

# Taliban

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### **The Taliban in Afghanistan**

For decades, Afghanistan was an unstable nation with rival armed groups in control. In the late 1970s, the Soviet Union sent thousands of its soldiers to help the pro-communist government. Unfortunately, the conflict led to the death of approximately 15,000 Soviet army men forcing Moscow to withdraw. In the 1980s, mujahideen, commonly known as the Muslim Afghan fighters, stepped in after the retreat of the Soviet soldiers in an attempt to control the country even though they didn't succeed to unite the Afghans. By the mid-1990s, the nation was split into spheres of control. The split of power was an advantage to the Taliban's rise (Crews, Robert, and Amin Tarzi 123). The Taliban movement or so-called "students" in the Pashto language emerged. The group was then led by Mula Muhammad Umar and 11 students in Qandahar. The Taliban was believed to be a group involving of religious students called the Talib. They were from Pashtun areas to the south and east of Afghanistan. The students received Islamic education in the Traditional Islamic Schools in Pakistan. In addition, the Uzbek and Tajik students also were highly involved in the Taliban's successful growth (Kuehn & Felix 530). Initially, the movement participated in various religious seminaries and received payment from the Saudi Arabian government since it was believed to preach Sunni Islam. The Taliban had assured the Afghans to bring peace, security as well as protect the Islamic laws, "sheria," when it is in power.

The Taliban gained popularity from southwestern Afghanistan and had great influence in these regions, which attracted many followers. In September 1995, the movement took over Herat province. In a year, the Taliban also took over Kabul, which is the Afghan capital. It overthrew the government led by President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was among mujahideen leaders. By 1998, the group had approximately 90% of Afghanistan under its influence (Baczko, & Adam 1426). During this period, the Afghans were tired of President Burhanuddin Rabbani's leadership, the mujahideen's excesses, and internal strife after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Therefore, they welcomed the Taliban movement immediately after it first appeared on the scene, making it easy for the movement to gain Afghans' full trust (Kuehn & Felix 589). The Taliban gained more popularity after successfully eradicating corruption, curbing lawlessness, and making sure that Afghanistan's roads and areas were under their safe control. It was a great achievement for the Afghans as it helped improve their economy in the country's first years of its reign.

However, after twenty years of the Taliban movement rule over Afghanistan, the nation experienced worse infrastructure and economy. The movement introduced ruthless Islamic punishments, for example, executing publicly murderers and adulterers. As if that isn't enough, the group amputated individuals accused of theft. Moreover, the Taliban enforced the law of men growing beards, women wearing an all-covered burka, banned T.V.s, music, cinemas, and stopped education of girls aged from 10 and over the years. The movement was accused of violating multiple human rights and cultural abuses (Baczko & Adam 1432). For example, in 2001, the group was involved in the demolition the Bamiyan Buddha sculptures that initially stood in Afghanistan. Renowned family structures that for decades provided social and economic protection were destroyed by the Taliban. Moreover, the group is responsible for violence

against healthcare personnel working in Afghanistan (Crews, Robert, and Amin Tarzi 130). In 2010, the movement claimed to have killed ten medical practitioners passing through Badakhshan province and, in 2012, murdered four females working with the U.N. as polio workers in Karachi in Pakistan.

The Taliban group has a series of major attacks that involve the death and injuries of innocent civilians. In 2020, Kabul University was attacked, and the movement claimed to be responsible. At least 32 people died, and more than 50 others were injured. In the same year, at Jurm district in Kabul province, there was another attack where at least 12 police were killed and more than ten others injured (Kuehn, & Felix 626). On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the movement was involved in two suicide bombing scenes which left more than 40 people dead and another 50 people severely injured. In the same year, 2016, the Taliban organized an attack on the U.S. military base in Afghanistan. A bomb was detonated near a group of U.S. soldiers, leaving four U.S. soldiers dead, two contractors, and 17 injured (Ibrahimi, Niamatullah, and Akbarzadeh 1010). In 2008, the movement was responsible for the bombing of the Indian embassy located in Kabul. The terror attack left 58 dead people and another 141 wounded. The bombing attack happened through a suicide car carrying a bomb that was packed near the embassy's gate and then detonated.

Tracking the Taliban movement's financial network is more or less a guesswork activity since this secretive militant organization will never publish its accounts. Various BBC interviews conducted inside Afghanistan and abroad proved that the movement is operating very complex financial networks and taxation systems that pay for insurgent functions. It is estimated that the movement has accumulated approximately \$400 million annually from 2011 onwards. However, recent reports state that the income might have increased to around \$1.5 bn (Azami). The Taliban

movement is believed to accumulate its income from running drugs business. According to a UNODC Afghanistan Opium survey 2018, the group has opium poppy cultivation lands in Afghanistan provinces like Helmand with 136,798 ha, Kandahar with 23,410ha, and Kabul with 484 ha. With these large tracks of land under cultivation, Afghanistan is termed the world's largest opium producer. The poppy growing is under the control of the Taliban and generates lots of income (Azami). Moreover, the group earns much income from imposing taxes at several stages, such as a 10% cultivation tax that opium farmers were required to pay and another percentage that opium manufacturing factories paid after converting the opium into the illegal heroin. Also, the traders who traffic the illegal drug pay some tax to the Taliban. Calculating the income generated from the illicit drug economy is likely to range between \$100 to \$400 million.

Nevertheless, according to 2018 BBC report, the Taliban group is recognized by about 70% of the total population in Afghanistan. It means that the group still maintains a robust taxation regime. Taliban group draws the income from telecommunication, mobile phone users, and electricity companies in Afghanistan. For example, Afghanistan's company in charge of electricity supply confessed that the movement gains more than \$2million annually from billing electricity to customers in varying parts of Afghanistan (Azami). In times of conflict, the movement generates income after capturing military posts or urban centers, emptying treasuries, robbing weapons and armored vehicles. Moreover, the Taliban controls mining sites in Afghanistan. It extorts money from mining works which are either legal or illegal. According to a U.N. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team report, the movement receives an approximate 10million annually from 25-30 illegal mining operations in mines located in the Southern Helmand province (Azami). Some reports have shown that the group receives foreign funding. Private citizens located in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Pakistan, and United Arab Emirates are

great contributors to this group. The revenue acquired from foreign funds is approximately \$500 million every year, even though it is difficult to measure the funds received.

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