

# Neo- Taliban and Religious Nationalism in Afghanistan

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## Abstract

The religious nationalism in Neo-Taliban era implies a process of distancing from tribal legitimacy toward a more nationalistic narration. The research aims to understand the Religious nationalism in the approach of Neo- Taliban toward state-building and the peace process. In this regard, the social theory of Ibn Khaldun is employed to measure the process, the logic and the consequences of the birth of its religious nationalism. It becomes clear that the group spiced its religious narration with nationalist changes to win more social support and legitimacy by overcoming ethnonationalism and emphasizing on nationalistic notions that ultimately weakened its traditional legitimacy.

**Keywords:** *Religious Nationalism, Peace Process, Afghanistan, Neo- Taliban, Ibn Khaldun*

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## **Introduction**

The Taliban transformation into a new phase has raised equally new and important questions. The evidence regarding the performance of the group has implied paradoxical perceptions about the true nature of this new phase and its relation with the society of Afghanistan. For example, one of the paradoxical sectors is the literacy in rural areas. The tribal villages, especially Pashtuns, resist modern education, as by the increase in literacy, the obedience from rituals, tribal code of conduct or any other traditional local law like Pashtunwali decreases (Abbas, 2014: 19). Interestingly, the tendency to receive traditional education remains, even if the Neo-Taliban presents that course. In other words, these people aspire education for their children, but it is not clear that either they don't differentiate critically between the traditional syllabus of schooling and Neo-Taliban narrative or they don't really have any other options; even though, hardly a few perceive the presence of the group in their neighbourhood as positive in education of their children. According to a field survey, people are more afraid of the Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK) than Neo-Taliban as the latter could win the support and sympathy of a fraction of society, mostly villagers. This is despite their higher understanding of the danger that the group imposes to their traditional social structure due to their historical interactions with the militants (Akseer & et al, 2018:104). Accordingly, what is the reason behind this paradoxical output from society and how could the group reinforce this situation to its favour or even caused it?

Nationalism and religion are two social driving force that can mobilise large numbers of people. The relationship between the

two is seemingly opposed to each other because, in theory, nationalism is secular in nature, and secularism (in a common sense) is opposed to religion (Smith, 2001). However, if religion sets its goal to counteract this secular nature of the nation, it will ultimately affect nationalism, which surprisingly behaves like two natural allies and form religious nationalism (Juergensmeyer, 1993:15, 54, 110, 115 & 138). Such nationalism can take various forms that are based entirely on the relationship between religion and nation in one country which reinforce each other. Such a relationship goes back to the nature of nationalism. Contrary to the popular belief that nationalism is a secular phenomenon, it is in fact, an expression of the opinion of a number of people, and if these people are religious, the nation aspirations of nationalism will be religious too. Furthermore, the religiously charismatic political leaders are another reinforcing social drive fusing the nationalism with religion. In other words, assigning them with superhuman qualities with the idea of saving the nation or the religion would attract followers to their policies and status. The core idea of these nationalists is the exaltation of the nation, leading to sanctified history, religion, social and cultural tradition, taken from contemporary or a period in the history of that nation. Furthermore, usually most of the nationalist leaders are steeped in the religious tradition of their forbearers, even if they reject it, to make their political message more comprehensible by using jargons that are most suited for the audience (Smith, 2001). Therefore, even the secular nationalists are equipped with mingles of sacred and worldly elements and rarely seek the destruction of an old, religious identity to erect a new political one, except when faced severe confrontation from the guardians of that old or religious identity.

Nationalism is not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. In fact, the country witnessed several nationalistic movements in its contemporary history from ethnonationalism like Pashtu nationalism for Pashtunistan (Rutting, 2020) and Tajik Nationalism against the Taliban (Roy, 2003) to Amanollah

