The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan – organization, leadership and worldview

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English summary

The aim of this report is to get a better understanding of the Taliban movement and its role in the Afghan insurgency post-2001. The approach to this is three-fold: First, the report discusses the nature of the Afghan insurgency as described in existing literature. The second part looks at the organizational characteristics of the largest and most well-known insurgent group in Afghanistan: the Taliban movement (or Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, IEA) led by Mullah Omar. The third and most extensive part of the report analyses the Taliban leadership's ideology and worldview, based on the official statements of its organization and leaders.

The report argues that the Taliban sees itself as a nationalist-religious movement, which fights mainly to resurrect the Taliban regime of the 1990s and to bring the various ethnic groups of Afghanistan under its rule. The Taliban's agenda differs from that of its foreign allies (al-Qaida, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and others) because its primary concern is fighting for Islam within the context of Afghanistan's borders, while the foreign groups aim to spread their fight to other countries as well. Still, the Taliban appears to have a closer relationship with its foreign allies than with the other major insurgent leader in Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. In spite of their common goals (ending foreign occupation of Afghanistan and establishing an Islamic state), their relationship can be described as pragmatic at best. The main fault line in the Taliban's relationship with its various allies appears to be centred on power and authority, rather than ideological disagreement.

The Taliban spends considerable time and resources on attacking Afghan targets, and on justifying these attacks through their propaganda. The report argues that this is not merely a pragmatic choice due to the relative easiness of attacking Afghan targets. Rather, it is a deliberate strategy on part of the Taliban, because the Taliban leadership's primary concern is to contest for power locally, not to kill foreigners in itself. This corresponds with existing theories of insurgencies, which describe the insurgency as a conflict primarily between the insurgent movement (the Taliban) and the local government (the Karzai regime). Outside actors such as NATO, the United States, Pakistan or even al-Qaida may play an important, but nevertheless a secondary, role compared to the role played by the Afghan regime.

Lastly, the report discusses the Taliban leadership's attitudes towards negotiations and power-sharing. For the time being, it looks like any attempt to negotiate with the Taliban leadership directly would serve to strengthen the insurgent movement, rather than weakening it. A more realistic approach is probably to try to weaken the Taliban's coherence through negotiating with, and offering incentives to, low-level commanders and tribal leaders inside Afghanistan. The insurgent movement consists of a wide variety of actors, which may be seen as proof of its strength – but it could also constitute a weak-ness if properly and systematically exploited. This effort, however, requires extensive resources, both in terms of manpower and knowledge of the Afghan realities.

Samandrag

Føremålet med denne rapporten er å få ei betre forståing av Taliban og deira rolle i opprørsrørsla i Afghanistan etter 2001. Rapporten har ei tredelt tilnærming: I første del diskuterer rapporten kva som karakteriserer den afghanske opprørsrørsla, basert på forsking som allereie er gjort på temaet. Den andre delen ser på kva som karakteriserer organisasjonen til den største og mest velkjente opprørsgruppa i Afghanistan, nemleg Talibanrørsla (eller Det islamske emiratet i Afghanistan, IEA) som Mulla Muhammad Omar leier. Den tredje delen av rapporten, som er den mest omfangsrike, diskuterer Taliban-leiinga sin ideologi og verdsoppfatning, basert på ein kvalitativ analyse av Taliban sine offisielle publikasjonar og ytringar.

Rapporten argumenterer for at Taliban-leiinga ser på seg sjølv som ei nasjonalistisk og religiøs rørsle som ynskjer å gjenreise Taliban-staten som styrte Afghanistan på 1990-talet. Taliban og dei utanlandske gruppene i Afghanistan (al-Qaida, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan og andre) har ulike agendaer: Taliban ynskjer å halde striden innanfor Afghanistans grenser, mens dei utanlandske gruppene ynskjer å spreie konflikten til andre land. Taliban har likevel eit nærare forhold til sine utanlandske allierte enn til afghanaren Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, trass i at Hekmatyar og Taliban kjempar for liknande mål. Den viktigaste konfliktlinja i forholdet mellom Taliban og deira allierte synest å vere sentrert om makt og autoritet, og i mindre grad om ideologiske skilnader.

Taliban bruker mykje ressursar på å angripe afghanske mål, trass i at dette vert rekna som meir kontroversielt enn å angripe dei framande koalisjonsstyrkane i Afghanistan. Rapporten argumenterer for at årsaka ikkje berre er pragmatisk: Det å angripe afghanske motstandarar er ein medviten strategi frå Taliban si side, og underbyggjer argumentet om at Taliban sin hovudfiende er den afghanske regjeringa, og ikkje dei internasjonale styrkane. Dette korresponderer òg med eksisterande teoriar om opprørsrørsler, som gjerne skildrar opprør som ei konflikt mellom opprørsgruppa (Taliban) og den lokale regjeringa (Karzai-regimet). Andre aktørar (Nato, USA, Pakistan, al-Qaida og andre) kan ha innverknad på konflikten, men speler likevel berre ei sekundær rolle samanlikna med Karzai-regimet.

Til sist diskuterer rapporten korleis Taliban-leiinga stiller seg til forhandlingar med det afghanske regimet. Slik som situasjonen er no ser det diverre ut til at eitkvart forsøk på å forhandle med Taliban-leiinga vil tene til å styrke opprørsrørsla, heller enn å svekkje henne. Ein meir realistisk framgangsmåte er truleg å svekkje samhaldet i Talibanrørsla gjennom å ta initiativ til forhandlingar, og tilby incentiv, til opprørsleiarar på lågare nivå. Opprørsrørsla er samansett av mange ulike grupper med særs ulike motivasjonar. Dette kan sjåast på som ei stadfesting av Talibanrørsla sin styrke – men det kan òg vera ein veikskap dersom ho vert utnytta på rett måte. Denne framgangsmåten krev rett nok store militære ressursar og inngåande kjennskap til lokale forhold.

Contents

Terms and abbreviations

al-Sumud	Literally "the resistance." Monthly, Arabic-language magazine issued by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan since June 2006
amir al-mu'minin	"The Leader of the Faithful." Title given to Mullah Omar in 1996 when he was appointed leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
al-Sahab	Literally "the clouds." Al-Qaida's official media production company
COIN	Counterinsurgency
da'wa	Preaching and proselytising of the Islamic faith
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas (see map in Appendix A)
HIG	Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin. Afghan insurgent group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IEA	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan's main intelligence agency)
jihad	Literally "struggle [in the way of God]." Here used strictly in the way militant Islamists use the term: to denote a violent struggle against Islam's enemies (sometimes translated as "holy war")
layeha	"Code of conduct"
madrasa	Literally "school." Here, it refers to schools (primary to high school level) where Islamic subjects are taught, also translated as "Koran schools"
mujahidin	(sg. *mujahid*); Literally "those who struggle [in the way of God]." Usually refers to Afghan guerrilla fighters who fought the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979–1989. Today, the term is used by a wide variety of militant Islamist groups including al-Qaida, and refers to any person who takes part in violent *jihad*
maulana/maulavi	Variations of the title *mullah*
mullah	Islamic religious leader. In Afghanistan, often refers to a person with a *madrasa* background (not necessarily a graduate) and who is responsible for the religious affairs of a village
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NWFP	North-Western Frontier Province (se map in Appendix A)
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
pir	"Holy man" in the Sufi tradition of Islam
shahada	The Muslim Confession of Faith ("there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger")
sharia	Islamic law: laws derived from the Koran and the Hadith (tales of the Prophet Muhammad's life written down and compiled after His death)
shura	Advisory council

taliban	(sg. *talib*); Literally "those who seek [knowledge]," usually referring to students in *madrasas*. Also refers to a political movement, the Taliban, which ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001
'ulama	(sg. *'alim*); Group of educated religious leaders with the authority to make decisions on behalf of a community

1   Introduction

As of 2009, Afghan security forces and their international allies are faced with a powerful insurgency which poses a serious threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan. Within the NATO alliance, much attention has been devoted to the discussion of how to best defeat the insurgency, or at least to keep the level of violence to a "manageable" level. Less attention has been given to trying to understand *who* the insurgents are, and what they are fighting for. Even finding a proper name for the insurgents has proven difficult. In the media, the insurgents are often lumped together as "al-Qaida and Taliban," while coalition forces tend to use acronyms such as OMF (Other Military Forces), neither of which is very clarifying. Among ISAF soldiers on the ground, the enemy may be more bluntly referred to as "whoever is shooting at us."[1] The image of who the insurgents are seems indeed to be blurred. This is to some extent justified: Due to the great diversity of Afghanistan's geography and demography, the nature of the insurgency can vary greatly from one region to the next, or even from one village to the other.

On the other hand, few would describe the insurgency in Afghanistan as merely a collection of small, locally based militias with no overall leadership or direction. And neither do the insurgents themselves: When reading insurgents' own statements and publications, we see that the militants have definite ideas of who they are and how they relate to other actors on the arena. For propaganda purposes, the insurgents may frequently describe themselves as part of a single, popular Afghan movement. On the other hand, insurgents also see themselves as belonging to specific commanders or groups, often with historical roots going back to the 1970s or 1980s. Several of today's insurgent leaders, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani, rose to fame during the 1980's war against the Soviet Union, while others, such as Mullah Muhammad Omar, appeared on the stage in the chaotic first half of the 1990s, when the country was ravaged by civil war. Today, Mullah Omar's Taliban movement describes itself as a resistance movement with a leadership, an organization structure, a defined goal and strategy, and even an official "code of conduct" for its members.[2] It allies itself with other groups fighting for the same cause, but from time to time it also disavows groups and commanders who do not comply with the Taliban's tactical or strategic goals. Therefore, the Taliban's definition of themselves may at times differ considerably from the mass media's often ambiguous use of the label "Taliban." While the Islamic Emirate's own propaganda most certainly seeks to exaggerate the movement's own strength and cohesion, the group's statements and publications may nevertheless give valuable insight into who these insurgent leaders are, or at least how they want to portray themselves to the outside world.

The primary aim of this report is to examine the Taliban's official publications and statements in order to get a better understanding of who the "Taliban" are, seen from the insurgents' own perspective. The study differs from previous studies of the Taliban's propaganda, because it does

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[1] The author's conversation with ISAF soldiers in Afghanistan, March-April 2008.
[2] "Taliban issues code of conduct," *Al-Jazeera English*, 27 July 2009,
http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/07/20097278348124813.html (accessed 3 Dec 2009).

not merely focus on analysing the Taliban's media and communications strategy.[3] Instead, it takes a broader approach, focusing on understanding the Taliban leadership's ideology, identity and self-perception, as well as discussing their role in the insurgency as a whole. Few studies of this kind currently exist.

One reason for this may be that the Taliban tend to be regarded as religious fanatics or fundamentalists who have no "ideology" in the real sense of the word. Regardless of how one wants to define "ideology," this is an unfortunate assumption because it conveys the impression that the Taliban is a static and unchangeable actor, whose policies are shaped by a peculiar interpretation of religious texts and tribal customs, rather than by current events. Another reason why there is a lack of studies of this kind may be that the Taliban's senior leadership (the so-called "Quetta Shura," believed to be located in or near the Pakistani city of Quetta) and their ideological-political statements are not regarded an important driving factor for the insurgency.

On the other hand there is little doubt that the Taliban's senior leadership is a force that has to be taken seriously. This has been signified, for example, by the Karzai government's various attempts at reaching out to the movement's senior leaders. In November 2008, President Karzai even offered Mullah Omar protection, should he decide to enter into talks with the government.[4] General Stanley McChrystal, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has also acknowledged the importance of Taliban's Pakistan-based leadership. In an assessment of the war in Afghanistan dated 30 August 2009, he stated that most insurgents are "directed by a small number of Afghan senior leaders based in Pakistan" and that the "Quetta Shura Taliban" is the most threatening insurgent group in Afghanistan.[5] UK officials have also called for a strategy which includes "strategic reconciliation" with the Quetta Shura, according to an internal memo leaked to the BBC in November 2009.[6] Needless to say, any such effort should be based on an accurate understanding of the Taliban leadership's attitudes, worldview, and role in the insurgency as a whole.

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[3] For previous studies on Taliban's propaganda, see "Taliban propaganda: Winning the war of words?" in *Asia Report No.158* (Kabul/Brüssels: International Crisis Group, 2008); Tim Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities: How well is the Afghan insurgency communicating and what is it saying?" Sipri Project Paper (June 2007), www.sipri.org/research/conflict/publications/foxley (accessed 3 Des 2009); and Thomas H. Johnson, "The Taliban insurgency and an analysis of *shabnamah* (night letters)," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, No.3 (Sept 2007): 317–344; see also (in Norwegian) Ola Bøe-Hansen, "Kampen om den mest uimotståelige historien: Hva kjennetegner Talibans propaganda og med hvilke kontrapropagandatiltak kan ISAF bekjempe den?" (Master's Thesis, Forsvarets stabsskole, spring 2009).

[4] John F. Burns, "Karzai offers safe passage to Taliban leader if he agrees to talks," *New York Times*, 16 Nov 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/11/17/world/asia/17afghan.html (accessed 15 Dec 2008). See also "Afghan president offers Taliban a role in governing country," *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 Oct 2008, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/3179534/Afghan-president-offers-Taliban-a-role-in-governing-country.html (accessed 15 Dec 2008), "Petraeus sees value in talking to Taliban," *Reuters*, 8 Oct 2008, www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE497AIT20081008 (accessed 15 Dec 2008).

[5] The other major insurgent groups described in the report are the 'Haqqani Network' and 'Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin'. Stanley A. McChrystal, "Commander's initial assessment," ISAF HQ, Kabul, Afghanistan, 30 Aug 2009, accessed via http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf?hpid=topnews (accessed 3 Dec 2009): 2-5 and 2-6.

[6] "UK 'backs Taliban reintegration'," *BBC News*, 13 Nov 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8357972.stm (accessed 3 Dec 2009).

A clarification of the term "Taliban" is needed. *Taliban* (sg. *talib*) literally means "those who seek," and generally refers to students in the religious seminaries, or *madrasas*, that are scattered across Afghanistan and Pakistan.[7] In its literal meaning, the word *taliban* has no connotations of militancy or political ambition. However, the name "Taliban" also refers to a political movement which emerged in Kandahar in 1994, and which ruled Afghanistan in 1996–2001 under the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Omar. Today, the word "Taliban" is used in a wide variety of meanings. In the media, "Taliban" is often used to refer to Pashtun insurgents in general, or as a generic term for all anti-government militias in the area. (Sometimes, these also include Pakistani militant groups operating under the umbrella organization Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and referred to as the "Pakistani Taliban.") This hides the fact that the insurgent movement in Afghanistan in reality is complex, consisting of a number of different actors and allies, rather than being a uniform organization.

In this report, the name "Taliban" has been used as a synonym to the name "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA)," and refers to the insurgent organization which is led by Mullah Muhammad Omar and his Supreme Council. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was the official name of the regime which ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, and it has continued to be used as the official name of Mullah Omar's organization after 2001. The IEA itself announced in 2009 that it prefers to be called the "Islamic Emirate" rather than "Taliban," in order to differ itself from elements of the insurgency that it does not want to be associated with (in particular the "Pakistani Taliban" movement based in the tribal areas of Pakistan). In this report, "Taliban" and "IEA" has been used interchangeably.

1.1   Research design and sources

Theoretical works on insurgency and counter-insurgency (COIN) focus on identifying the nature of insurgencies, their strengths and weaknesses, and come up with methods on how to best defeat them. This report is not a traditional case-study of the insurgency in Afghanistan, and will therefore make few references to this type of literature.[8] Instead, the study needs a framework for analysing ideology and self-perceptions. The U.S. Army's most recent COIN manual mentions "ideology and narrative" as one of six dynamics that shape an insurgency, and that countering a group's ideology should be part of the overall COIN effort.[9] It defines ideology as "systematic thought about the world" while the narrative (or "framing," in social movement theory) refers to the mechanism through which ideology is expressed and absorbed by followers. However, the COIN literature provides little detail on how to identify and counter insurgent ideologies in practice.

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[7] For a study on the connection between Pakistani *madrasas* and militancy, see Qandeel Siddique, "Weapons of mass instruction? A preliminary exploration of the link between madrassas in Pakistan and militancy," FFI-Report No. 2008/02326, http://www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00128/Weapons_of_Mass_Ins_128057a.pdf   (accessed 17 Dec 2009).

[8] See, for example, Seth G, Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," RAND Counterinsurgency study Vol. 4 (2008), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG595.pdf (accessed 21 Dec 2009).

[9] The six dynamics were: 1) Leadership, 2) objectives, 3) ideology and narrative, 4) Environment and geography, 5) External support and sanctuaries, 6) Phasing and timing. *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Department of the Army, Dec 2006): 1-13–1-15.

