanistan and by means of hostage-taking and bombings. This study has found that the Taliban and Al Qaeda alliance in Afghanistan can be analyzed based on three factors religion, idea and identity: the particular goal is to replace corrupt and heretical government with the rule of "Sharia" (Islamic law) and establish an Islamic state. Religion is far more transcendent than nationality or political

ideology; fewer groups need to compete for interests of their constituencies, as the interest of a particular religious group are largely uniform, regardless of temporal and spatial concern. Thus, there exist now terrorist groups, these groups due to their religious basis are endowed with unprecedented global support, global reach and member fanaticism (Rapoport, 2004).

As Al Qaeda and the Taliban interacted and deepened their alliance, a trans-terrorist identity was formed to the extent that the soldiers identified with the battle as one battle and considered their battle to be one jihad, so the alliance between the Al Qaeda and Taliban resulted in a synchronicity of objectives. Ideology or more precisely, religion-based has also been mentioned as an efficient factor favoring Al Qaeda and Taliban cohesion. A shared ideology enables followers to carry out hard to control operations by using special tactics, for example, the suicide attacks that are only possible due to a fanatic belief in a cause. The leader of both groups is seen as a central piece of this ideology and a “symbol of resistance” (Gunaratna, 2002: 69). Consequently, even if Al Qaeda’s and Taliban leadership is captured, the ideology will still persist.

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