nationalism in the early 20th century (Tarzi, 2018:125), but the phenomenon of religious nationalism for Neo- Taliban is a topic that is worth addressing. As a matter of fact, nationalism in the Neo- Taliban era has already been considered by other authors. Some studies have referred to this as Pashtun nationalism, such as the Siagol's (2012) article. In other works, the relationship between Pashtunism and Islamism (Kamel, 2015; Rutting, 2020) and the existence of religious nationalism (Gopal, 2016; Ahmed, 2014) are mentioned. What is missing from all these articles is the lack of adequate attention to the phenomenon of religious nationalism and how it was born in relation to the Pashtun roots of the group, the ambiguity about the dynamicity of the relationship between tribal and national levels of Neo- Taliban and thus limiting the scope of analysis to Pashtun tribe and Pashtunistan. Ultimately, the ambiguity about the difference between the Neo-Taliban's behaviour at different times with the non-Pashtuns, especially before 2001, still remains. All led to the level of analysis remaining at the micro level and the inability to distinguish between the above –mentioned subject and religious nationalism. Moreover, these investigations have failed to explain the Taliban's path to forming a government.

Efforts have been made to address the issues in present study, shedding light on the dynamics of this religious nationalism and consider it beyond a specific ethnicity in order to form a national scope for the study. In this regard, the present paper aims to systematically study the related criteria at macro and micro levels in order to provide an understanding of the characteristics of the religious nationalism in Neo-Taliban. These assigned social topics at the levels consist crucial information, which contributes to an original analysis between the lines to see how religious nationalism is framed in the group, deals with the peace process and aspires for the state-building.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The duly address of the topic is made possible by the employment

of the social theory of Ibn Khaldun Thereupon, two macro and micro levels of analyses are set for the work due to the nature of the theory, in which the dynamics between these two may provide a continuous mixture of an attempt of one to prevail the other. The micro level is to understand the relations between the group and non- Pashtuns, and the macro level is, like, for understanding the mechanism of pursuing the Emirat, the always longed revival of the Country's historical importance during the Khilafah. Not to mention that the joint section of these two levels is the religious nationalism.

Application of Ibn Khaldun social theory requires acquaintance with the core terminologies of his theory, which are very simple but very confusing at the same time. The discussion here is mostly on Barbarism, then only 'Barbarism' would suffice to be elaborated, to the needed extent, by keeping the definition as simple as possible, to prevent further complexity. The Barbarians live in tribal form, believe in simple islamic rituals; this is close to the traditional definition of Salafism; They equalise islamic laws with local customary laws, which in some instances, have shown contradictions (Al- Wardi, 2017: 234). These people have always resided in specific and harsh geography and have rarely emmigrated for Jihadist activities to other countries because most of their Jihads have happened inside their region (Binesh, 2014: 59). Inaddtion, their local customary laws are historically considered as the haven for the time of social unrest and anarchy, as have the potential to be a substitute to governmental laws for making discipline and justice through a form of a primitive social contract (Ibn Khaldun, 2012: 337). Finally, they consider themselves superior to the citizens and blame urban cultures and ethics (Al- Wardi, 2017: 22).

The end of a Civic state in the eyes of Ibn Khaldun is very dependant on the source of degeneration. In that condition, Barbarism, theoretically, if in equal condition with Civilization, prevails over the Civilization to form a new one. At this point, the Barbaric values like contentment and minimalism, ethics,

diligence, unboundedness to state law, resistance, bravery, and militancy will be substituted with civic values and finally form a new civilisation on the ruins of the defeated civilisation; this later becomes undermined or conquered by another barbarian community; this is a process of loosening legitimacy foundation of Barbarism in favour of Civilization (ibid: 79, 80,93, 94,98&141).

Freedom is essential to the tribes for the realisation of primitive social contract through consensus; otherwise, it would only result in a chaotic society; that is called Social Solidarity. This intentionally becomes the subject of corrosion by the newly formed Barbaric state as its gradual advancement to a more state of Civilization, the primitive social contract fades in favour of a new civic social contract, which is fatal to the Barbaric state if not be well managed. Not to mention that the primitive social contract is the source of legitimacy and the essential foundation for the birth of a Barbaric state, even long before prevailing over Civic state (Sadeghi Fasaie, 2000: 97, 98, 100 &134).