A more practical tool for analysing and comparing ideologies has been developed by John Wilson, who defines ideology as "a set of beliefs about the social world and how it operates, containing statements about the rightness of certain social arrangements and what action would be undertaken in light of those statements."[10] Ideology is described as having three elements: *diagnosis* (how things got to be how they are), *prognosis* (what should be done and what the consequences will be), and *rationale* (who should do it and why).[11]

Wilson's framework has been used here as a starting point for the discussion of the Taliban leadership's worldview. However, this framework is rather general, and does not illustrate very well the difference between the IEA's attitudes, and that of other insurgent groups in Afghanistan. In order to explain the IEA's worldview and attitudes, a set of more specific questions have therefore been added, including:

- How does the IEA describe itself?
- How does the IEA describe its allies?
- Who does the IEA describe as its main enemies and why?
- What is the IEA's attitude towards negotiations and power-sharing?

Before discussing these questions, a thorough background chapter is provided which sums up what we know about the insurgency in Afghanistan today, including its organizational structure, major insurgent groups, recruitment patterns, military and media strategy, and sources of financing. This chapter is mainly based on secondary sources. Thereafter follows a chapter on the Taliban leadership, which also discusses the role of the Taliban leaders in the insurgency as a whole. The third part of the study is concerned with the Taliban's ideology, identity and attitudes as expressed through their official communications. It is based on a qualitative analysis of primary source material. Two types of source material were collected: 1) Official statements and publications by the IEA (i.e. statements and publications issued in the name of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" and its various spokesmen and committees), and 2) interviews with high-ranking Taliban members.[12] The selection is based on the IEA's Arabic- and English-language statements and publications which are distributed via the Internet and international media.

It should be noted that the selection of primary source material is not representative of the IEA's communications as a whole. As described in more detail in Chapter 3, the IEA utilizes a range of media platforms and languages to distribute its message to different audiences. For example, the IEA produces a large amount of propaganda in the local language Pashto, which has not been

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[10] John Wilson, *Introduction to social movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[11] Ibid.
[12] A "high-ranking Taliban leader" is defined here as a person who is described as such by the Islamic Emirate's own propaganda. It should be stressed that it does not necessarily reflect the real power structures within the IEA. For example, Mullah Baradir, Mullah Dadullah and Jalaluddin Haqqani have all been portrayed by the IEA's propaganda as high-ranking leaders in the organization, but they have (or had) different types of relationships with the Quetta shura.

considered in this report.[13] The IEA's Arabic- and English- language propaganda mainly reflects how the IEA wants to portray itself to and interact with the wider Muslim world and the West, but does not necessarily reflect how the IEA mobilizes support on a local level in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the selected material was found to be sufficient for the purposes of this study, since the overall aim is not to analyze the communication strategy of the IEA or its ability to mobilize the local population, but rather, to answer general questions about the IEA's ideology and self-perception.

2   Background

In order to understand current developments in Afghanistan, a brief summary of the history of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement is warranted, as well as an overview of developments in the country after 2001.[14]

2.1   Islamist movements in Afghanistan

The foundation for modern-day Afghanistan was laid by the Pashtun emperor Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1747. The country's borders, as we know them today, were finalized by the British and Russian empires at the end of the 19th century, when Afghanistan functioned as a buffer state between the two great powers. Afghanistan gained full independence from the British empire in 1919 and remained a kingdom until 1973, when it was transformed into a republic after a bloodless coup by the king Zahir Shah's brother-in-law, Muhammad Daoud. A new coup in 1978 ensured that the Afghan communist party PDPA came to power. Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in 1979 in order to support the faltering communist regime, and occupied the country until they were forced to withdraw in 1989. The withdrawal was partly a result of fierce popular resistance among the Afghans, primarily by rebels known as the *mujahidin*, who were trained and supported by a number of external actors including Pakistan, the United States and Saudi Arabia. In 1992, a coalition of *mujahidin* parties led by Burhanuddin Rabbani came to power in Kabul, but was unable to stabilize the country due to severe infighting and civil war. In 1996, a conservative Islamist movement known as the Taliban took control over Kabul and remained in power until they were ousted by the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Many of the Taliban's leaders had fought with the *mujahidin* in the 1980s, but the Taliban did not emerge as a separate political force until about 1994.

In some ways the Taliban's rise to power in 1994–96 represented something new, since it was the first time an Islamist movement had been able to control a substantial portion of Afghanistan's territory. On the other hand, the movement was not without precedents. Islamist-inspired anti-

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[13] See, for example, the IEA's homepage *Shahamat*, http://www.shahamat1.org/ (accessed 14 Dec 2009).

[14] For a general history of Afghanistan, see for example, Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution unending: Afghanistan: 1979 to the present* (London: Hurst & Company, 2005), Barnett Rubin, *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002). For studies on the Taliban movement, see for example, Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, oil and the new great game in Central Asia* (London: Tauris Publ., 2000), S. Iftikhar Murshed, *Afghanistan: The Taliban years* (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2006), Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, religion and the new order in Afghanistan* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

government opposition has a long history in Afghanistan. At times, the opposition has been initiated by conservative tribal leaders, and at other times, by charismatic religious figures known as *pirs* or *mullahs*.[15] These religious figures were normally not bound by the tribal structures, and were therefore able to rally large amounts of tribesmen to *jihad* against whoever they perceived as enemies of Islam. In the Pashtun border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, such uprisings were dubbed "mad mullah movements" by the British colonial administration.[16] The Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar, has frequently been compared to the charismatic mullahs of the 19th and early 20th century, such as Mullah Hadda (who started the Great Pashtun Revolt of 1897) and the Fakir of Ipi (who led a guerrilla war against British India in the 1930s and 1940s).[17] However, while it may be tempting to label the eccentric Taliban leader a "mad mullah," it is important to point out that the Taliban phenomenon was more than simply another village uprising that gathered momentum due to Pakistani support. The rise of the Taliban as a political organization in the 1990s must be seen as a result of the great changes that Afghanistan and the rest of the region underwent during the latter part of the 20th century.

Islamist political movements did not become a major force in Afghanistan until the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s where large groups of *mujahidin* were equipped and trained by foreign powers, in order to counter the threat of Soviet communism. In 1992, a coalition of these *mujahidin* parties came to power in Kabul and declared Afghanistan an Islamic state, but never managed to implement it in a systematic manner due to civil war and in-fighting. It was in this context that the Taliban movement rose to prominence in 1994–96. Due to variations between the various *mujahidin* factions, as well as within the Taliban, it is hard to make any generalizations about their differences. For the sake of simplification we can say that *mujahidin* leaders such as Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were Islamist intellectuals with secular university degrees, who had gotten their inspiration from urban Islamist movements in the Middle East. The Taliban's leaders, on the other hand, were more often of rural background and had a traditional Islamic education, often from madrasas in Afghanistan or Pakistan. But the distinction between *mujahidin* and Taliban is by no means clear: In the 1980s, before "Taliban" existed as a separate political movement, many religious students fought with the various *mujahidin* parties against the Soviet occupation. Mullah Omar himself, and about half of those who were to become the Taliban leadership, fought under the Islamic Revolution Movement of Afghanistan (*harakat-e enqelab-e islami-ye afghanistan*) led by Mullah Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi.[18] For foot soldiers of the resistance, the ideological differences between various fighting groups was probably of less importance since they were all fighting for the same overall goal, namely to

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[15] A *pir* is a "holy man" in Sufi tradition while a *mullah*, in the Afghan context, is a person who is responsible for a village's religious affairs. A *mullah* typically has less religious education than an *'alim* (pl: *'ulama*), but the word *'ulama* also refers generally to the body of religious men in an area; on a local level it can refer to a group of mullahs. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No sign until the burst of fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 54.

[16] Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis*, Winter 2007: 79.

[17] Ibid.: 53.

[18] Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi, *The Taliban and the crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 28–29.

expel a foreign occupier. The same can perhaps be said of the Afghan insurgency today, which will be discussed in more detail later.

2.2 The rise of the Taliban

Popular stories tell us that the Taliban movement came into being in 1994, after a warlord in Kandahar province had kidnapped and molested two local girls. Mullah Omar, then a local village mullah, gathered a group of religious students, went to the commander and freed the girls. The story has several variations: Some versions tell that it was a young boy that was kidnapped; others add that the Taliban killed the warlord and hung his corpse on the cannon of a Soviet tank. Whatever the details, it is commonly acknowledged that the Taliban movement started as a local reaction to the widespread anarchy and lawlessness in the country. In 1994, Afghanistan had already gone through a ten-year long struggle against Soviet occupation, followed by five years of devastating civil war. Due to the large amounts of arms and other support given to the *mujahidin* in the 1980s, the country's population was armed to the teeth by the time of the Soviet withdrawal. While society previously had been based on tribal laws and customs, the long struggle against Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil war had led to a fragmented society, where power was no longer based on tribal heritage, but on military muscle. Thus, the 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of a new phenomenon in Afghanistan, namely that of warlordism. It resulted in a period of brutal suppression of the population, corruption, anarchy and lawlessness. It was this society that the Taliban movement set out to reform, by calling for a return to a "pure" Islamic society governed by a strict interpretation of *Sharia*, or Islamic law.

The Taliban movement quickly increased in strength, and came to control 90 per cent of the country in less than five years. The research literature usually points to two main explanations for the Taliban's rapid rise to power: The fragmented nature of Afghan society, and the external support it received from Pakistan and other foreign actors. Thus, the literature tends to downplay or ignore the role played by the Taliban themselves. However, other researchers have argued that the Taliban's rise to power cannot be explained by external factors alone. In a recent article, Sinno argues that the Taliban's rapid rise to power was due to the Taliban's own skills and efforts at assimilating or sidelining rival Pashtun leaders. This would explain why the Taliban managed to take control over large portions of Afghanistan so quickly while Hekmatyar, a Pashtun warlord who received far more foreign support than the Taliban, never managed to extend his power outside a small area of eastern Afghanistan.[19] On the other hand, it is unlikely that the Taliban would have achieved what it did, had it not been for the specific historical circumstances and the support from outside actors, in particular the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI (Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence). There is probably more research to be done in the field of understanding the internal dynamics of the Taliban movement of the 1990s.

2.3 Overview of developments 2001–2009

While the Taliban managed to bring some degree of security and stability to Afghanistan, running a state was a far more complex task than they had probably envisioned. By 2001, the Taliban had

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[19] Abdulkader Sinno, "Explaining the Taliban's ability to mobilize the Pashtuns," in *The Taliban and the crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

lost much of its initial support among the Afghan population, and had also seriously fallen out with the international community. The Taliban government was criticised for numerous human rights violations, tolerance of poppy cultivation and for providing sanctuary to international terrorists. The most contentious issue between the Taliban and the United States, at least from 1998 onwards, was the Taliban's refusal to hand over or expel the Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, who had issued threats against the U.S. on numerous occasions, and whose al-Qaida network was believed to have carried out the bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the bombing of the U.S. warship USS Cole in Yemen in 2000.

After the attacks on New York and Pentagon on 11 September 2001, the U.S. decided to retaliate massively against the Taliban regime, which continued to refuse to hand over Osama bin Laden. The U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan started on 7 October 2001, and by December the same year, the Taliban had left their last stronghold, the southern city of Kandahar. However, a large part of the Taliban's and al-Qaida's leaders, including Mullah Omar and bin Laden, managed to escape to Pakistan. Meanwhile, a conference was held under UN auspices in Bonn, Germany in the beginning of December 2001 to lay the foundation for a new government to be installed in Kabul. Under the Bonn Agreement, the Pashtun politician Hamid Karzai was appointed chair of a new transitional government in Afghanistan. All of Afghanistan's major ethnic groups were represented in the new interim government. Members of the ousted Taliban regime, however, were not invited to the Bonn conference. The former king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, returned to Afghanistan from his exile in Rome in 2002 and was given the honorary title of "father of the nation," but with no political powers (the ageing king passed away in 2007, and the title "father of the nation" disappeared with him). In 2004 and 2005, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai was elected president of Afghanistan with 55 per cent of the votes, a clear margin from the other candidates. In 2009, new presidential elections were held in which President Karzai was again declared the winner amid massive allegations of election fraud.

Since 2001, international coalition forces have been present in Afghanistan to assist in the reconstruction and stabilization of the country. They consist of an American-led force, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and a UN-sanctioned force, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). OEF's main task is to conduct counter-terrorism operations, mainly targeting al-Qaida and Taliban leaders, while the ISAF's initial mandate was limited to providing security in and around Kabul. It was led by a British commander, and command of the force rotated on a 6-month basis. Later, the ISAF mission expanded greatly in both size and scope. In August 2003, the ISAF was transferred to NATO command. In October the same year a UN resolution was passed which extended the ISAF's mandate to include other parts of Afghanistan as well. In 2006, the ISAF expanded its operations to southern and eastern Afghanistan, taking over responsibility for these regions from OEF forces. The OEF, however, continued to conduct small-scale operations targeting Taliban and al-Qaida leaders independently of the ISAF operation. This was to change in the autumn of 2009, when changes in the upper command structure of ISAF brought

all U.S. forces in Afghanistan under ISAF command.[20] As of 1 February 2010, the ISAF mission comprised more than 85,000 troops from 43 countries, including some 47,000 troops from the United States.[21]

After the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005, there was general optimism in the mass media about the future of Afghanistan. In early 2006, Afghan and American leaders talked about the Taliban as "defeated" and "no longer able to fight large battles."[22] However, this mood changed significantly during 2006, after a series of heavy clashes with insurgents. Giustozzi has argued that the upsurge in 2006 was not a sudden new development, but was a continuation of a military build-up on part of the insurgents that had started already back in 2002–2003. This brings us to the topic for the next chapter, which is concerned with the nature of the Afghan insurgency.

3   The nature of the insurgency

This chapter is based mainly on secondary literature and summarizes what we know about the Afghan insurgency post-2001. How did the insurgency start and how did it develop? How do the insurgents recruit? How do they spread their message? And what are the main financing and support networks? First of all, however, the chapter will discuss a fundamental, yet contentious question: Who are the insurgents?

3.1   Who are the insurgents?

In order to describe the nature of the Afghan insurgency, it is essential to say something about how it is comprised. Most of the research literature agrees that the insurgent movement can be divided into several distinguishable groups: The Taliban movement/Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan led by Mullah Omar; the Haqqani network led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his sons; the Hizb-e-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, foreign fighters connected to the al-Qaida network, and so forth.[23] This would also correspond to how the insurgents often describe themselves. In reality, however, and especially on a local level, it is often hard to distinguish between the various insurgent groups, especially when they all seem to be fighting for the same cause. Dividing insurgents into groups may in some cases seem artificial, and does not describe the dynamics of the insurgent movement very well. Another approach, which is especially useful for counter-insurgency purposes, is to divide the insurgent movement into "layers" based on the individual insurgents' motivation for fighting. Using this approach, the literature talks about

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[20] The current commander of ISAF (COMISAF), a four-star U.S. general, is dual-hatted and serves as both Commander of ISAF and Commander of US Forces in Afghanistan (COM USFOR-A). "ISAF command structure," *Internetional Security Assistance Force Homepage*, 12 Oct 2009, http://www.nato.int/isaf/structure/comstruc/index.html (accessed 5 Feb 2010).

[21] "International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army strength & laydown," *Internetional Security Assistance Force Homepage*, 1 Feb 2010, http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf (accessed 5 Feb 2010).

[22] Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop: The neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2007), 1.

[23] Some researchers, such as Giustozzi, prefer the label "neo-Taliban" in order to distinguish present-day Taliban from the organization that formed the Taliban government in the 1990s.

"hard-core" vs. "non-core" insurgents, "first-tier" vs. "second-tier" and "third-tier" Taliban, and the like. In one end of the scale are those motivated by ideology and religion alone, and on the other end are those fighting for money or other pragmatic reasons. In the following we will outline both these approaches.

3.1.1   Main insurgent groups and leaders

Below is a description of the groups and commanders most often mentioned in the literature and media: The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), the "Haqqani network" Hizb-e-Islami and al-Qaida.