Ibn Khaldun discussed the topic of Civilization in depth, which is mostly focused on economic and management criteria, but the important thing in his theory, which is relevant to our discussion, is the most fundamental shift of the Social Solidarity side effects to the Civic state. According to Ibn Khaldun, by relaxation of Social Solidarity of Barbaric state, the problem of legitimacy arises, which encourages the Civic state to employ Mercenaries for security reasons and being cost-efficient; they lack Social Solidarity (Sadeghi Fasaie, 2000: 153). Ibn Khaldun identifies religion and ideology as the most crucial elements for the formation of Civilization due to its extraordinary capacity to unite and drive the social forces for realisation of a new Social Solidarity amongst different tribes. Not to mention that the religious and ideological Social Solidarities must be inline, otherwise any sharp contradiction would shatter the idea of Civilization (ibid:98-102 &141-144); this is the initial steps for

the transformation of Barbaric state into Civic state.

The theory is applicable to the present social situation of Afghanistan. Pashtuns can be regarded as Barbaric in line with Ibn Khaldun definition of Barbarism. They have already equalised the Islamic law with Pashtunwali (Abbas, 2014: 28) and consider themselves superior to the citizens, mocking or criticising urban lifestyle and ethics (Shams-ur-Rehman, 2015). They have never emigrated for the purpose of 'jihad' as all of their jihadist activities were within their geography since the trilogy jihad began against Britain in the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries and continued to the contemporary Jihad against the coalition force by Neo-Taliban. Finally this Jihadist movement turned to the Pashtunwali in time of anarchy and unrest during the civil war which led to the birth of the Taliban through a primitive social contract (Fasihi-Dolatshahi, 2016: 253). The Neo-Taliban represents itself in the framework of this theory: the group have always advertised itself as contented and devoted Mujahids (Peters, 2010:22) whose tribal identity induced its formation in response to the un-Islamic, immoral and unethical culture of urban communities, as they themselves, in contrary, claim to possess the highest and the purest moral and ethics (Clifford, 1989: 84) and other mentioned characteristics, most notably, unboundedness to state law which they regard as Taghut. Thereupon, the theory suits the field.

### **1. Neo-Taliban and the local ethnicities**

The Taliban historically has shown that the group pursues revolutionary social restructure to answer the need of breaking the dominance of some of the Mujahidin warlords and the social structure formed during the Jihad time by the already begun crush of tribal structures and its affiliated characteristics. Since then, the Taliban, and then Neo-Taliban school of thought, have worked hard to brand the group as a religious-nationalist cult that welcomes social, political and religious participations beyond tribal borders, with a concentration on the theory of Emirate with

the brand of Amir; this has started as rehabilitation of the religious position of the country under the classical theory of Khilafah in the Arab world and the nationalist wave of previous monarchs, that of course, leaves aside the Taghut (earthly tyrannical power whose laws are not taken from Islam) parts in order to form a functioning structure based on the legacies of Post-Khilafah Islamic world ideology related to Arabic (classical) theory of Khilafah (restructured in India) rather than Ottoman theory of Khilafah (Salimifar, 2019: 88-91).

The Taliban reaffirms Islam, which is traditionally the adhesive, mobilising and reuniting element for different ethnicities and tribes inside Afghanistan. Therefore, the severe confrontations of the group cannot be justified through the lens of ethnic cleansing or other similar narration in religious interpretations, although the tendency was already there at the level of local commander due to the influence of Arab Jihadists, especially Jalalabad school. This is despite their inductive inner conflict with diverse schools within the Taliban (Hamid & Farrall, 2015: 37, 38&49) and the sensational baggage resided in the minds of Afghan people since Abdelrahman monarchy in 19th century with regard to Hazara people (Salimifar, 2019:44).

### **1-1. The Hazara: Friends or Enemy?**

There are unexpected and controversial documentations from sympathy of Uzbek and Hazara to the Taliban since the birth of the group (Giustozzi, 2008: 54) to the support of Hazara by Neo-Taliban in response to Shia targeting by ISK (Tarzi, 2017). Therefore, it seems that the reason for the sharp confrontations of Hazara (in the majority) with the Taliban and then the Neo-Taliban might be something rather than ethnical but ideological, and not based on Sunni- Shia typical competition but rooted in the difference between these two sectors. The main reason, again, resides in the theory of Khilafah and its adversarial doctrine, namely Shia; according to the Sunni Islamic thoughts regarding the Khilafah theory, once a Khalifah (the ruler) takes control of the government, it is an obligation for every muslim (in general)

to pledge allegiance to him and fully obey his orders. In addition, it is strictly religiously prohibited for Sunnis to uprising against their ruler, unless he is Taghut, which is still not commonly accepted by all Sunni schools (Al- Qahtani, 2015: 110), let alone Khalifah himself. These two terms are not endorsed in Shia Islamic thoughts; they believe in Imamah (twelve infallible family members of the Prophet Mohammad) rather than Khilafah (Dabashi, 2011:57-60). By taking the two terms into consideration, Hazara has a rich history of disobedience toward their rulers, notably since the 19th century against Abdelrahman, to the era of Emirate that continued to the present time with Neo-Taliban; this disobedience has resulted in severe difficulties and bloodshed (Green, 2017:137&138; Farhang, 1992: 383) during different Pashtun monarchs, governments, and regimes.

It is worth mentioning that wherever the Hazara has compromised with the presence of the Taliban (and later Neo-Taliban), the group has tolerated Shia practices and ideology. Besides, the freedom for the import of Shia books during Emirate time induces that the confrontation is not a typical Shia- Sunni competition, while the group had banned the import and distribution of many other Sunni books including publications of Muslim Brotherhood. There is very similar approach in the time of Neo- Taliban; the group has shown compromise to the establishment of Shia schools (Safari, 2016:49, 122,123&129). Additionally, the group proved successful in the recruitment of a few Hazara people, which contributes to the discussion (Giustozzi, 2008: 54). Still, this merely represents the compromise for the position of the leadership, and not necessarily represents the embracement of the ideology of the group; this may be due to a different criterion, namely religious nationalism, which will be discussed.

The actions of the Taliban, as discussed before, are very dependant on the ideological roots of the local commanders and may neither represent the policy of the main core in either violent or compromising approaches. Still, there is the possibility of a sort

of subtle intention by Hazara to overgeneralise Neo- Taliban in order to gain political advantages or social support. This is by labelling the conflict as Shia- Sunni or to unintentionally or intentionally cover, or even surprisingly to bold, their sense of disobedience under different types of ideological political systems adversary to Shia, or to advertise, as the truth is, that the disobedience from Khilafah is based on Shia thoughts. Besides, the history of the country has shown to be inconvenient for Hazara, as the suppresses and bloodshed brought them political participation backwardness despite their educated people, except during Marxist government or interestingly nowadays; the Democratic political system is a very exceptional moment in the history of Afghanistan for Hazara, especially when the dominant Pashtuns has been pushed back.

## **2. The Birth of Religious Nationalism**

Neo-Taliban has shown flexibility in terms of its previously imposed social regulations and indoctrinations based on religion, including the ban on music, photography, enmity toward Shiites and the significance of Pashtonwali in legislation. In fact, by the fall of Emirate, many commanders had the opportunity to complete religious studies that brought them more maturity in the interpretation of Islamic laws (Osman & Gopal, 2016). Besides, the social environment has changed since the fall of Emirate and the previous interpretations could not bear social support anymore especially between 2002 to 2005, namely when the group was in the middle of a transformation from the Taliban to Neo- Taliban. For instance, it clearly became evident to the group that the ban on the music had only brought disobedience and loss of support for them. Therefore, Mullah Omar granted, by issuing a Fatwa, the freedom of action to the local commanders to observe the orders that were consistent with the local acceptability and mindset of people, to the time that the situation turned suitable for the enforcement of other Fatwas (Giustozzi, 2010). Moreover, Neo-Taliban published a collection of laws under the name of Layeha

in which the representation of Pashtunwali decreased in favour of Sharia law (Nagamine, 2015: 104); this was a very crucial point. As it was discussed, Sharia, or in a general term Islam, is the uniting element of the fragmented society of Afghanistan, according to which, Neo- Taliban pursue the idea of religious nationalism. It has already been discussed the compromise of Neo- Taliban in terms of accepting different ethnicities under the banner of Islam if they show obedience toward the emir. Now the 'Nationalism' part needs elaboration.