The largest and most influential insurgent group in Afghanistan is the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), believed to be led by Mullah Muhammad Omar (born ca 1959). It was formed by remnants of the Taliban regime that was ousted in 2001, but does not only consist of *taliban* (religious students) in the strict sense of the word. The IEA today is probably best described as a network of mainly Pashtun militant groups and commanders, who follow, to some extent or other, directions from a senior leadership believed to be based in Pakistan. It is said to have several leadership *shuras* (advisory councils) but the most important one is the so-called "Quetta Shura" based in or near the city of Quetta, the provincial capital of Baluchistan province in western Pakistan.[24] The city lies a short distance from Pakistan's border with Kandahar province of Afghanistan. Other leadership *shuras* associated with the IEA are said to be based in Peshawar (in the North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan) and Waziristan (in FATA).[25] Estimates of the IEA's size and strength vary greatly, depending of course on how one defines the IEA. However, the general trend is that the estimated number of fighters associated with the IEA has increased since 2006, coupled with a general rise in the levels of insurgent violence (see Chapter 3.2). In November 2006, a UN report estimated the number of armed insurgents in Mullah Omar's movement to be around 4,000–5,000.[26] In a study published in 2008, Giustozzi puts the estimate somewhat higher, to between 6,000–10,000 active fighters at any given time.[27] In 2009, a U.S. intelligence report estimated that the number of "full-time Taliban-led insurgents" had risen to 25,000, and that the number had increased with 5,000 over the last year only.[28] The exact number

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[24] Mukhtar A. Khan, "Quetta: The headquarters of the Afghan Taliban," *CTC Sentinel* 2, no.5 (May 2009): 4–6.

[25] Some sources say that the "Peshawar shura" is really based in Waziristan, while others maintain that the Peshawar shura and the Waziristan shura are two separate councils. See, for example, Giustiozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 83; Peter Bergen, "Peter Bergen's Afghanistan testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs," 15 Feb 2007, http://www.newamerica.net/publications/resources/2007/peter_bergens_afghanistan_testimony_before_the_house_committee_on_foreign_affairs (accessed 15 Dec 2009).

[26] UN Security Council, "Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team appointed pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1526 (2004) and 1617 (2005) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities", 7 nov 2006, http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/622/70/PDF/N0662270.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 15 Oct 2007).

[27] See Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 34–37.

[28] "Taliban strength nears military proportion," *Seattle Times*, 15 Oct 2009, http://www.military.com/news/article/taliban-strength-nears-military-proportion.html?col=1186032310810 (accessed 14 Dec 2009).

of "full-time" IEA fighters at any given time is hard to verify, but an overall increase in numbers over the past years seems likely, due to the geographical spread of IEA's campaign since 2005. The IEA's leadership and organization will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

The Haqqani network is formally led by Jalaluddin Haqqani (born ca 1950), a Pashtun veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war who later became a minister in the Taliban government. In the 1980s, Haqqani led a guerrilla campaign against Soviet forces in south-eastern Afghanistan.[29] After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Haqqani's forces continued to fight against the Communist regime of President Najibullah, and managed to capture the city of Khost in 1991. He joined the Taliban government in 1996 where he served as minister for tribal affairs. After the fall of the Taliban regime, Haqqani fled to his old base in Waziristan and decided to join the insurgency. His current position in the IEA is unclear, but he is frequently described as an integrated part of Mullah Omar's organization, rather than just an ally.[30] He has publically sworn allegiance to Mullah Omar, and his network is suspected of carrying out numerous operations in the IEA's name, including several high-profile attacks in Kabul. Others, however, would describe the Haqqanis as only "nominally subordinated" Mullah Omar.[31] Haqqani's strongholds are in south-eastern Afghanistan and across the border in neighbouring Waziristan. Haqqani himself is born in Khost, which makes him distinct from most of the IEA's senior leaders, who originate from Kandahar province.[32] While Haqqani has been featured in the IEA's propaganda on several occasions, he and his sons do not issue their own statements through the IEA's official channels, but rather, through own media platforms or through giving interviews to the press.[33] Haqqani is said to mainly be recruiting his fighters from Deobandi madrasas and mosques in the Waziristan area.[34] Due to Haqqani's age and apparent bad health, it is believed that the network today is run by his sons, in particular Sirajuddin Haqqani, who appeared on a U.S. list of most wanted Taliban and al-Qaida leaders in 2007.[35] In March 2008, Jalaluddin Haqqani appeared in a video speech for the first time in long, countering rumours of his death. In the speech, he confirmed his allegiance to Mullah Omar and warned of a coming spring offensive of the IEA.[36]

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[29] Also back then, Jalaluddin Haqqani led the campaign from a base in Waziristan, according to "Insurgency in the East: The Taliban's military strategy for 2008", *Kabul Direct* 2, no.7 (July 2008): 4.

[30] According to Giustozzi, Jalaluddin Haqqani was named Taliban's "general commander" in 2006, but his real role within the network is hard to verify. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 92.

[31] Fotini, Christina and Michael Semple, "Flipping the Taliban", *Foreign Affairs* 88, no.4 (July/Aug 2009): 34–45.

[32] Although they are all ethnic Pashtuns, the "Kandahar Pashtuns" generally see themselves as distinct from the Pashtuns of the Eastern Afghan provinces.

[33] See, for example, "Video» Afghanistan: Veteran mujahadeen defies west," *Adnkronos International*, undated, http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Video/?vid=1.0.2036914523 (accessed 17 Aug 2009); "Interview with Taliban commander Sirajuddin Haqqani," *NEFA Foundation*, 18 Aug 2008, http://www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[34] "Insurgency in the East: The Taliban's military strategy for 2008," *Kabul Direct* 2, no.7 (July 2008): 5.

[35] "US issues Afghan most wanted list," *BBC News*, 1 Oct 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7021876.stm (accessed 20 May 2009).

[36] Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban welcome back an old friend," *Asia Times*, 4 Apr 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JD04Df02.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009); "Video» Afghanistan: Veteran mujahadeen defies west," *Adnkronos International*, undated, http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Video/?vid=1.0.2036914523 (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (born 1947) is a Pashtun from the Kunduz province of northern Afghanistan. He studied engineering at Kabul University and founded Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) in 1975, modelled after the Muslim Brotherhood movements in the Middle East and revolutionary Islamists in Iran.[37] HIG became one of the seven main parties to receive Pakistani backing during the Afghan-Soviet war. However, after the Soviet withdrawal, Hekmatyar's party became entangled in the Afghan civil war, and became gradually weakened. When the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, Hekmatyar allegedly refused to make a peace deal and fled instead into exile in Iran.[38] He returned to Afghanistan in late 2001 or in 2002[39], and started carrying out attacks against the coalition forces, in particular in north-eastern Afghanistan. The group's current stronghold is in the Bajaur Agency of FATA and Kunar and Nuristan in Afghanistan.[40] Hekmatyar's party also runs madrasas and welfare services in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan.[41] There have been various rumours of contact between the IEA and HIG, but given the historic enmity between the two, the alliance is likely to be pragmatic at best.[42] As opposed to Haqqani, Hekmatyar has not publicly sworn allegiance to Mullah Omar.[43] According to a HIG spokesperson, no cooperation between Hekmatyar and the IEA is taking place at the leadership level, but tactical cooperation may take place on lower levels.[44] Hekmatyar has also been rumoured to consider talks with the Afghan government. However, he stated in 2007 that all foreign troops must withdraw from the country first, thus following the same official line as the IEA. HIG has its own media platforms, including magazines and an official web page.[45] There have been speculations that former Hizb-e-Islami cadre, who now hold a number of positions in the current Afghan government, may still have links with Hekmatyar, but the implications of this are so far unclear. A United States Institute of Peace report from 2008 stated about former Hizb-e-Islami members that "although they have broken off from the group and separated themselves from its current policy of fighting coalition forces, they represent potentially important points of contact between the government and Hekmatyar."[46]

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[37] "Assessing Hizb Islami threats: Question to Qazi Amin Waqad", *Kabul Direct* 1, no.1 (Oct 2007): 9.

[38] Ibid., 8.

[39] Ibid., 11.

[40] Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai,, "Thwarting Afghanistan's insurgency", Special Report 212, *United States Institute of Peace* (Sept 2008): 8.

[41] "Assessing Hizb Islami threats: Question to Qazi Amin Waqad", *Kabul Direct* 1, no.1 (Oct 2007): 8.

[42] A former leader of Hizb-e-Islami, Qazi Mohammad Amin Waqad, put it like this: "Today, the only basis of any alliance is that they are both opposed to the Karzai administration. Aside from that, they have nothing in common – not their ideology, not their interpretation of Islam, not their vision, or their politics." "Assessing Hizb Islami threats: Question to Qazi Amin Waqad," *Kabul Direct* 1, no.1 (Oct 2007): 9, See also "Taliban propaganda," 31.

[43] "South Asia and Afghanistan", *Strategic Survey* 108, no.1 (2008): 298.

[44] Jamshed Ahmad, "Afghanistan: Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami: Differences despite common target," *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, 2007, http://san-pips.com/print.php?id=106 (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[45] The web page, www.shahadatnews.com , was down at the time of writing, but is referred to in "Taliban propaganda," 31.

[46] A former leader of Hizb-e-Islami, Qazi Mohammad Amin Waqad, stated in an interview in 2007: "Many of the old Hizbe Isalmi [sic] commanders are still members of the group's governing council. Some are in Afghanistan, working with the Karzai government. Many, hold high-level positions in the Karzai administration." However, he also added later that these officials "only empower their own relations." "Assessing Hizb Islami threats: Question to Qazi Amin Waqad", *Kabul Direct* 1, no.1 (Oct 2007): 8, 10;

A fourth group of insurgents in Afghanistan with a distinct group identity is foreign fighters associated with the al-Qaida network. Al-Qaida members have been present in Afghanistan since the Soviet-Afghan war, and are likely to have long-standing ties to several of the current players in the Afghan insurgency.[47] During the last half of the 1990s, al-Qaida also consolidated its ties with the Taliban regime, although the relationship seems to have had its ups and downs. After 2001, a large number of al-Qaida cadre escaped to the tribal areas of Pakistan, which is regarded al-Qaida's main stronghold today. Al-Qaida's stated purpose in the area is to help bringing the Taliban regime back to power in Afghanistan. However, al-Qaida also uses its base in the Pakistani tribal areas to plan, support and prepare for terrorist operations outside Afghanistan's borders, most recently against Western targets in Pakistan. An overwhelming majority of foiled al-Qaida operations in the West over the past two decades have been tracked, in one way or another, to al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan or Pakistan.[48]

Al-Qaida's activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan are led by the Egyptian Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (aka Sheikh Saeed al-Masri), who was formally appointed to this position in May 2007. His organization is referred to in al-Qaida's official propaganda as "al-Qaida in the Land of Khurasan" (*qa'idat al-jihad fi bilad khurasan*), although it is unclear whether it has an organizational structure separate from that of the al-Qaida leadership. Al-Yazid was among the founding members of al-Qaida in 1988, and appears to have been an intimate member of bin Laden's inner circle since then. He accompanied bin Laden to Sudan in the 1990s, and has been in charge of financial matters on behalf of the al-Qaida network.[49] Al-Yazid has been described as a diplomatic person who has good relations among local militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan. His appointment as leader of al-Qaida in Afghanistan in 2007 can be seen as an effort on al-Qaida's part to strengthen its ties with local insurgents.[50]

The number of al-Qaida fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan today is small (perhaps in the hundreds[51]), which suggests that they have little influence on actual operations carried out in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Arab fighters seem to provide local insurgents with key resources such as strategic advice, training and weapons-making, and material and financial support.[52] It

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Stanekzai, "Thwarting Afghanistan's insurgency", Special Report 212, *United States Institute of Peace* (Sept 2008): 8.

[47] These include Jalaluddin Haqqani and Yunus Khalis, who died in 2007 but whose son is now believed to be fighting under Taliban's banner in Nangarhar province.

[48] Peter Bergen, "The front: The Taliban-Al Qaeda merger," *The New Republic*, 19 Oct 2009, http://www.tnr.com/article/world/the-front (accessed 15 Dec 2009).

[49] "Interview with Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid," *al-Sahab*, April 2007; and "The truth of belief," *al-Sahab*, Oct 2007; *The 9/11 Commission Report*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 436.

[50] Michael Scheuer, "Al-Qaeda's new leader in Afghanistan: A profile of Abu al-Yazid," *Terrorism Focus* 4, no.21 (3 July 2007).

[51] According to *Newsweek*, the Taliban spokesman Zabibullah Mujahid has stated that al-Qaida has "more than 100 specialists, mostly Arabs, helping support Taliban forces in Afghanistan." Sami Yousafzai, Ron Moreau and Mark Hosenball, "The regathering storm," *Newsweek*, 25 Dec 2006, http://www.newsweek.com/id/44269/page/2 (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[52] According to one report, al-Qaida has provided the insurgency with "strategic communication and planning, financing, and networking opportunities." Stanekzai, "Thwarting Afghanistan's insurgency," 9. According to a UN report, foreign fighters support the Taliban as advisers, see UN Security Council, "Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team appointed pursuant to Security Council

seems likely that al-Qaida operatives have contributed to spreading new types of tactics and technologies to the Afghan battlefield, such as the tactic of suicide bombing, which was virtually unknown in Afghanistan before 2001. Occasionally, groups of foreign fighters also take part in militant activity inside Afghanistan. Especially notorious in this field was the Libyan veteran Abu al-Layth al-Libi, who was based in North Waziristan and carried out several guerrilla-type raids across the border. Some of the attacks were documented on video and distributed via the Internet. However, al-Qaida's most visible contribution to the insurgency is in the field of media and propaganda. From around 2006, al-Qaida's primary media company *al-Sahab* has produced a large number of operational films from Afghanistan, and spread them to a global audience via the Internet. Mustafa Abu al-Yazid has also issued specific appeals to the global community of Muslims to support the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan, both via *al-Sahab* and interviews with external media.[53]

3.1.2   Motivations for joining the insurgency

Another way of describing the Afghan insurgency is to identify various groups or "tiers" based on the fighters' backgrounds and motivations. This approach is mainly used to describe the local insurgent movement, which may be referred to as the "Taliban insurgency" or the "neo-Taliban," but usually includes a broad variety of anti-government militants (i.e. a broader definition than the one used in this report to describe the "Taliban"). However, it does not necessarily include foreign supporters such as the al-Qaida network.

Quoting a secret U.S./NATO/Afghan report circulated in 2006, Ahmed Rashid described the insurgency as having four components: Hard-core leaders with links to al-Qaida (driven by ideology); fighters recruited in Pakistani madrasas (driven by ideology); unemployed youth (driven by money); and disaffected tribes (driven by a variety of purposes, often stemming from local conditions).[54] In a study published in 2008, Giustozzi had a similar categorization. He leaves out the leadership of the organization and talks about the potential recruits of the insurgency as divided into four main categories, two of which are classified as "hard-core" and the two others as "non-core."

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resolutions 1526 (2004) and 1617 (2005) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities,"
7 Nov 2006, http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/622/70/PDF/N0662270.pdf?OpenElement (accessed
15 Oct 2007): 12.
[53] See, for example, "Interview with Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid 'Shaykh Saeed'," *al-Sahab* May 2007, FFI's Jihadist video database #504; "Mustafa Abu al-Yazid … the al-Qaida Organization [in Arabic]," *al-Jazeera*,
21 June 2009, transcript available: http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C8A7D29B-9DFA-414E-8A09-EB30948E2621.htm (accessed 15 Dec 2009).
[54] Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008): 367.

"Hard-core":
- madrasa students (driven by ideology)
- recruits provided by village mullahs (driven by xenophobia, personal rage due to U.S. airstrikes, etc.)

"Non-core":
- local allies (independent militias driven by a variety of motivations)
- "mercenary" elements (driven by money).[55]

In reality, the categories and motivations are of course overlapping, and needless to say, they might not apply equally or even at all to all parts of the insurgent movement. Nevertheless, this categorization serves to illustrate the great diversity of the commanders and foot soldiers that make up the insurgency, and it is especially useful for counter-insurgency purposes. If all anti-government forces in Afghanistan are lumped together as "Taliban" and countered with brute force, it may alienate the population and lead to more support for the insurgents. It is argued, therefore, that "non-core" insurgents in some cases may be better countered by using non-violent means such as negotiations, provision of security, monetary incentives, development aid and the like.[56] But identifying these "non-core" elements and choosing the proper method to deal with them is a challenging task. It requires extensive knowledge of local power structures as well as of local culture and customs.

On a more principal level there are contentious questions as well: For example, should Afghan "drug lords" who appear to have links to the insurgency, be fought with military means or not? According to the categorization above they are motivated mainly by financial gain and thus belong to the "non-core" part of the insurgency. Nevertheless, they have been regarded as so indispensable for the insurgent movement that there have been repeated calls for targeting them by military means.[57] Direct eradication of poppy fields has been regarded a controversial method because it harms Afghan farmers, but there have been calls to target mid-level traffickers and opium laboratories.[58] In the beginning the coalition was reluctant to get involved in counter-narcotics, but in 2008, NATO opened up for limited targeting of opium factories and facilities.[59] In 2009, this was taken a step further when a U.S. congressional report quoted in the New York Times defined a number of Afghan drug lords as legal military targets.[60]

In sum, the Afghan insurgency is made up of a complex network of actors with different interests. The networked structure of the insurgent movement and its heterogeneity is both a strength and weakness. For example, the Taliban leadership's ability to effectively recruit and mobilize local

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[55] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 42–43.