Different audiences perceived the presence and actions of the group and analysed reluctantly according to the traditional customary legal system of the Pashtuns, namely Pashtunwali. The move of diminishing the dominance of Pashtunwali over the code of conduct of the group represents a tendency to shift from a sectarian interpretation toward a unifying element: Islam. Not to mention that Islam here is a widely accepted national concept that accompanies or justifies other actions of the group to show a compromise vividly targeted to other ethnicities under the framework of nationalism and through a national call for Jihad. The group justifies that the country is occupied by foreigners who are 'accidentally' infidels, and is governing by 'Taghut' which due to its 'bad governance', is not eligible of ruling the country and needs to be overthrown by the 'Righteous Jihadists', namely Neo- Taliban. This call for Jihad is evident through the songs that the group releases regularly in Farsi and Pashto. The combination of these two sections has beautifully done by the group as religious nationalism ; whoever believes in either one of these sections, unintentionally show support to the other section as well.

### **2-1. Religious nationalism and society**

The religious nationalism contributes to the legitimacy of the group; it is believed that the traditional pillars of legitimacy during the history of the country were 'tribalism', 'Islam' and 'nationalism'(Roy, 1990: 14), which has been perfectly included in this narration of religious nationalism. The notion is the step by which the group intends to loosen the ties with tribalism

(Barbarism), to foster or introduce ties with Civilization and therefore it is very important. The most crucial characteristics of Civilization is the 'inclusion' of individuals beyond the tribal borders. This notion is a double-edged sword that can defy the traditional legitimising pillar of the group, tribalism, in favour of another legitimising source, nationalism, and yet solidify it with Islam. The step indeed needs a context and some revolutionary, yet very cautious actions because the loosening should avoid collapsing internal legitimation.

It is necessary to remind that these flexibilities are not necessarily depicting any intention and must not be regarded as any sort of justifications that the term 'Neo- Taliban' is a promise of the evolution of 'Taliban' in a form that was never before or we are conceptualising a completely different group. Instead, it represents the notion of transformations that have been undergoing due to the change of time, technics, social environment, adversaries, and more importantly, leadership and his selective manner and purpose of ideological notions in the mindset of the group that subsequently drive the social and political attitudes of the group.

There are two very good examples about the Neo- Taliban that happened simultaneously but brought different results. During the Doha Peace conference in 2019, the group accepted to give permission to girls to begin education until obtaining doctorate degree. This was a follow up to the previous move of the group for allowing girls to attend school in several provinces if the classrooms, universities, and occupations be gender-segregated (Al- Arabiya, 2019; Paton, 2011). This was an indirect response to ISK as well because they announced their permission for girl education soon after their emergence in Afghanistan (Winter, 2015). The move did not bore any serious critiques for the leadership of the Neo- Taliban while the second gesture, namely the promise of membership of a woman in the negotiation board of Neo-Taliban, previously decided and announced before the same conference, proved otherwise. Apparently, the promise for

the participation of women in the Neo-Taliban delegation brought tremendous pressure over the leadership that the group quickly modified the promise of participation, and limited the topic to a meeting between some of the sympathising women with the delegation (Sediqi, 2019).

These examples clearly demonstrate the true nature of the Neo-Taliban as the first gesture was merely a selective action, which its realisation was not completely at odds with the overall connections between values in the mindset of the group, while the latter was not the same. In other words, the idea of public gender segregation is known to be a widely common practice in the Islamic world, even by the Sunnis (Rezk, 2006; Reuters, 2010; Islamweb, 2002; Huda, 2019; Metcalf, 2007:101; Bennoune, 2013:303; Dettmer, 2013); besides it seems to have its supporter even in the west (Ribeiro, 2019). Considering this, the insistence over the ban on the education of girls only bore dissatisfaction and disobedience, which distanced the people from the incentives of the group. Interestingly, this is not a very controversial topic and can be the subject of compromise in favour of more serious agendas to be addressed later.