[56] *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Department of the Army, Dec 2006): 1–15.

[57] "Afghanistan: UN Antidrug Chief Wants NATO To Destroy Opium," *Radio Free Europe*, 12 Sept 2006, www.rferl.org/content/article/1071273.html (accessed 10 Aug 2009).

[58] "Asia," *Strategic Survey* 105, no.1 (2005): 338–339.

[59] "Nato to attack Afghan opium labs," *BBC News*, 10 Oct 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7663204.stm (accessed 10 Aug 2009).

[60] "U.S. to hunt down Afghan drug lords tied to Taliban," *New York Times*, 10 Aug 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/08/10/world/asia/10afghan.html?_r=1&hp (accessed 10 Aug 2009).

insurgent commanders by playing on local grievances has contributed to widening the scope and strength of the insurgency. However, it is also a potential weakness since these commanders, lacking the strong ideological conviction of the leadership, might easily change sides should local conditions change.

3.2 Development of the military campaign

There are different versions of how the Afghan insurgency started, but it is generally agreed that the initiative came from a narrow group of Taliban leaders who had managed to survive the U.S. invasion in 2001.[61] Initiatives probably came from local commanders and militants inside Afghanistan as well, who may have started fighting the coalition forces and the new Afghan authorities on their own, and for a variety of purposes. Nevertheless, it appears that remnants from the Taliban government were involved in organizing and coordinating an insurgency from early on. Some have argued that had former Taliban officials been offered a role in the post-war negotiations, they would perhaps not have started the insurgency. This depends, of course, what part of the "Taliban" one is referring to. Giustozzi has argued that while so-called "moderate Taliban" might have been involved in such a process,[62] the "hard-core" led by Mullah Omar started the insurgency not because they were refused a seat at the negotiation table, but because they for ideological reasons "never accepted defeat and thought it was their duty to fight on."[63] The IEA's ability to recruit and gather followers, on the other hand, could perhaps have been reduced had "moderate Taliban," or former Taliban officials willing to cooperate with the new government, been given political influence in the new Afghan state from the very beginning.

From January to September 2002, there were occasional incidents of violence, mostly concentrated in the southern and south-eastern border areas of Afghanistan, and in particular the provinces of Paktia, Paktika and Khost in the southeast, and Kunar in the East. The largest battle in this period was the battle of Shah-i-Kot (Operation Anaconda) in the first half of March 2002, which involved both local Taliban militia (fighters associated with the commander Safiur Rahman Mansoor[64]) and foreign fighters associated with al-Qaida and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. It was not looked upon as a sign of a new insurgency, but rather as a "last stance" for foreign and local fighters who had not yet withdrawn to Pakistan. In this period, there were also occasional attacks elsewhere in Afghanistan.

From September 2002, the insurgency gradually developed into a more organized campaign. Attacks slowly increased in number and in geographical distribution. New tactics were also introduced, and the attacks became slightly more sophisticated. In the beginning, attacks involved mostly small numbers of fighters and tactics were limited to rocket attacks and ambushes on U.S.

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[61] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 11.

[62] Here, "moderate Taliban" refers to officials of the Taliban government who have cooperated with the Afghan government after the U.S. invasion in 2001, such as Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil (former foreign minister), Mullah Muhammad Khaksar (former deputy interior minister), and Abdul Salaam Zaeef (former Embassador to Pakistan).

[63] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 11.

[64] Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Battle creates a new Taliban legend," *TIME Magazine*, 7 March 2002, www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,216053,00.html (accessed 11 Aug 2009).

targets, in addition to attacks on Afghan police and military. Towards the end of 2002 and in 2003 insurgents started to operate in larger units (up to 150), the use of roadside bombs increased, and operations became more frequent. A Taliban stronghold was reportedly established in the province of Zabul, which some said housed up to 1,000 fighters.[65] During 2004–2006, more strongholds were established across southern and south-eastern Afghanistan, and in 2006 reports started to emerge of insurgent activity in northern parts of the country.[66] In 2006, insurgents also stepped up their efforts in the southern provinces of Afghanistan, in particular Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand, as a reaction to the deployment of ISAF troops in the area.[67] In Kandahar province, insurgents gathered in the Arghandab district in a possible attempt to take the city of Kandahar, the second largest city of Afghanistan and a traditional Taliban stronghold. However, they suffered a setback during a massive ISAF operation known as "Operation Medusa," carried out in September that year. The IEA's leadership also suffered another setback in May 2006, when the notorious commander for Southern Afghanistan, Mullah Dadullah, was killed. In spite of this, the insurgency seemed to resume with full strength the following spring. In 2007, the insurgency continued its spread to western and northern parts of the country, and the fighting also came closer to Kabul. From late 2007, a series of high-profile attacks have been mounted inside Kabul city, including:

- 14 January 2008: An attack on the five-star Serena hotel in Kabul was carried out by four militants with small arms and suicide bombs, killing six people.
- 24 April 2008: An attempt on President Karzai's life was made during a military parade in Kabul, carried out by six militants with small arms and suicide bombs. Three people were killed.
- 7 July 2008: A suicide car bomb attack against the Indian Embassy in Kabul killed 41 people. This was the largest attack in Kabul city since 2001.
- 11 February 2009: A coordinated attack on three government buildings (the Justice Ministry, the Education Ministry and the directorate for prisons) in Kabul was carried out by eight militants with small arms and suicide bombs. Around 20 people were killed.
- 15 August 2009: A suicide car bomb attack against the NATO headquarters in central Kabul killed eight people.
- 17 September 2009: A suicide car bomb attack against an ISAF convoy in Kabul killed six Italian soldiers and at least 10 civilians.
- 8 October 2009: A suicide car bomb attack against the Indian embassy in Kabul killed at least 17 people.
- 29 October 2009: An attack on a UN guesthouse in Kabul was carried out by three gunmen. Five UN staff and three Afghans were killed.

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[65] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 3.

[66] "Asia," *Strategic Survey* 107, no.1 (2007): 366.

[67] Rubin and Rashid have argued that the escalation of the insurgency in 2006 was connected to the transfer of command from U.S. to NATO: "The summer of 2006 saw a major escalation of the insurgency, as Pakistan and the Taliban interpreted the United States' decision to transfer command of coalition forces to NATO ... as a sign of its intention to withdraw. They also saw non-U.S. troop contributors as more vulnerable to political pressure generated by casualties." Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain: Ending chaos in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2008).

Over the past few years, there have been some new trends in the insurgency that deserve mention. First of all, the capital of Kabul appears to be more often targeted with gunmen and/or suicide bombers than before. It is a disturbing development, as it indicates that militant networks have the ability to smuggle fighters and weapons even into the seemingly secure capital. Most attacks in Kabul have been directed against coalition forces, the Afghan government and certain foreign embassies. The attack on the Serena hotel in 2008 and the UN guesthouse in 2009 were exceptions to this pattern. Up until 2009, UN offices in the Afghan capital had largely been spared for direct attacks, which made the Afghan insurgency different from that in Iraq.[68] In an article published in May 2007, Williams noted that the UN appeared to be respected by the main insurgent groups in Afghanistan as a neutral partner in the conflict.[69] The attack on the UN guesthouse in Kabul in 2009 broke with this trend, but it is still too early to say whether it was a separate incident connected to the UN's involvement in the 2009 elections, or the beginning of a new strategy to step up attacks on UN personnel and installations. The IEA has repeatedly condemned the UN in their public statements (more on this in Chapter 8), but does not appear to have a specific strategy to target the UN on a massive scale. According to an IEA spokesman, the attack on the guesthouse in October 2009 came because of the UN's involvement in the Afghan elections that autumn, which the IEA sought to derail.[70]

The use of suicide bombers is another trend that deserves mention. The tactic of suicide bombing was virtually unknown in Afghanistan before 2001. The first known suicide attack to take place on Afghan soil was carried out on 9 September 2001, when the Northern Alliance commander Ahmed Shah Masoud was killed by two Arab suicide operatives posing as journalists. As the insurgency gained momentum, the use of suicide bombing also increased, and the tactic started to be employed by local insurgents as well as by foreigners. The number of attacks per year reached a peak in 2007 with 142 attacks, after which it appears to have declined (see Figure 3.1).

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[68] For example, in August 2003 the UN headquarters in Baghdad was attacked with a truck bomb which killed 22 people including the UN special representative in Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello.

[69] Brian Glyn Williams, "A report from the field: Gauging the impact of Taliban suicide bombing," *Terrorism Monitor* 5, No.10 (May 2007).

[70] "Attackers targeted UN staff," *News24*, 28 Oct 2009, http://www.news24.com/Content/World/News/1073/ddbabf613cc04d158f3e60f14af5fe7b/28-10-2009-09-45/Attackers_targeted_UN_staff (accessed 15 Dec 2009).
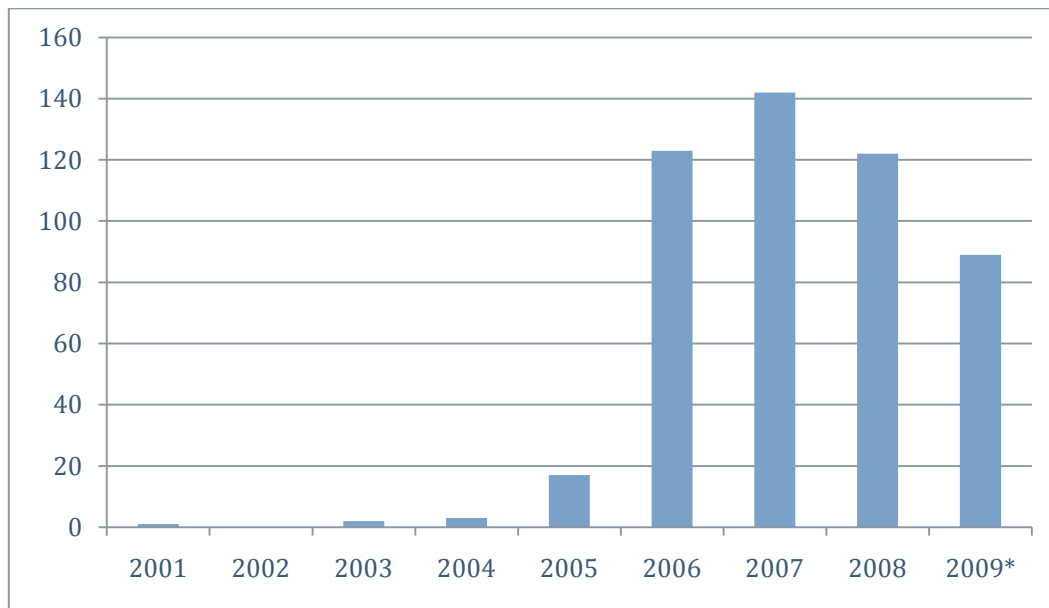
As of 25 November 2009.

Figure 3.1: Suicide attacks in Afghanistan, 2001–2009.[71]

Suicide attacks with a large number of casualties, which occurred on a few occasions in 2007 and 2008, do not appear to be a trend in Afghanistan. In fact, suicide attacks in Afghanistan have tended to result in much fewer casualties per attack than similar campaigns in Iraq and elsewhere. A study of attacks carried out in 2006 and the first half of 2007 concluded that in almost half of the cases, only the suicide attacker himself was killed.[72] There may be many reasons for this, including a lack of professionalism and motivation on part of the suicide bombers.[73] However, the avoidance of mass casualty bombings also appears to be a deliberate strategy of Taliban leaders. When suicide attacks result in large numbers of civilian casualties, IEA's spokesmen usually deny responsibility, presumably for fear of losing popular support. In 2009, the IEA issued a new "code of conduct" for its members which stated that the use of suicide bombings should be limited to high-value targets and that "the utmost effort should be made to avoid civilian casualties."[74] Another point is that few suicide attacks in Afghanistan have randomly targeted civilians or other religious sects, as was the case in the Iraqi insurgency.[75] When mass-casualty attacks do happen, they appear to have had a specific target in mind such as Afghan politicians or security chiefs.

At this point one can only speculate about the reason for the drop in suicide attacks after 2007, at a time where the overall level of insurgency-related violence increased (see Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2). It may be attributed to an improvement in local counter-terrorism efforts. It could also be

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[71] The statistics for 2001–2006 are based on Hekmat Karzai, "Suicide terrorism: The case of Afghanistan," *Security &Terrorism* 5 (March 2007): 36. The statistics for 2007–2009 are based on numbers compiled by the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS), Kabul, as of 25 Nov 2009 and collected by the author.
[72] Brian Glyn Williams, "The Taliban fedayeen: The world's worst suicide bombers?" *Terrorism Monitor* 5, No.14 (July 2007).
[73] Ibid.
[74] "Key quotes from new Taliban book," *al-Jazeera English*, 27 July 2009, http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/07/200972775236982270.html (accessed 16 Dec 2009).
[75] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 108–109.

due to a lack of will among segments of the insurgents who prefer more "classical" methods of guerrilla warfare, and directions from the Taliban leadership who do not want to alienate the local population.[76] It can also be noted that one of the most vocal supporters of suicide bombing among the IEA's commanders – Mullah Dadullah – was killed in May 2007.[77] Suicide bombing remains a controversial tactic in Afghanistan, among civilians and insurgents alike. Some IEA-affiliated insurgents endorse it as an effective tactic while others have stated that they do not use it.[78] In any case, the use of suicide bombing continues to be highly outnumbered by other types of violent attacks such as ambushes and roadside bombs (see Table 3.1).

	2006	**2007**	**2008**
Suicide attacks	118	142	122
Roadside bombs	1,931	2,615	~5,200

Table 3.1:   Suicide attacks and roadside bombs in Afghanistan, 2006–2008[79]

Overall, there is little doubt that the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. One indication of that is the rising number of coalition casualties per year. According to the web site *iCasualties.org*, the number of coalition deaths in Afghanistan have increased every year since 2005, and reached a preliminary peak in 2009 with 491 deaths – almost 200 more than the year before (see Figure 3.2). The web site does not contain statistics on the number of Afghan military and civilian casualties, which are likely to be much higher.

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[76] Williams, "The Taliban fedayeen: The world's worst suicide bombers?"

[77] "Afghan Taleban commander killed," *BBC News*, 13 May 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6650755.stm (accessed 16 Dec 2009)

[78] See, for example, the interview with Taliban provincial chief Maulavi 'Abd al-Rahim bin 'Ali in *al-Sumud* 2, no.20 (Safar 1429/February 2008); and the interview with Taliban military commander Maulavi Dost Muhammad in *al-Sumud* 1, no.9 (Safar 1428/February 2007).

[79] Dexter Filkins, "Bomber kills 21 policemen in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 2 Feb 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/03/world/asia/03afghan.html (accessed 11 Aug 2009); Mark Mazzetti, "Military death toll rises in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 2 July 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/02/washington/02military.html?_r=1 (accessed 11 Aug 2009).
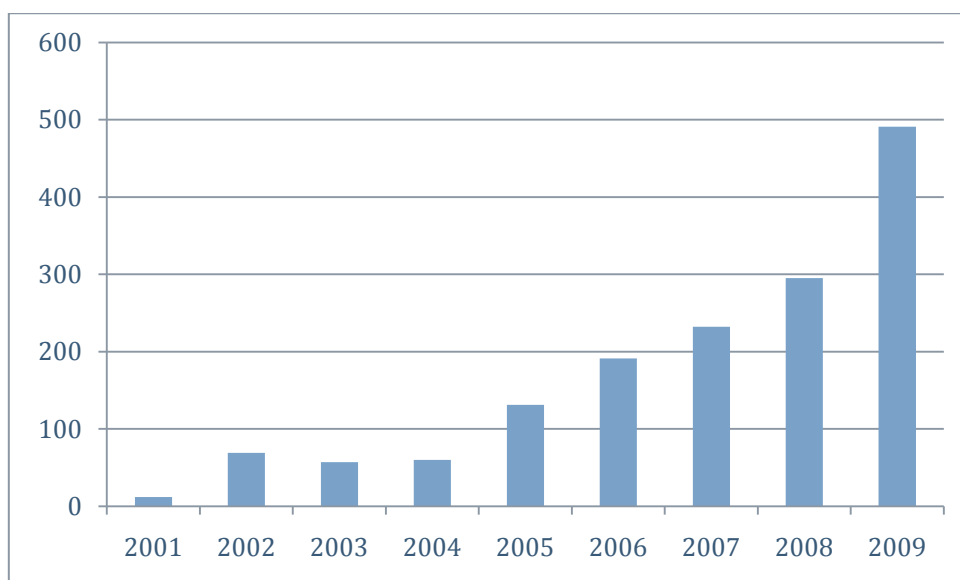
Figure 3.2: Coalition military deaths in Afghanistan, 2001–2009.[80]

Existing literature on the Afghan insurgency often seeks to explain *why* the insurgency gathered momentum after 2001 and why it is still so resilient.[81] Two of the most common explanatory factors are weak governance and cross-border sanctuary in Pakistan. The weakness of the Afghan state is undoubtedly important. The failure of the Afghan government and the international community to provide security, a reliable justice system and development opportunities to the people of Afghanistan, has made many people disillusioned, especially in rural areas. In addition to causing grievances, the weakness of the Afghan state creates room for the insurgents to gain influence and set up parallel governance structures. Another vital factor explaining the growth of the insurgency is the insurgents' cross-border sanctuary in Pakistan. The unruly border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan function as a safe haven for insurgent leaders, and the border itself is so porous that fighters and supplies can be transported across it with relative ease. Some would also argue that the IEA receives military and material support from individuals within the Pakistani authorities and security services. The last point is blankly denied by Pakistani authorities, but a number of academic as well as journalistic sources have indicated otherwise.[82]

3.3   Recruitment patterns and popular support

It is common to believe that the IEA's main recruitment base is students in the Koran schools, or *madrasas*, which are scattered across Afghanistan and Pakistan. Certain madrasas undoubtedly play a role in supporting militant networks,[83] but as mentioned in a previous chapter, the Afghan insurgent movement draws recruits from a variety of backgrounds. Insurgent commanders

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[80] The numbers are taken from www.icasualties.org/OEF/index.aspx accessed on 14 Dec 2009.