The reason behind the second example resides on another social characteristic. According to a survey, the extent of social participation of women, alongside other topics like code of dress, obedience, and Hijab, is still limited in the Sunni sector of the Islamic world and the acceptance of an extended participation is justified as 'unIslamic' or 'inappropriate' in this regard (Tausch & Heshmati, 2016). Furthermore, the issue can be explained based on the traditional worldview of one of the social sectors of society of Afghanistan where the majority of Neo-Taliban takes root from, namely Pashtun. It is already discussed here that the Pashtunwali diminishes when nationalism strengthens, but it should be noted that the process is not strong enough yet; not to mention that regardless of whatever efforts of the main core, still the steaming force of the group is the Pashtunwali. Moreover, any sharp deviation that the leadership imposes at the common culture

of the group would only result in disobedience and confrontations, especially considering the autonomy of the local commanders and their ideological roots. Some of these ideological roots are not necessarily and essentially fully compatible with the strategy of the leadership.

The education of girls has not always been controversial for the people of Afghanistan in general. This issue just began to become a distinguishable widely controversial topic during Amanollah and Zahir Shah reforms in the early 20th century and then the Soviet reforms. During these periods, the education reform caught the attention of the religious society because Islamic schools had been integrated into modern schools. The first modern school for girls was introduced in 1922 during the Amanollah reforms, designed the required syllabus in cooperation with Columbia University, and introduced the first mix-gender classroom in 1958 during the reforms of Zahir Shah. Later, the soviet reforms were mainly dedicated to preaching the communist ideology besides continuation of the previous reforms. (Fasihi-Dolatshahi, 2016:160; Clifford, 1989:149). In other words, the general idea of modern education, which was intended to substitute the traditional system of education, was rejected by the muslim society. The rejection was mainly due to the ‘unIslamic’ content of the syllabuses and the issue of gender segregation. In addition, the reforms were recognised as the reason for the ‘disobedience’ of girls from the parents, and subsequently, the root cause of feminism in the country (Fasihi-Dolatshahi, 2016: 100-103&160; Clifford, 1989: 114). Accordingly, education of girl does not seem to be an inherently fundamental problem in the society of Afghanistan leading to the rejection of the girls education. Besides, history had witnessed that the education was available to girls by the elders and religious men of villages in the gender-segregated classes before these reforms (Clifford, 1989:114). Understandably, the same issues seem to be persisted in the mindset of the Taliban, and the Neo- Taliban had shown tendencies to overcome it if the issues were addressed in a socially

acceptable solution.

During the modern time especially after the fall of Emirate, the Islamic notions were also included in the syllabus and textbooks (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2013) and a special effort made to propagate the necessity of respect and obedience from the parents, that especially targeted the girl school (see Figure 1). Not to mention that with the defeat of the soviets, the issue of gender segregation was automatically resolved by the Muslim morals of the country. Therefore, insisting the ban on girl education no longer gained major public support for the Neo-Taliban. Although according to a survey, %34.8 of Afghan families still don't send their girls to school due to the lack of infrastructure or impose a ban on schooling of the girls for ideological reasons (Akseer & et al, 2019), that doesn't necessarily mean they are in favour of the sabotages in this regard. Accordingly, this issue shall be distinguished from the social participation of women, which is still confronted as the issue of feminism, albeit the Neo-Taliban announced that they are no longer oppose women's work if the gender-segregations is observed (Saifullah, 2019).



Figure 1. (World Bank, 2018); A gender-segregated classroom with a clear indication of social instruction targeted to girls as a wall inscription of Farsi poem, roughly translated as: Equip

yourself first with chastity and virtue, then attend the schools for the attainment of requirements, pursue the knowledge at school, observe the respect for your parents at home.

### **3. Neo- Taliban and the peace process**

The peace process indirectly encourages the ordinary people of the country to balance between the government and the Neo-Taliban or at least extend their compromise to these two rivals, especially those people who are regularly in touch with both side or resides in contested regions where both the government and the group claim authority (Giustozzi, 2008: 75). The same tendency is available amongst the Neo-Taliban local commanders as well with this contrast that they do not heavily invest in a compromising leader or other fellow local commanders, instead, they form ties with sympathising partners, based on the motivations they have for joining the group. Accordingly, the peacemaking with a local commander would disappoint his low-rank comrades. This eventually or abruptly encourage these desperate crew to show tendency to or join other commanders with whom they have the shared concerns or motivations; this liquidity is devastating for the leadership if the perception of peace process fosters in a way unfavourable for the ties between the low-rank crew, local commanders and the leadership, respectively. This is the weak point of Neo- Taliban. The constant cycle of attaining peace process and separation of layers of organisation of the group ultimately weakens the alliances and strengthens divisions inside the group, and more importantly, reinforcement of the possibility of their recruitment to the rival groups like ISK (Giustozzi, 2018: 45) whose motivations partly overlap with motivations of the Neo- Taliban. This can be explained according to the Ibn-Khaldun social theory.