[81] For example, Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*; Seth G. Jones, *In the graveyard of empires: America's war in Afghanistan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009); Thomas H. Johnson, "On the edge of the big muddy: The Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, No.2 (2007); Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's insurgency: State failure and jihad," *International Security* 32, No.4 (Spring 2008): 7–40.

[82] See, for example, Rashid, *Descent into chaos*; Jones, *In the graveyard of empires*, 323.

[83] For a recent study on this topic, see Qandeel Siddique, "Weapons of mass instruction? A preliminary exploration of the link between madrassas in Pakistan and militancy," FFI-Report No. 2008-02326, www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00128/Weapons_of_Mass_Ins_128057a.pdf (accessed 17 Dec 2009).

themselves have also made this point. In 2006, a commander known as Mullah Sabir told Western media: "We have about 15,000 men. Forty percent are not really Taliban, have not graduated from any religious school; they are youngsters who join our ranks in sympathy [with our cause]."[84] While the total number of his fighters was probably inflated, it is worth noting his use of the word "taliban" in its literal meaning.

One of the more detailed descriptions of the IEA's recruitment patterns can be found in Giustozzi (2008). He argues that the movement's recruitment efforts started in 2002, when recruiters systematically started visiting refugee camps, madrasas and mosques in Pakistan, as well as tribal leaders and elders in Afghanistan, to encourage them to join the insurgency. The recruitment increased in pace from 2003. The madrasas in Pakistan, which had a number of Afghan students, was an obvious source of recruitment. However, Giustozzi finds that the biggest numbers were recruited locally in Afghanistan, "through the support of the clergy and through enlisting community support in specific areas."[85] The support of local mullahs across Afghanistan was ensured through a variety of means, including intimidation and assassination of pro-government religious figures.[86] Recruitment of local communities increased especially from 2006, although NATO in September 2006 estimated that 40 per cent of all fighters still came straight from Pakistan.[87]

Giustozzi also argues against allegations that the Taliban insurgency has a "tribal dimension" as its main recruitment drive, at least with regards to the period after 2003. A list of members of the IEA's leadership council anno 2003 shows that its members come from various tribal backgrounds and that Mullah Omar's Ghilzai tribe was by no means dominant. Moreover, local Pashtun communities did not appear to follow any "tribal logic" when choosing sides in the conflict.[88] The Taliban's recruitment targets included "all those who had supported the Taliban regime and who had been marginalized afterwards."[89] In a few cases, this also included non-Pashtuns.

From about 2006, the recruitment patterns were somewhat widened, in line with the IEA's relative success on the battlefield. In addition to spreading their influence at village level, there were apparently attempts to recruit in the cities, including in universities, and to reach out to former *mujahidin* commanders on a larger scale than before.[90] Overall, however, the IEA's recruitment and mobilization patterns remain with a strong ethnic dimension: The IEA's core recruitment base continues to be rural Pashtuns from southern and south-eastern Afghanistan. To a lesser degree, they have started to also include rural Pashtun communities in the north of the country.

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[84] Interview with Mullah Sabir, quoted in "The new Taliban codex," *Signandsight,* 28 Nov 2006, http://www.signandsight.com/features/1069.html (accessed 17 Jan 2009).

[85] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 38–39.

[86] Ibid., 46.

[87] Ibid., 52.

[88] Ibid., 46–47.

[89] Ibid., 48.

[90] Ibid., 71–72.

The extent of popular support for the IEA is hard to estimate precisely, especially in southern and south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan. The reason for this is the lack of access to a representative selection of the population, as well as the fact that answers given to interviewers may not reflect the true feelings of the interviewee, due to the sensitivity of the question. As observed above, the IEA has resorted to threats and violence as a recruitment strategy. Generally this indicates a lack of popular support, even in the so-called "Taliban heartlands" in southern Afghanistan, but exactly how much this amounts to is hard to estimate. However, it is commonly believed that a majority of the population in the Pashtun areas are neither hardliner supporters of the IEA nor the government, but sit on the fence, while a minority supports either of the sides. This is also in line with the Afghan tradition of allying oneself with the party that is most likely to benefit one's own interests at any given time.

3.4 Media and propaganda

Since the beginning of the insurgency, the IEA's media apparatus has become increasingly sophisticated. It uses today a wide range of media platforms, including modern technologies such as DVDs and the Internet, to spread its message. Some have argued that this represents a clear shift from the policies of the old Taliban government, which abolished television and cameras on religious grounds.[91] While this is a truth with modifications, there is in any case little doubt that the media activities of the IEA's leadership have increased in scope since 2002, and that a deliberate propaganda and media campaign is carried out to support the movement's military operations on the ground.

Put simply, the IEA's propaganda may be divided into two categories: Propaganda directed towards a local audience, aimed at getting direct support from the Afghan population, and propaganda directed towards an international audience, aimed mainly at getting international sympathy and financial support. The former is typically distributed through local newspapers and magazines, radio stations, "night letters" (leaflets posted to doors or walls, used to inform or threaten the local population) and cassettes/DVDs sold in local markets; while the latter is distributed through the Internet and international media. In many cases these categories may overlap, and messages directed to local Afghans are frequently also posted on the Internet. However, it should be stressed that the IEA's interaction with local populations in Afghanistan is a complex process which cannot be understood by considering Internet-based propaganda only. The illiteracy rate in Afghanistan is high, and Internet users constitute but a tiny fraction of the population.[92] In the rural southern and south-eastern Afghanistan, where the IEA is most active, other means of communication such as direct interaction, "night letters" and radio channels are undoubtedly more important.

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[91] Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities," 4.

[92] According to the CIA World Factbook, the literacy rate in Afghanistan is around 28,1% (2000 est.), while the number of Internet users is around 580,000 (2007 est.), or 1,7% of the population. CIA, *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ (accessed 19 May 2009).

We will not go into further detail on how the IEA uses propaganda to rally support on a local level in Afghanistan.[93] Instead, we will give a more general overview of how the IEA has propagated their message through international media and the Internet since the start of the insurgency in 2002. In the period from 2002 to 2006, the IEA's media activities were primarily focused on publicising "battle reports" about insurgent operations in Afghanistan through radio, telephone or newspapers.[94] As the insurgency increased in strength and scope from 2006 onwards, the IEA expanded their range of media platforms. The content of the propaganda has also widened in scope. In the beginning of the insurgency, the few statements that were issued by the Taliban leadership focused on describing the injustice of the American occupation.[95] In 2006–2009, the IEA's propaganda covered a number of topics, such as articles de-legitimizing the Afghan government; refuting unfavourable claims about the IEA made in the press; statements commenting on regional and international events, and various "political analyses."[96] However, the greatest output still lies in the field of exaggerated "battle reports."

3.4.1   Who speaks on behalf of the IEA?

Written communiqués from the IEA are normally issued in the name of the Islamic Emirate, or one of its official spokesmen (see Table 3.2). Occasionally, written communiqués are also issued directly by Taliban leaders. From 2006 to 2008, Mullah Omar issued between two and four such communiqués per year, usually on the occasion of religious holidays, at the death of prominent jihadi leaders, or to clarify important policy matters.[97]

Contact with international media is usually carried out by one of the IEA's official spokesmen. At present, Zabihullah Mujahid and Qari Muhammad Yusuf are listed on the IEA's website as official spokesmen of the organization, and have frequently answered questions and inquiries from the international press.[98] The IEA's leaders rarely give direct interviews to the media. A notable exception to this is Mullah Dadullah, who gave several interviews to international media, including televised interviews to the international news channel al-Jazeera, from at least 2004 and

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[93] For an analysis of locally distributed propaganda, see for example, Thomas H. Johnson, "The Taliban insurgency and an analysis of *shabnamah* (night letters)," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18, no. 3 (2007).

[94] Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities," 5.

[95] "Taliban propaganda," 8.

[96] However, it can be noted that the Taliban's literature is still much less sophisticated and less pluralistic than the literature produced by the global jihadist movement (al-Qaida and its affiliates). For example, the IEA's official propaganda outlets do not seem to produce any "strategic literature" of the kind that has been produced within the global jihadist movement, i.e. literature analysing the current conflict, and arguing how the war should be fought most effectively. IEA's propaganda outlets frequently bring articles discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the actors in the conflict. However, they do not contain a critical analysis of the actual situation, nor any discussion of how the war should be fought in the future. Rather, they are aimed at projecting a "reality" in which the IEA is already winning, and the West is losing. Typically, the articles analyse insurgent operations in retrospect, pointing out its positive effects, and often backed up with selective quotes from Western sources.

[97] In 2008, for example, Mullah Omar issued a statement denying rumours in the international press that the IEA had been involved in negotiations with the Karzai regime.

[98] Inquiries have been answered through telephone and in writing, but neither spokesperson has appeared on photographs or TV. One study has argued that these names are most likely aliases, and may be used by more than one person. "Taliban Propaganda," 11.

until his death in May 2007.[99] Mullah Omar, in contrast, has hardly spoken to the press since 2002. There are claims that he has given interviews on at least two occasions – in 2004 and 2007 – but the authenticity of these interviews is hard to verify (one was allegedly conducted through telephone and the other through e-mail).[100] It is easier for the press to get in direct contact with mid- and low-level commanders inside Afghanistan, who have given interviews to the media on a number of occasions. However, these are not recognized by the Islamic Emirate as official spokesmen of the organization. Mullah Omar himself clarified in 2007: "The comments of the Islamic Emirate are those which are released by our official spokesmen and our Al Emarah web page."[101]

Spokesman	Period	Note
Abdul Latif Hakimi	ca 2002–Oct 2005	Arrested in Quetta on 4 Oct 2005
Dr. Mohammed Hanif	Oct 2005–Jan 2007	Arrested on the Af-Pak border in January 2007
Qari Mohammed Yusuf (Ahmadi)	Oct 2005–present	Responsible for the Southwest and Northwest
Zabihullah Mujahid	(?)–present	Responsible for Southeast and Northeast

Table 3.2: The IEA's official spokesmen[102]

3.4.2 Internet-based media platforms

As mentioned, the IEA's media platforms towards local audiences include "night letters," magazines and radio channels, and DVDs and cassettes sold in local markets. MP3 files and cell phone videos have also been said to be circulating on a local level.[103] On the Internet, one of the first web pages representing the Islamic Emirate was the Arabic-language "Homepage of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (*mawqi' imarat afghanistan al-islamiyya*), which also existed under the Taliban government on the same URL. However, after 9/11 it appeared with new design and carried propaganda about the insurgency, including news and "battle reports," as well

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[99] Dadullah's brother and successor, Mansur Dadullah, seemed to follow the same policy of talking directly with the press. In one instance, he also publically denied claims given by the Taliban leadership: In late 2007, the IEA made an official statement sacking Mansur Dadullah from his position, due to his failure to comply with the rules of the Islamic Emirate. According to the AFP, Dadullah subsequently denied this claim to a Pakistani newspaper. The Dadullah clan also seemed to have their own spokesmen, strenghtening the impression that there was a divide between them and the Taliban leadership, in spite of the fact that Mullah Dadullah was member of Taliban's Shura Council. "Taliban Propaganda," 27. For an example of Mullah Dadullah's early interviews with *al-Jazeera*, see Ahmed Zaydan, "Today's meeting [in Arabic]", *al-Jazeera*, audiofile, 30 Apr 2004 (stored by the author).
[100] In 2004, the Pakistani-based freelance journalist Mohammad Shehzad allegedly interviewed Mullah Omar over the phone from Kabul, published in an Indian newspaper. In 2007, Reuters published an interview conducted by e-mailing Mullah Omar a set of questions, getting an e-mailed response. See "The Rediff interview/Mullah Omar," 12 Apr 2004, www.rediff.com/news/2004/apr/12inter.htm (accessed 19 May 2009); "Mullah Omar says hasn't seen bin Laden for years," *Reuters*, 4 Jan 2007, www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP137015.htm (accessed 19 May 2009).
[101] Quoted in "Taliban propaganda," 11.
[102] Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities," 5; "Taliban propaganda," 10.
[103] "Taliban Propaganda," 12–16.

as statements by Mullah Omar.[104] Later, and from at least 2006, the IEA set up a Pashto-language website known as the Voice of Jihad (*jihad ghag*), also referred to as al-Emarah, which became one of the main outlets for news, statements, and other propaganda from the Islamic Emirate.[105] At various times, it has had versions in Dari, Urdu, Arabic and English, but the Pashto section has been the most extensive. Another method to spread propaganda online has been to post the IEA's statements to various al-Qaida-affiliated discussion forums. This effort is not necessarily carried out by IEA members directly, but more likely, by online volunteers known as "correspondents" who get the communiqués from the IEA's home page or via middlemen.[106] This is an effective way of reaching a global network of militant Islamist sympathizers, especially since the IEA's website has been somewhat unstable.

The Islamic Emirate also issues a number of periodicals, some of which are distributed online. The most well-known of these publications is probably the Arabic-language *al-Sumud* (the Resistance), a monthly publication which appeared for the first time in 2006, and which has been posted on Taliban's web pages as well as on al-Qaida-affiliated discussion forums. From 2002, the IEA has also issued several magazines in Pashto and Dari, some of which have also appeared on the Internet.[107]

The Islamic Emirate also issues audiovisual propaganda, but so far it has not had its own "production company" like al-Qaida's *al-Sahab*.[108] Instead, films from Afghanistan are produced on behalf of the Afghan insurgents by various local and Arab-run media agencies. The most professional films are produced by *al-Sahab*. During 2006 and 2007, *al-Sahab* issued at least fifty operational films from various regions across southern and south-eastern Afghanistan. The films were subtitled in Arabic and featured fighters dressed in local attire, sometimes heard speaking Afghan languages but occasionally also foreign languages, carrying out various types of military operations. *Al-Sahab* has also published a small number of videotaped interviews with certain Taliban leaders and spokesmen, including Mullah Dadullah, Mansur Dadullah (Mullah Dadullah's brother who briefly took over the former's position), and Sheikh Muhammad Yasir, the head of the IEA's *da'wa* committee.[109]

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[104] The web page states that it opened on 18 Nov 2000, and existed on the URL www.alemarh.com/ from at least the summer of 2001 until September 2002 (accessed via archive.org on 20 May 2009).

[105] For example, www.alemarah.org/ (2006–2007) and www.alemara.org (2008). In 2009, more sophisticated web pages have appeared, that include links to audio and video files, for example at www.shahamat.org/shahamat/ (accessed May 2009).

[106] Hanna Rogan, "Al Qaeda's online media strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007," FFI-Report No. 2007/02729, http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2007/02729.pdf (accessed 17 Dec 2009).

[107] "Taliban propaganda," 13.

[108] In a possible new development, a series of films carrying the logo of the Islamic Emirate itself (rather than one of the previously known "production companies") appeared in 2009. However, they do not appear to be very sophisticated, and sometimes, the video clips are even taken from films originally issued by other production companies.

[109] Only three high-ranking Taliban members have been featured by *al-Sahab*: Mullah Dadullah, Mansur Dadullah and Sheikh Muhammad Yasir.

3.4.3 Content

Overall, the IEA's official propaganda is aimed at legitimizing the IEA's struggle and conveying the impression of a strong and unified movement. Previous studies have identified a set of recurrent topics, which include:[110]

- "Battle reports" claiming an exaggerated number of enemy casualties and material damage;
- Articles defaming the enemy, often by describing atrocities committed against Muslims, but also moral transgressions;
- Justifications for IEA's struggle, by referring to nationalist, cultural or religious sentiments;
- Denials of alleged atrocities committed by the IEA, such as the killing of large numbers of civilians or the use of cruel or brutal methods of punishment towards Afghans.

Certain topics are also absent from the IEA's propaganda: First, the propaganda is careful not to appeal to specific tribes or ethnic groups, in order to convey the impression that the IEA represents a unified and popular-based Afghan movement, unlike the *mujahidin* factions which ended up fighting each other for power in the early 1990s.[111] For the same reasons, it rarely contains anti-Shi'ite rhetoric.[112] Second, it has consistently denied that the IEA is getting assistance from neighbour states, such as Iran and Pakistan. Third, although the IEA's propaganda is often filled with references to the "global jihad," or the universal struggle of Muslims worldwide, the Islamic Emirate is careful to picture itself as a purely Afghan movement with no ambitions of its own outside Afghanistan's borders.

The propaganda lacks detail regarding how the IEA intends to run the country in the future. The IEA's political program seems to be limited to governing according to Sharia law. Specific political issues, such as the future of the Durand line, or the status of non-Pashtun ethnic groups in the future state, are rarely addressed. While the propaganda is effectively addressing the immediate grievances of the people, it does little to "sell" the idea of a future Taliban state to wider segments of the Afghan population. Furthermore, studies have pointed out that the IEA's propaganda is filled with inconsistencies.[113] This may of course reflect the decentralised nature of the movement and the lack of internal communication, but it may also indicate that the IEA has no clear policy with regards to how to deal with controversial issues such as the killing of civilians. The content of the IEA's official propaganda will be discussed further in a later chapter of this report.

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[110] "Taliban propaganda," 17–24; Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities."

[111] Occasionally, however, its web sites have carried references to Pashtun nationalism. See, for example, "Taliban Propaganda," 18.

[112] In a message in 2007, Mullah Omar specifically called on followers to respect the Shia tradition. See "Al Qaida in Afghanistan: Waheed Mujda explains", *Kabul Direct* 1, no. 1 (Oct 2007):14.

[113] Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities," 14.

3.5   Financing and support networks

The Taliban's finances are very often associated with opium production. While this is true to a large extent, it would be wrong to say that the opium industry is the sole financial source of the Taliban. One report from 2008 estimated that opium production "provides up to 40 percent of the Taliban's total financial support,"[114] which is serious enough, but which also indicates that 60 per cent or more comes from other sources. Other sources of income probably include taxations of local populations, various forms of criminal activity (either directly through f.ex. kidnapping and extortion, or indirectly through cooperation with criminal networks), and donations from local and international support networks. The Islamic Emirate usually admits that the insurgents are financed by way of religious taxes, and local and international donors, although they principally deny having anything to do with opium trade, or other forms of organized crime.[115]

3.5.1   Criminal networks and the poppy industry

In 2001, the level of poppy production in Afghanistan was at a historical low, due to a ban on poppy cultivation the previous year which had effectively been imposed by the Taliban government. However, since the start of the insurgency, there has been a sharp increase in the opium production in Afghanistan. A large part of the production takes place in southern Afghanistan, which is the traditional stronghold of the Taliban, and production levels have increased in line with the levels of insurgent-related violence.[116] Many conclude from this that the IEA is directly responsible for the return of poppy cultivation and production to Afghanistan, due to their need for funding of the insurgency. This is true to some extent, but the reality is far more complex. First of all, opium cultivation and production takes place all over Afghanistan, not only in IEA-influenced areas. Second, a number of actors are involved in the industry, and their ties to the IEA vary significantly.

The poppy farmers can best be described as local Afghan farmers in need of livelihood. A UN survey showed that in southern Afghanistan, poppy farmers often have to pay tax of their income (typically 10 per cent) to other groups which include, but are not limited to, the IEA.[117] The farmers usually pay this tax in return for protection from the local group, and permission to

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[114] Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, "Thwarting Afghanistan's insurgency: A pragmatic approach toward peace and reconciliation," (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 2.

[115] Dadullah said in Feb 2006 that drug trade "is not Sharia at all. Most of the government officials are drug traders... Karzai's brother is the biggest known exporter of drugs and even Karzai supports this trading ... Taliban did not and will not trade in drugs, but it stopped it at the testimony of the United Nations." "Interview with Mullah Dadullah, the military commander of the Taliban in Afghanistan," *al-Jazeera* (2006).

[116] See, for example, the graphs of "Average number of violent incidents per month, 2003–2008," and "Opium poppy cultivation and production levels, 2002–2007," provided in Stanekzai, "Thwarting Afghanistan's insurgency," 2–3.

[117] According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, farmers in the south of Afghanistan "said that they paid a tax of approximately 10 per cent of their income from poppy cultivation to groups which included the Taliban; this was not true for farmers in the central, north and north-eastern regions, where security conditions were better and the Taliban had less influence. The survey also noted a reduction in poppy cultivation in those areas." "Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Pursuant to Resolution 1735 (2006) Concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and Associated Individuals and Entities," (UN Security Council, 14 May 2008), 11.

cultivate poppies. In some areas, poppy farmers and Taliban fighters may also overlap, as demonstrated in an article in the *Globe and Mail* in 2008.[118] In a series of interviews conducted among 42 "ordinary Taliban foot-soldiers" in the Kandahar province, more than 80 per cent said that they also farmed poppies. As the article points out, this is of course not very surprising, since poppies are among the most common crops in the province, and the IEA draws recruits from the local rural population. Perhaps more interesting was that 50 per cent said that their poppy fields had been targeted by government eradication efforts, indicating a possible motivation for why these farmers had joined the insurgency.[119]

The main drivers behind the poppy industry are not the farmers themselves, but criminal networks and drug lords, who are believed to get 90 per cent of the total income from opium (in 2007 estimated to be some 4 billion USD).[120] Some of them may be part of the IEA, others allied with the IEA out of convenience. (There are also various allegations of alliances between drug lords and corrupt government officials, including President Karzai's brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, but this will not be elaborated upon here.[121]) A UN Security Council report from 2008 described their relationship like this: "There is an alliance of convenience between the Taliban and drug lords, with both having an interest in seeing a weak government and in corrupting central and provincial officials."[122]

Overall, the direct involvement of the IEA in the drug trade is seen as a "rising trend," illustrated by a series of narcotics-related incidents in southern Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008. A UN Security Council report mentioned, for example, that:

> "... in December 2007 large quantities of narcotics, heroin-producing equipment and precursor chemicals were discovered when Afghan forces and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) retook the town of Musa Qala. Local inhabitants reported that the Taliban had encouraged the construction of heroin laboratories under their protection and had levied a 10 per cent tax on the product. In February 2008, a ton of raw opium, about 20 kilograms of pure heroin and over 1,000 kilograms of chemicals were seized by Afghan forces and ISAF in a drug processing plant controlled by insurgents in Helmand ..."[123]

Many ISAF countries have resisted taking an active part in poppy eradication in Afghanistan; for fear that it would only harm ordinary Afghan farmers. This would turn the local population against the ISAF and make counter-insurgency operations more difficult. However, in 2008, the NATO announced it would open up for attacking opium labs and facilities in Afghanistan, targeting the criminal networks rather than the poppy farmers.[124] In August 2009, the U.S.

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[118] Graeme Smith, "Talking to the Taliban," *Globe and Mail* 24 March 2008, http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/talkingtothetaliban/ (accessed 22 May 2009).
[119] Ibid.
[120] "Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team No. S/2008/324," 11.
[121] "Karzai's brother suspected of involvement in drug trade: report," *AFP*, 4 Oct 2008, http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gQXeIjjy90aFOYj42q5YnZS-fWAw (accessed 18 Dec 2009).
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] "Nato to attack Afghan opium labs," *BBC News* 10 Oct 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7663204.stm (accessed 13 Aug 2009).

announced a new, controversial approach to fighting the narcotics industry. According to an article in the New York Times, the U.S. Army in Afghanistan would start targeting drug traffickers directly, and fifty drug traffickers were put on a list of people associated with the Taliban to be "hunted down."[125] It remains to be seen whether the policy will be put into practice, but in any case it illustrates that fighting the poppy industry and fighting the insurgents in Afghanistan are increasingly seen as two sides of the same coin.[126]

Overall, there is a large network of criminal groups in Afghanistan. They are involved in a range of illegal activity such as drug and arms trade, smuggling of luxury goods, highway robbing, and kidnapping of foreign and local civilians for ransom. They profit from having a weak Afghan state, and thus share interests with the insurgents. One such network was lead by Haji Juma Khan, a Pakistani tribesman who was arrested in October 2008. His network was responsible for smuggling large amounts of heroin out of Afghanistan and weapons back into the country. The business was said to generate money for insurgent groups such as the Taliban, with whom he had close ties.[127] Insurgents and criminals also cooperate in other areas. For example, there have been incidents where criminal groups have kidnapped foreigners who have later been "sold" to the Taliban or other insurgents. Moreover, criminal groups often have their own militias, and the Taliban may hire them to carry out specific tasks, such as providing protection for Taliban forces or even carrying out rocket or Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks on behalf of the insurgency.[128]

3.5.2 Support networks in Pakistani tribal areas

After the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has functioned as a sanctuary for senior Taliban and al-Qaida leaders. These areas have traditionally been outside control of Pakistan's central government, and have been a site for guerrilla and terrorist training camps since at least the 1980s.[129] Today, Afghan insurgents and foreign fighters rely on these areas for training, material support, and recruitment. The border with Afghanistan is porous, allowing for fighters and supplies to be transported across it with relative ease. FATA and NWFP have long been home to a number of Pakistani militant Islamist groups. In 2007, several of these groups joined an umbrella organization called the "Pakistani Taliban Movement" (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP), initially lead by the Waziristan-based

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[125] "U.S. to hunt down Afghan drug lords tied to Taliban," *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/10/world/asia/10afghan.html?_r=1&hp (accessed 10 Aug 2009).

[126] For more information on links between Taliban and opiums trade see also: Joanna Wright, "Taliban insurgency shows signs of enduring strength," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 okt 2006; Joanna Wright, "Afghanistan's opiate economy and terrorist financing," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 mars 2006; and Peter Bergen, "The Taliban, regrouped and rearmed," *The Washington Post*, 10 Sept 2006, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/08/AR2006090801614.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[127] Tim McGirk, "Terrorism's harvest," *TIME*, 2 Aug 2004, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1101040809-674777,00.html (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

[128] Stanekzai, "Thwarting Afghanistan's insurgency," 8–9.

[129] Such training camps have existed here since the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, with the blessing of the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI. They were used to train militants to fight against the USSR in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and later to fight for Pakistan's interests in India-controlled Kashmir. Ibid.

militant Baithullah Mehsud. Mehsud was killed in a drone strike in August 2009, and was replaced by one of his close associates, Hakimullah Mehsud. At the time of finalizing this report, there were rumours that Hakimullah Mehsud had also been killed in a drone strike in North Waziristan, but the TTP has so far denied this.[130]

The exact contributions of TTP to the Afghan insurgency are unclear. According to the Pakistani journalist Muhammad Amir Rana, the two organizations enjoy close ties: "Every group that wants to join the TTP must take an oath of commitment to Sharia enforcement and loyalty to Mullah Omar." They also have to contribute 50 per cent of their income to a"jihad fund" to sustain activities in tribal areas and in Afghanistan.[131] According to various reports, the TTP has supported the insurgency in Afghanistan directly by sending fighters across the border. However, there have also been tensions between TTP and the Afghan Taliban over strategy and tactics, as will be discussed later in this report.[132]

3.5.3 Al-Qaida and international donor networks

In spite of all the myths about Osama bin Laden's personal wealth, it is highly unlikely that he is currently in a position to finance the Afghan insurgency from his own pocket. Most of bin Laden's personal assets disappeared or were frozen in the 1990s, and the al-Qaida network was said to rely on other sources of finance, such as donations from private financiers and money collected through NGOs and charities in Saudia Arabia and the Persian Gulf states.[133] However, al-Qaida may still play a role in financing the insurgency in Afghanistan, through its continued contacts with wealthy donors in the Arab world. Al-Qaida's media agency *al-Sahab* has also produced a number of propaganda videos on behalf of the IEA, tailored to an Arabic-speaking audience. Al-Qaida's leader in Afghanistan, Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, has since 2007 made repeated calls to Muslims worldwide to support the IEA financially, and he stated in one video message that the money should be sent through "official channels" only (presumably through donor networks organized by al-Qaida or the Taliban leadership, to ensure the money is distributed centrally rather than directly benefitting one faction of the insurgency). A *Newsweek* article from 2006 claimed that al-Qaida also had taken a more direct role in financing insurgents:

> "Guerrillas in eastern Ghazni province say the Arab money teams ride in from the direction of the Pakistan border astride motorcycles driven by Taliban fighters. The Qaeda men ask each local commander what weapons, money and technical assistance he needs--and then deliver the aid that is required."[134]

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[130] "Pakistani Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud killed in US drone strike?" *Yahoo! News*, 14 Jan 2010, http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20100114/896/twl-pakistani-taliban-chief-hakimullah-m.html (accessed 5 Feb 2010).

[131] Muhammad Amir Rana, "The Taliban consolidate control in Pakistan's tribal regions," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 7 (2008).

[132] A more comprehensive study of the TTP and its militant activities is provided in Qandeel Siddique, "The Pakistani Taliban," FFI-Report, *forthcoming* 2010.

[133] *The 9/11 Commission report*, 55–57, 66; Steve Coll, *Ghost wars: The scret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

[134] Sami Yousafzai, Ron Moreau and Mark Hosenball, "The regathering storm," *Newsweek*, 25 Dec 2006, www.newsweek.com/id/44269/page/2 (accessed 13 Aug 2009).

It cannot be ruled out that such incidents have happened (especially in south-eastern Afghanistan where Arab fighters appear better connected than in the Taliban strongholds in the south), but their extent is hard to verify, and the exact contribution of al-Qaida to the IEA and their associates remains unclear. However, it is generally observed that international donors (whether connected to the al-Qaida network or not) play a certain role in the IEA's financing. In 2006, a UN report observed that in addition to having ties with the drugs industry in Afghanistan, the IEA had re-established links with donors in the Gulf.[135] Peter Bergen also observed the "twin revenue streams" of the IEA as being drug money and contributions from donors in the Middle East.[136] Quoting U.S. officials, a recent *Wall Street Journal* article said that Afghan Taliban "may receive as much money from foreign donors as it does from opium sales," but also quoted "payments from legitimate businesses" as another major source of financing.[137] Donor networks in Pakistan are also said to exist, probably in connection with the TTP and other Pakistani militants sympathetic to the IEA's cause.

3.5.4   State support?

Pakistan and its intelligence bureau, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), are frequently accused of supporting the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. These accusations range from passive support (for example, tolerating the presence of high-ranking Taliban leaders on Pakistani territory) to direct and active support (supporting the insurgents with military equipment, weapons, trainers and advisors). The truth in these accusations is bound to remain blurred. However, observers seem to agree that while the Pakistani state does not openly support the IEA or other insurgent groups, it cannot be excluded that individual Pakistani officials (or former officials) may lend such support. There are numerous anecdotal examples of this. Former Pakistani officials have openly admitted their sympathies for the IEA. There are also indications that Pakistani officials have protected (or at least failed to actively pursue) IEA members hiding on Pakistani territory, and that they have turned a blind eye to border crossings between Pakistan and Afghanistan.[138] There are indications that Pakistanis may have played roles as trainers and advisers, and they may have passed on intelligence. On the other hand, there is little firm evidence that Pakistan has supplied the IEA with large amounts of weaponry. Weapons appear to

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[135] See UN Security Council, "Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team appointed pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1526 (2004) and 1617 (2005) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities", 7 Nov 2006, http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/622/70/PDF/N0662270.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 15 Oct 2007).

[136] Peter Bergen, "The Taliban, regrouped and rearmed", *Washington Post*, 10 Sept 2006, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/08/AR2006090801614.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[137] Yochi J. Dreazen, "Taliban's foreign support vexes U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 June 2009, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124355226210564403.html (accessed 16 Aug 2009).

[138] It is a telling fact that up until 2006, only "a handful" of Taliban or former Taliban leaders were arrested in Pakistan, while thousands of alleged "al-Qaida members" were arrested in the same period. After 2006, the Pakistani government started cracking down on alleged Taliban members inside Pakistan, but it seldom resulted in the arrest of high-ranking members. An exception is the arrest of Mullah Obaidullah in February 2007. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 21–24.

come from several different sources, including black markets in northern Afghanistan and Pakistan's North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP).