In line with the theory of Ibn Khaldun, a similar tendency can be seen for Neo-Taliban to honour freedom as the pathway to form Social Solidarity. It is widely presumed that the Taliban is a dominantly Pashtun group, that laid their foundation based on

Pashtunwali. Whatever they used to be, there are reported tendencies of the group, since transformation to Neo-Taliban, for the inclusion of more nationalistic approaches to expand out of tribal recruitment resources and showed a clear tendency to recruit non-Pashtuns even from Hazara people. Besides, they have already put more reliance on Islamic laws than Pashtunwali in their Layeha; these clearly contradict the historical and traditional culture of Pashtuns. In other words, Neo-Taliban pursues Civilization, which requires freedom. The group once formed based on the freedom of will of Pashtuns and stepped up for Civilization, and now seeks the same Civilization through a new form of freedom of will this time based on national consensus. To do so, the group first had to relax its dominant ties with the Social Solidarity of the Pashtuns, in favour of amplifying freedom, religion, geography, ideology and nationalism, which eventually deprive the group of the force of tribal community, which was widely available to the group during the Emirate (Safari, 2016:114). This is exactly the same problem that Neo-Taliban has ever faced since the fall of Emirate.

The tendency of Neo-Taliban for attainment of civic state has encouraged the group to form reliance on mercenaries for security, sustainability and being cost-efficient; not to mention that these forces don't have the Social Solidarity with the group and unlike the tribal tribesmen, don't priorities the survival of tribe over anything else (Ahmed, 1980: 189). This is only the initial obstacle for the group to form a Civic state. As mentioned above, freedom is essential for formation of Civilization. The group had once stepped up for Civilization when the country was free and the freedom was referable at that time. This is a very important element that the group lacks today, which shadowed all other factors; their country is occupied, their religion and their geography are under threat, the community and the occupiers do not tolerate their ideology, and their nationalism is shattered. Thereupon, theoretically, Neo-Taliban is vulnerable during its transformation or at least its tendency of transformation from a

Barbaric state into Civic state due to the possibility of internal degeneration. More importantly, the group required to fulfil the freedom of Afghanistan, which is a great barrier to his agenda.

The peace process negotiation is the promising view for this group to facilitate the transformation, which itself is a great threat to the legitimacy, and subsequently, the destruction of the group. Furthermore, there shall be a sort of rehabilitation of selected Barbaric notions at the same time to prevent the complete degeneration of Barbaric state while still its transformation to Civic state is underway. The group has the rehabilitation history of its political position, accusation of central government, and lurching deadly and organised insurgencies in short period before, after or during the negotiations. For instance, the group intensified its insurgencies during Zalmay Khalilzad visit to Afghanistan for brokering peace in April 2019 (Abed, 2019), they reiterated the same positions and accusations two days after Doha Peace Conference in July 2019 (Ahmad, 2019), launched a deadly attack in Kabul on September 6th, 2019 just two days before the already announced U.S. event in Camp David for brokering a peace deal between the Neo-Taliban leaders and the president of Afghanistan (BBC, 2019), and conducting suicide attack in Bagram Air Base during peace negotiation in December 2019 (Abed & Mashal, 2019).

The peace intended by this peace process literally means a shattered, inconsistent and in-cohesive Neo- Taliban, and not necessarily, any forms of political inclusions of the group in the government envisioned through the idea of peace building at all. In this regard, there seems to be unnecessary even to reach any peace deal because the idea itself is fatal enough to conclude the fate of Neo- Taliban. According to Nagamine (2015: 110, 111 &119), whenever the leadership accepts the attainment for peace negotiations, there is a possibility of losing internal legitimacy of the leadership. To prevent this, Nagamine identifies the media barrier introduced by the Neo- Taliban that present the news in a way that differs from the exact detail of the actual news. This is

the instrument of Neo- Taliban to manage surviving this uncertainty, pursuing its goals through attaining the peace process.