Iran is also a state that has frequently been accused of supporting the IEA and other militant groups in Afghanistan. Such rumours appeared especially as U.S. pressure on Iran increased due to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Like most of Afghanistan's neighbours, Iran has historically sought influence in Afghanistan, but in the past they have mainly supported Shi'ite communities and groups which have traditionally been the Taliban's adversaries. While the Sunni Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was allowed residence in the country until 2002, there are few indications that Iran has continued to support HIG (Hekmatyar was pressured to leave the country in 2002).[139] Iranian weapons have been found in Afghanistan, but there is no proof that they have been donated to the IEA by the Iranian state. (In some cases, Taliban sources have admitted to purchasing such weapons for money.)[140] It cannot be ruled out that Iran has sought to establish contact with various Sunni groups in Afghanistan, especially since they have a common enemy in the United States, but there are few indications of direct support to any of the major insurgent groups.

4 The Taliban leadership

So far, the report has focused on the history of the conflict in Afghanistan and the general characteristics of the post-2001 insurgent movement. We will now continue with a more specific discussion of the Taliban leadership, its ideology and worldview. The current chapter contains a brief account of the leadership's history and discusses its role and influence in the insurgent movement as a whole.

4.1 The leadership councils

The Islamic Emirate is said to have one or more leadership councils (*shuras*) based in Pakistan. The most important one is the so-called "Quetta Shura" based in or near the city of Quetta in north-western Pakistan, a short distance from the border with the Kandahar province of Afghanistan. This is also where Mullah Omar is believed to be based. The IEA does not use the name "Quetta Shura"; since it principally denies that any of its leaders are based in Pakistan, but refers simply to "the leadership of the Islamic Emirate" or its various functions and committees.

Open sources are somewhat inconsistent with regards to the exact nature and composition of the Islamic Emirate's leadership. What seems clear, however, is that ever since the IEA started re-organizing in 2002 the leadership has been dominated by former members of the Taliban government. In 2002, Mullah Omar allegedly appointed four commanders to re-organize the IEA in southern Afghanistan: Mullah Baradir (former deputy defence minister), Akhtar Muhammad Uthmani (former army chief), Mullah Dadullah (former corps commander), and Abdul Razzaq (former interior minister). By 2003, Mullah Omar was said to have appointed a 10-man leadership council, again consisting of members who had all held positions within the former

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[139] Ibid., 29.
[140] Ibid., 28–29.

government (See Appendix B).[141] It did not include any members from rival Afghan organizations such as Hizb-e-Islami, or foreign groups such as Pakistani militants or al-Qaida. However, it is likely that the IEA established relations and various degrees of cooperation with such organizations early on.[142]

In October 2006, Mullah Omar allegedly appointed a new leadership council with 12 members and three advisors. On it were some of the old members (such as Razzaq, Dadullah, Uthmani and Obaidullah), in addition to a number of new names such as Sheikh Abd al-'Ali, now acting as the chief legal advisor to the IEA, and Maulavi Abd al-Kabir, currently believed to be head of political relations.[143] Still there were no indications of "outsiders" being integrated into IEA's leadership structure, at least not among the top military commanders. A possible exception may be head of IEA's *Da'wa* (preaching) committee, Sheikh Muhammad Yasir, who claimed to have joined the IEA only after 2001. Before that, he worked for the Rabbani government and then as a university professor in Pakistan.[144]

Few of the 2003 members of IEA's leadership council play visible and active roles in the movement today. High-ranking members, such as Akhtar Muhammad Uthmani, Mullah Dadullah and Abdul Razzaq, were killed during military operations in Southern Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007. The two most important "veterans" still alive are probably Mullah Baradir, who frequently appears in IEA propaganda as deputy head of the movement, and the ageing Jalaluddin Haqqani, whose "Haqqani network" has carried out a number of military operations on behalf of the IEA.

In May 2008, an IEA publication contained an article describing the IEA's organizational structure.[145] According to this article, the IEA's organization consists of the leader Mullah Omar, the deputy Mullah Baradir, a 19-member military *shura* led by Mullah Baradir, and a 15-member legislative *shura* led by a Sheikh Maulavi Abd al-'Ali, which is primarily concerned with appointing judges and setting up Sharia courts in areas under IEA's control. In addition, it has seven committees, including committees for finance, media, preaching, and so on. The *Da'wa*

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[141] According to a Taliban source, the 10-man council was appointed on 12 July 2002, but it does not specify who were the members, except that Dadullah was on it. See "Biography of the martyred commander Mullah Dadullah [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.1 (June 2007).

[142] The Libyan militant Abu al-Layth al-Libi claimed in 2002 that he had played a role in improving relations between the IEA and Hekmatyar. See "Interview with Al-Qaeda's field commander Abu Laith Al-Libi,"
19 July 2002, originally published as an audiofile at www.jehad.net, English translation available: http://mprofaca.cro.net/abu-laith.html (accessed 8 March 2010).

[143] "Mullah Omar names a new Majlis Shura," *The MEMRI Blog*, 6 Oct 2006; "The new Taliban codex," *Signandsight*, 28 Nov 2006, www.signandsight.com/features/1069.html (accessed 17 Jan 2009).

[144] Sheikh Yasir appeared in an interview with al-Qaida's media agency *al-Sahab* in Sept/Oct 2007, after he was released from prison in Kabul (allegedly in exchange for an Italian journalist that the Taliban had taken hostage). He studied in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and is alleged to have a close relationship with bin Laden and al-Qaida that goes back to the time before the Soviet jihad. After the Soviet withdrawal he served in the Rabbani government, but left for Pakistan and did not return until after 11 September, when he decided to join the Taliban in their fight against foreign occupation.

[145] "The Organizational structure of the Taliban Islamic movement," *al-Sumud* 2 no.21 (March 2008): 14–17.

committee is led by Sheikh Muhammad Yasir, and is concerned with recruitment and preaching among current and potential *mujahidin*, and also with preaching towards members of President Karzai's administration in order to convince them to change sides, according to the article.[146] It is hard to confirm how correct this "organization chart" of the IEA is. It differs somewhat from organization charts of the IEA provided by other open sources[147], but is not necessarily more accurate, as the IEA might want to hide or add information to serve their propaganda goals. Whatever the details, it seems clear that the Taliban leadership is more than a collection of guerrilla commanders; it appears to have mechanisms and dedicated resources in place for conducting a broad political and media strategy. But how much influence does the Taliban leadership have on the Afghan insurgency?

4.2 How much influence do the IEA's leaders have?

Some would argue that the Taliban leadership is not really important. The insurgency, it is argued, is driven by local commanders who act out of self-interest and local grievances, independently of any centralised leadership. Others, such as Giustozzi, have argued that the Taliban leadership indeed played an important role in initiating and building up the insurgent movement. The position taken here is that the insurgent movement is so diverse that there is probably no single, correct way of characterizing it. In some areas the movement may be under the influence of a central leadership and in other areas it may be more correct to characterize it as decentralised.

There are many indications that the Taliban leadership does play an important role in the insurgency as a whole. There is little doubt that Mullah Omar is regarded as a person that has to be taken seriously. The President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, has several times addressed the Taliban leader in public; most recently by offering to guarantee his security should he be willing in entering into peace talks with the Government. If it was believed that Mullah Omar in reality had no influence over the insurgents, this would hardly have been the case. Saudi Arabia was rumoured to have offered Mullah Omar political asylum, although this was later denied by a Saudi foreign ministry official.[148] The UN special representative to Afghanistan, Kai Eide, has called for dialogue with the insurgent leadership, not just with mid-level commanders.[149] The U.S. also appears to view Mullah Omar as the most important insurgent leader, judging from the 10 million USD reward for his arrest or capture. The sum is only surpassed by the rewards offered for the two al-Qaida leaders bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.[150] Al-Qaida leaders, including bin Laden himself, have repeatedly pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar as *Amir al-Mu'minin* ("Leader of the Faithful") and recognized him as the leader of the Afghan insurgency. The same

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[146] "Interview with al-Shaykh al-Ustadh Yasir after he left prison in exchange for the Italian prisoner [in Arabic]," *al-Sahab*, Ramadan 1428 (Sept./Oct. 2007), FFI's Jihadist video database #556.

[147] See, for example, "The Taliban: An organizational analysis," *Military Review* (May-June 2008).

[148] "S. Arabia offers asylum to Omar," *Dawn*, 22 Nov 2008, www.dawn.com/2008/11/23/top5.htm (accessed 17 Aug 2009); "Saudi Arabia denies Mullah Omar asylum report," *Reuters India*, 23 Nov 2008, http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-36643220081123 (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[149] Michael Semple, "Talking to the Taliban might solve Afghanistan impasse," *Irish Times,* 6 Aug 2009, www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2009/0806/1224252079476.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[150] www.rewardsforjustice.net/index.cfm?page=MullahOmar&language=english (accessed 14 Jan 2009).

has been done by a number of local and regional actors, such as the legendary *mujahidin* leader Jalaluddin Haqqani as well as the young and charismatic TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud.

Another question is to what extent the Taliban leadership exerts any form of control over regional and local commanders inside Afghanistan. Due to geographical distances, and a lack of effective and secure communications channels, the leadership has probably limited capability to exert command and control in the day-to-day activities of the insurgency. They may, however, issue general directions and guidelines such as a "Code of conduct" (*layeha*) that was allegedly distributed to 33 of IEA's provincial commanders in 2006.[151] A copy of it was obtained by *Der Spiegel*, who interviewed one of the commanders who had attended the meeting where the booklet was distributed. If the account is true, it illustrates that the Taliban leadership has indeed authority to gather regional commanders together and issue guidelines for their fight. Whether they have power and will to also make sure that fighters follow these guidelines, is another question. In some cases it is hard to know whether such guidelines are sincerely meant, or whether the main aim is to function as propaganda to legitimize the Islamic Emirate. With regards to the "Code of conduct," however, many of the rules were concerned with clarifying procedures for internal command and control, perhaps indicating that the Taliban leadership were experiencing disciplinary problems on lower levels of the organization and issued this rule book in an attempt to counter them.[152]

There is anecdotal evidence of local insurgent commanders receiving direct orders from a higher-level leadership. The British journalist James Ferguson tells in *A Million Bullets* how he managed to arrange a meeting with Taliban fighters inside Afghanistan in 2006. According to the account, he was ensured safe passage to the Taliban members on order from a higher Taliban command. The local Taliban talked of kidnapping him, but desisted from it due to the "orders from Quetta."[153] It appears, therefore, that the Taliban leadership or their middlemen may exert direct influence over provincial-level insurgents inside Afghanistan.

According to a former commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, Gen. David D. McKiernan, "The insurgency remains poorly coordinated at operational and strategic levels."[154] It appears indeed that the IEA is a de-centralized movement where regional commanders largely are left to act on their own. At the same time, the top leadership seems to be able to exert some degree of influence and coordination, or at least they are attempting to do so. Overall, the coherence of the movement is ensured through the absolute loyalty of IEA's members to Mullah Omar, a status he has enjoyed since the days of the Taliban government. But does this mean that there are no dissidents within the IEA?

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[151] "The new Taliban codex," *Signandsight*, 28 Nov 2006, www.signandsight.com/features/1069.html (accessed 17 Jan 2009).
[152] Ibid.
[153] James Fergusson, *A million bullets: The real story of the British Army in Afghanistan* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2008), 297, 305.
[154] Carlotta Gall, "Ragtag Taliban show tenacity in Afghanistan," *New York Times,* 4 Aug 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/world/asia/04taliban.html?pagewanted=all (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

4.3   How coherent is the IEA's organization?

There have been various claims of internal rivalries and disputes within the Taliban leadership. One common claim is that the Taliban are split on ideological and strategic questions, such as over the question of their relationship with al-Qaida and the question of whether to enter into talks with the government. Others have held that there is a generational split within the Taliban, where younger and, arguably, more radical leaders such as Sirajuddin Haqqani have risen to power and are now rivalling the authority of the old leadership. Others, again, claim that the Taliban leadership is split due to personal differences.[155]

It is hard to find any firm evidence of these allegations. After 2001, Mullah Omar seems to have lived very isolated from his followers, and this may have estranged him from the rest of the organization.[156] On the other hand, the Mullah has always been a reclusive leader. During the five years of the Taliban government, he never once travelled to Kabul, but stayed in his home province Kandahar. Overall there are few indications that Mullah Omar's authority within the movement is eroding. Testifying to this is the fact that after 2002 there has been various attempts at splitting the IEA by creating rival organizations, but these temporary movements were soon absorbed into the IEA's organization again.[157] Another indication is that there have been few violent clashes between various IEA factions. It is worth noting that during the Taliban government, Mullah Omar exerted large influence of the organization. He was able to act as the autocratic ruler of the country – this in spite of the fact that the Taliban government back then had many more "moderate" members who would oppose his rule, than the IEA presumably has today.[158] It appears that Mullah Omar's authority is not easily challenged.

A possible exception to this was a letter allegedly written by Jalaluddin Haqqani and published in several Afghan newspapers in 2008. In an unusually harsh tone, the letter openly criticized Mullah Omar and argued that it was time to change the leadership of the IEA. The content of the letter was so radical, however, and so inconsistent with previous Haqqani network statements, that many observers soon dismissed it as false. It is not unlikely that letter was fabricated in order to create confusion and splits among IEA's followers. If the letter turned out to be true, it would represent a radical and unexpected move by the veteran *mujahidin* leader. It would also break with statements made both before and after the letter was written. In a video statement released a few months before the alleged letter, in April 2008, Haqqani confirmed his pledge to Mullah Omar and warned of a coming "spring offensive."[159] In an interview with Haqqani's son conducted by a Pakistani journalist on 28 July 2008, the letter was not mentioned. Sirajuddin stated his father was alive and commanding the *mujahidin*, and stated that "we are fighting under

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[155] Jason Burke, "Hunt for 'traitors' splits Taliban," *The Observer*, 27 May 2007, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/may/27/afghanistan.jasonburke (accessed 17 Aug 2009); "Dadullah sacking highlights Taliban rifts," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* (16 Jan 2008).

[156] During a large meeting of all of Taliban's 33 provincial commanders, held in November 2006, Mullah Omar was said to be not present due to security concerns. "The new Taliban codex," *Signandsight*, 28 Nov 2006, www.signandsight.com/features/1069.html (accessed 17 Jan 2009).

[157] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 81–83.

[158] Dorronsoro, *Revolution unending*.

[159] "Video» Afghanistan: Veteran mujahadeen defies west," *Adnkronos International*, undated, www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Video/?vid=1.0.2036914523 (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

the leadership of Amir al-Mu'minin [Mullah Omar]."[160] In an alleged interview with *al-Sumud*, published in December 2008, Haqqani refuted any rumours that there were splits in the IEA's leadership, instead praising the leadership of Mullah Omar.[161]

Few examples of dissent and internal conflicts in the IEA are known. An exception was in late 2007 when the IEA officially sacked one of their leaders, Mansur Dadullah, for carrying out actions "which do not comply with the principles of the Islamic Emirate."[162] The real background for Mansur Dadullah's sacking remains obscure, but for some reason, the Taliban leadership was intent on making his sacking public. Possibly, Mansur Dadullah was seen as acting too independently from Mullah Omar and the Islamic Emirate, and they wanted to state an example to the rest of the organization. It is possible that Mullah Dadullah, Mansur Dadullah's brother, was killed in May 2007 for the same reasons. Some analysts have argued that other Taliban leaders saw Mullah Dadullah as a rival to Mullah Omar and therefore gave up his position to coalition forces, who subsequently launched an attack to kill him.[163]

It is well known that after the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, many senior members left the organization. Former Taliban officials have also actively joined political life in Afghanistan. In the Parliamentary elections in 2005 six former Taliban officials ran as candidates, and two managed to win seats in the Parliament.[164] This indicates a possible weakness of the Taliban's coherence, but on the other hand, the Taliban government was more diverse and included more "moderates" than the IEA-led insurgency is today. A more direct measure of the coherence of the IEA's organization post-2001 is to look at the number of defections among IEA commanders and allies inside Afghanistan after the insurgency started. One well-known example of this is the defection of Mullah Abdul Salaam, described as a Taliban commander in the Musa Qala district of Helmand, who defected to the government when Afghan and British forces re-took the town of Musa Qala in 2008. He was subsequently made the town's governor.[165] There are a few other examples as well, but as Christia and Semple observed in 2009, such cases are "still too rare."[166] Some would take this as a sign that the Taliban leadership has indeed succeeded in creating a coherent organization. Others have argued that the low number of defections is rather due to the

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[160] "Interview with Taliban commander Sirajuddin Haqqani," *NEFA Foundation*, 18 Aug 2008, http://www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[161] *al-Sumud* 3, no.30 (Dec 2008).