Some experts consider these insurgencies as indications of dishonesty, the continuation of hostilities and the final blow to the idea of Neo- Taliban, justifying that the Taliban remained unchanged as before. This trend is, in fact, a representation of legitimacy making action. In other words, the trend functions as an answer to the internal legitimacy crisis of the group exactly after the initiation of de-legitimisation process, namely the peace negotiation, otherwise, the leadership would be accused of compromising with 'infidels' and 'Taghut', or he finds himself denying any weakness as the reason for joining negotiations. Interestingly in some cases, these insurgencies have exceptionally are performed through suicide bombing while the Layeha is already strictly limited the probability of suicide bombing and conditioned the action to only highly prioritised and worthy targets (Stenersen, 2010: 27&28); what else can be more important than saving the legitimacy of the group for pursuing more crucial purpose.

The main reasons behind the tendency of the group toward this process and accepting the risk of internal de-legitimisation are anything rather than making peace, otherwise, the process will turn into a political suicide for the group. Maybe it was one of the reasons that convinced the United States to finally accept the idea of negotiation with the group; it strongly opposed the first negotiation in 2008-2009 with Taliban (Safari, 2016: 199) until some years later, without any preconditions (Ruttig & Ali, 2018). To overcome the imbalance, the group had shown that the news it provides to the staff is not essentially the same exact common knowledge of the affairs. In other words, the world knowledge of the local commanders and their crew from the peace process is not substantially at parity with the general understanding of the affairs by the negotiators, leaders, or anybody involved at the high council in Quetta. The group has always provided the local commanders with its own generated news or propaganda, which

are very trusted amongst the local commanders and the low-rank crew. Accordingly, there are sorts of censorship or at least news manipulations to biasedly restructure the news, facts or decisions in local and religious jargon, to be more pleasant, more convincible or less provocative for the cohesion and the face of the group, or to reword, to prevent the collapse of the whole system.

A very good and tangible example in this regard is the discrepancies, in length and content, between the Urdu version of a joint statement of Doha Peace Conference, unexpectedly provided by Neo-Taliban after the conference, with the three official versions of the same document in Pashto, Farsi, and English. In the Urdu version, they had portrayed the group as the winning party who gained the ‘respect’ of international, regional and national communities for their sacrifices to the nation, gained the promise of the enemy to ‘end’ the war, as known as the freedom and finally subordinating the women's rights with ‘Islamic principles’. These terms have not been included in other three versions of the joint statement (Ahmad, 2019). Not to mention that these terms are clearly in line with the always-declared goals of their Jihad, namely respect for their Jihad, international and domestic recognition, freedom of the country and enforcement of Islamic law.

## **Conclusion**

Taliban is changing and the idea of Neo- Taliban is not complete yet. This change is not inherent, but at the same time substantial. Amongst these changes, the the birth of religious nationalism should be mentioned. The religious nationalism should not be perceived as the inherent change of the mindset, yet it is suggested to be considered as the sign of more intelligent moves to win social support through amplifying nationalistic notions, and at the same time, reaffirming on their theological foundation. This, instead of reaffirmation on the element of religion as the basis of nationalism, embraces both religious and nationalistic notions at

the same time through an emphasis on common concepts and commonalities between the two topics, in a way that none of them offends the other and therefore reinforces each other.

The introduction of religious nationalism is in line with the long shot of the group for state building, yet risks the legitimacy of the group. To erect a state, the group must fulfil the freedom, which is only achievable through Jihad or negotiation; more tendencies to one side may imbalance the foundation of the religious nationalism of Neo-Taliban. To avoid this imbalance, the group considers a coherent social policy to keep different social communities and theologies united under one flag, especially by the emergence of serious rivals like ISK. Besides, religious nationalism means the voluntary distancing of the group from the traditional legitimacy sources, especially when the idea of negotiation overrides the idea of Jihad. This, more than ever, urges Neo-Taliban to fulfil the freedom in order to prevent the internal collapse of the group. Therefore, the idea of negotiation, existentially, and the problem of prolonging the negotiation process are fatal enough that requires the active intervention to balance the wings of religious nationalism.

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