[162] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A decision from the Islamic Emirate to remove Mansur Dadullah from his position," 29 Dec 2007.

[163] Author's conversations with sources in Kabul, Afghanistan autumn 2009.

[164] Those who won seats were Mullah Abdul Salam Rocketi (former Taliban corps commander in Kandahar), and Maulavi Muhammad Islam Muhammadi (former governor of Bamyan province). Others who ran but lost were: Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil (foreign Foreign Minister), Maulvi Qalamuddin (former head of the Taliban religious police), Mullah Muhammad Khaksar (former Deputy Minister), and some other less known personalities. "Khalid Bhatti, mafia, warlords and ex-jihad win elections," *SocialistWorld*, 8 Nov 2005, http://socialistworld.net/eng/2005/11/08afghanistan.html (accessed 14 Aug 2009); Christia and Semple, "Flipping the Taliban."

[165] Tom Coghlan, "Taliban defector is made Musa Qala governor," *Daily Telegraph*, 8 Jan 2008, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1574937/Taliban-defector-is-made-Musa-Qala-governor.html (accessed 14 Aug 2009).

[166] Christia and Semple, "Flipping the Taliban."

weakness of the Afghan state and lack of systematic effort on part of the coalition and the Afghan government.[167] Supporters of this view see the IEA's organization as a network of commanders who are not necessarily bound to the central leadership by common ideology and an immovable loyalty to Mullah Omar, but more often, by personal interests and out of strategic choice. As observed by Christia and Semple, IEA's success, both before and after 2001, was largely due to their ability to co-opt local commanders to their cause. Even Jalaluddin Haqqani's alliance with the IEA in 2002 was not something inevitable, but came as a result of a lack of other attractive alternatives.[168] It is worth remembering that changing alliances has always been a common feature of Afghan war-fighting. Throughout history, there are countless examples of commanders who suddenly flipped their loyalties, sometimes determining the outcome of a conflict.[169]

As the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, Western observers and policy-makers have increasingly been talking about the need for "negotiations with the Taliban" in one form or another.[170] Often, this refers to the strategy of trying to undermine IEA's coherence by gradually winning over mid- and low-level insurgent commanders inside Afghanistan who are willing to respect the constitution of Afghanistan. Some of the counter-insurgency literature also advises to not waste time on "extremists" – so-called soft approaches should be concentrated on "the groups with goals flexible enough to allow productive negotiations," according to the U.S. COIN manual.[171] At the same time, there is a debate on how to approach the IEA's senior leadership. Some look upon them as extremists that should be killed, others see them as holding the key to long-term peace and stability for Afghanistan.[172] In order to judge whether the Taliban leadership has a future role in Afghanistan, it is essential to have an understanding of their ideology and worldview. This will be the focus for the rest of this report.

5   Ideology and worldview

Little attention has so far been devoted to understanding the IEA's ideology, which is commonly described as a mixture between an extremist interpretation of Deobandi Islam (a Muslim revivalist movement that originated in India in the 19th century), and Pashtun village culture. Ahmed Rashid, the author of one of the most well-known books on the Taliban movement, states that the ideological base of the Taliban government was "an extreme form of Deobandism" with

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] See, for example, Hubertus Hoffman, "Afghanistan: Negotiations with the Taliban as the path to peace," *World Security Network*, 7 Dec 2009, www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=18148&topicID=77 (accessed 18 Dec 2009); "UK 'backs Taliban reintegration'," *BBC News*, 13 Nov 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8357972.stm (accessed 3 Dec 2009).

[171] *FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Department of the Army, Dec 2006): 1–15.

[172] See, for example, Bruce Riedel, "The next terror target," *The Daily Beast*, 17 Aug 2009, http://blogs.reuters.com/pakistan/2009/08/17/pakistan-after-mehsud-mullah-omar-in-the-cross-hairs/ (accessed 18 Dec 2009); Philip Jakeman, "Afghanistan: necessity and impossibility," *Opendemocracy.net*, 12 Oct 2007, via www.isaintel.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=87 (accessed 18 Dec 2009); "UK 'backs Taliban reintegration'," *BBC News*, 13 Nov 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8357972.stm (accessed 3 Dec 2009).

an interpretation that was strictly opposed to debate and reform, and that their goal was a "purist Islamic revolution."[173] Giustozzi argues that the 'ideology' of the Taliban government was ."... a mix of the most conservative village Islam with Deobandi doctrines, with a stress on the importance of ritual and modes of behaviour." Politics ."… was reduced to the demand of an orthodox application of the Shariah, based on a rigid interpretation of the Sunnah." Echoing this, Sullivan recently described Taliban's ideology as "a strict interpretation of Sharia law that incorporated local Pashtun traditional beliefs and a vision of a lost ideal Islamic society."[174] With regards to the Islamic Emirate after 2001, it is generally agreed that it has continued to pursue the "ideology" of the old government, but with some elements added, such as a degree of pragmatism and influence of "global jihadi" rhetoric. For example, Giustozzi argues that the ideology of the neo-Taliban "... is still derived to a large extent from the 'ideology' of the old Taliban," but that it differs from the old Taliban government in being more flexible with regards to implementation of Islamic law in order to aid the insurgency effort, and that it seems "more integrated into the global jihadist community."[175]

A shortcoming of all these descriptions is that they tend to focus narrowly on the movement's interpretation of religious doctrines and customs, and do not explain in a very clear way who the Taliban are, what they want, and how they justify their actions. The following discussion is based on a tool developed by John Wilson, who describes ideology as having three elements: *diagnosis* (how things got to be how they are), *prognosis* (what should be done and what the consequences will be), and *rationale* (who should do it and why).[176]

5.1   What is the problem, and who is to blame?

According to the IEA's narrative, Afghanistan is today occupied by infidel forces (the U.S. and their allies) who are trying to destroy Afghan and Islamic values. The problem started when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in late 2001, toppled the Taliban regime, and installed a puppet government whose sole purpose is to implement American policies in the country, rather than serving the interests of the Afghan people. This has led to the wide-spread corruption, insecurity, moral and material decay that the country has witnessed since late 2001.[177] After 2001, the IEA has consistently refused to accept America's official reasons for the invasion of Afghanistan, namely that the Taliban regime protected Osama bin Laden and allowed terrorist training camps on its territory. Even in 2005, the IEA continued to insist that there is no evidence al-Qaida was involved in the 11 September attacks.[178] These statements follow in the same track as the statements before 2001, when the Taliban regime continued to protect bin Laden under the pretext that there was no evidence against him.

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[173] Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, oil and the new Great Game in Central Asia*, 88.

[174] Sullivan, "Rise of the Taliban," *Journal of Peace Research* no.1 (2007): 101.

[175] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 12.

[176] Wilson, *Introduction to social movements*.

[177] See, for example, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Afghan national hardships," 25 Dec 2007.

[178] The Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate, "Communiqué from the Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [in Arabic]," 11 Sept 2005, www.alemarah.org

To counter the U.S. narrative of the invasion of Afghanistan, the IEA has frequently claimed that the U.S. invaded Afghanistan simply due to its hatred of Islam: A statement from Mullah Omar dated   4 October 2001 said that the U.S. did not invade Afghanistan because of the 11 September attacks, rather, "they want to finish off this Islamic state ... because it is Islamic."[179] In later statements, a similar wording has also been used.[180] The invasion of Afghanistan is often seen in relation to other perceived attacks on Islam and Muslims carried out by the West, such as the occupation of Palestine, the invasion of Iraq, insults of the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad, and so on.[181] This fits nicely in with the rhetoric of the al-Qaida network, which describes America as the root of all evil and the whole Muslim world as being under attack by an American-led crusade. But also prior to 2001, the Taliban regime expressed sympathy with oppressed Muslims elsewhere.[182] The significance of their "global rhetoric" should perhaps not be over-interpreted; it could simply reflect the fact that the IEA wishes to legitimate their struggle for an international audience and that it wants to attract the attention of Middle Eastern donors.

When explaining America's behaviour, the IEA's narrative echoes that of other anti-American currents across the Muslim world. American foreign policy is frequently described as being driven by economic interests, imperialist ambitions, and a desire to protect Israel. America's imperialist ambitions include a desire to spread Western culture and the Christian faith, although this is not seen as a main driving factor.[183] Rather, security and economic interests stand out as the main reasons for America's invasion of Afghanistan: In 2002 Mullah Omar stated:

> "America wants only to fight Islam and to prevent the implementation of the Sharia, because it knows that Islam and its people is the biggest danger to America and the Jews ... America wants to control the world and to exploit the resources and properties of weak peoples, and by that live in total security."[184]

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[179] Mullah Omar, "Support, oh people of Islam [in Arabic]," 4 Oct 2001, www.tawhed.ws/r?i=vvk4tuw3 (accessed 26 March 2009).

[180] For example, in 2005, the Taliban stated that the invasion happened because the U.S. and their allies "could not bear the Islamic Government in Afghanistan, and the rule of *sharia*..." See The Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate, "Communiqué from the Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [in Arabic]," 11 Sept 2005, www.alemarah.org

[181] See, for example, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from Mullah Omar of the Taliban," 2006; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Israeli Holocaust in Palestine and the wavering of Islamic states," 6 March 2008.

[182] See, for example, "Second interview with the Islamic Emirate Magazine," on www.alemarh.com, via Archive (Aug 2001). Here, Mullah Omar expresses sympathy with the Kashmir issue. He argues, however, that the conflict should be solved "by India and Pakistan" – in contrast to today's rhetoric where individual Muslims are encouraged to fight un-Islamic regimes and "Crusader enemies" without seeking permission from anyone.

[183] Statement from Mullah Omar, 2006: "The infidels in the West want to destroy our beliefs ('*aqa'id*), our morals, and to spread corruption on our society, and to make our people agents for them." See also statement from Mullah Omar, 2008: The goal of the enemy in Afghanistan has been to "remove the *mujahidin*, arresting Islamic leaders, finding a safe haven for them in Asia, controlling the central treasures of Asia, and promoting false faiths." The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A message from the Leader of the Faithful, may God preserve him, on the occasion of '*eid al-fitr*", 29 Sept 2008.

[184] Mullah Omar, "Message to the Muslim Islamic Nation [in Arabic]," 30 March 2002, http://www.tawhed.ws/pr?i=0vaabzxi (accessed 26 March 2009).

In a statement from 2005, this was further elaborated:

> "In Iraq, the main goal was to take control over the oil, and to provide security for Israel. In Afghanistan, the main goal was to get access to the mineral resources of Central Asia, and to establish a base in the area in order to be a starting point for occupying the countries of the region ... The truth of America's attacks is that it wants to extend its colonial tentacles all over the world ... the goal of America is not simply to occupy Afghanistan and Iraq, but to expand to the whole world!" [185]

In later statements, the IEA have expanded their rhetoric to include not only American imperialism, but also a host of other murky reasons that the West had for invading Afghanistan. In retrospect, the IEA described the Bonn agreement in December 2001 as aimed at:

> "pressuriz[ing] Afghans to abandon Jihad and resistance, put aside their courage and beliefs, accept slavery, spread obscenity, send their sisters, mothers and wives to brothels under the cloak of Women's Rights and freedom, open the way to invaders to destroy the national unity, preach Christianity and other expired religions at the expense of the preaching of the Holy Islam, and root out Afghan culture ..." [186]

It can be noted that the IEA's anti-American attitudes is not a recent phenomenon, but grew in strength already in the late 1990s as a result of U.S. policy towards the Taliban regime. A key event that seems to have worsened the relationship was the U.S. missile strikes on Afghanistan in August 1998, which the Taliban viewed as a gross violation of their national sovereignty. The relationship further deteriorated due to the increased pressure on the Taliban regime to eradicate opium production, improve the status of women and to expel the Saudi militant leader Osama bin Laden. When the Taliban finally took drastic steps to eradicate opium production in 2000–2001, they felt that they were not sufficiently rewarded by the international community. The Islamic Emirate sees the invasion of Afghanistan as a continuation of U.S. policies in the region, which started during the time of the Taliban regime:

> "[Before 2001,] the Taliban was ruling Afghanistan in accordance with the Sharia ... the U.S. could not stand this, so they forced, by way of the UN, economical sanctions on the Emirate. When they did not achieve their goals that way, they fired Cruise missiles upon Afghan territory. When this also failed, they gathered all the corrupted parties and satanic troops under the banner of the Crusaders, and attacked the Islamic Emirate. After a horrible and evil air attack against its cities, then it occupied it. Then they came with the Afghan agents that they had fostered by their own hands, and the Afghan government is currently run by them." [187]

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[185] The Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate, "Communiqué from the Supreme Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [in Arabic]," 11 Sept 2005, www.alemarah.org

[186] The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Bonn Agreement and the six years old Afghanistan," 12 Dec 2007.

[187] "Interview with Mullah Muhammad Rasul [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 3, no.25.

The "symptoms" of Afghanistan's problem is described as almost the same as in the 1990s, when the Taliban first came to power. Then, too, the country was ravaged by corruption, crime and lack of security. The solution back then was also to install an Islamic regime in Kabul. The difference in the IEA's narrative now is that while in 1990s, corrupt Afghan warlords were responsible for the situation, today, a foreign aggressor is responsible.

One might ask whether there is any truth in the Taliban leadership's version of history as presented through its propaganda. Is it possible, for example, that the United States had hidden motives for invading Afghanistan? Actually, it is not only the Islamic Emirate who has voiced such arguments, but also Western critics of the U.S. administration. The topic is beyond the scope of this report, but has been researched by Kolhatkar and Ingalls in *Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, warlords and the propaganda of silence*. The book, which otherwise does not shun criticising the U.S. administration, actually does not find any strong evidence that the U.S. had any "hidden agenda" in Afghanistan.[188] If Bush really wanted to invade Afghanistan, it would have been easy to find a pretext to do so, even before the 9/11 attacks. The lack of such attempts are taken as an indication that the U.S. administration invaded Afghanistan as a response to the 9/11 attacks, and not due to hidden economic or other interests.[189]

5.2 What should be done, and what is the desired "end state"?

According to the IEA's narrative, the only solution to Afghanistan's problems is armed struggle against the occupiers and their local lackeys, until an Islamic regime is re-installed in Kabul. The most urgent task is apparently to make foreign forces withdraw from the country. In 2006, Mullah Omar stated that as long as there are foreigners in Afghanistan, "the jihad will go on, even for a thousand years."[190] He repeated this in 2008, stating that "our struggle will continue until the departure of all foreign troops."[191]

At the same time, it seems clear that the desired "end state" is not the departure of foreign troops, but an instalment of an Islamic regime in Kabul. In 2007, for example, the IEA spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid stated, "the real solution to the issue of Afghanistan lies in the fact that foreign forces occupy our country, and an Islamic regime must be established according to the will of the Afghans."[192] The Islamic regime is seen as the only solution to Afghanistan's problems, as was also argued in *al-Sumud* in 2008: "There is no doubt that the Islamic regime is the only one which has basic values and correct doctrine, granting everyone their rights and spreading justice and equality amongst mankind."[193]

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[188] Sonali Kolhatkar and James Ingalls, *Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, warlords, and the propaganda of silence* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 42–49.
[189] See Kolhatkar and Ingalls, *Bleeding Afghanistan,* footnote 91.
[190] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from Mullah Omar," 10 Sept 2006.
[191] "Statement of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan regarding the untrue news about peace talk," *The Unjust Media*, 28 Sept 2008, www.theunjustmedia.com (acessed 24 Jan 2009).
[192] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The official spokesman denies Karzai's claims about the Taliban," 23 Nov 2007.
[193] "The International day of peace and American barbarity [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 28 (Oct 2008).

The IEA's statements are vaguer with regards to how this Islamic regime should look like, and who should lead it. In a statement from 2008, Mullah Baradir seems to indicate that the IEA will have a direct role in shaping the future state: "Right after the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan the Islamic Emirate will organize the administration and provide security."[194] The IEA gives few details about who they think should lead the new state, except that it has to be a person who is respected by "the Muslim people and all Afghans."[195] The IEA is careful not to claim that it has any power ambitions on its own. In 2006, it stated that "The goal of the Islamic Emirate is an independent Afghanistan and a sovereign state ... We do not want political power."[196] Mullah Baradir echoed this in 2008, stating that "were we conducting operations in order to reach power, we would have done it seven years ago. But our goal is elevation of the word of Allah the Great and Almighty, and liberation of Muslims."[197]

The denial of any power ambitions is also consistent with how the Taliban movement behaved in the mid-1990s, when it first took power in Afghanistan. Back then, the Taliban's stated goals were three-fold: 1) Consolidation (*iqrar*) of an Islamic system; 2) unite the country and prevent it from being divided; 3) Provide security and peace in the country. The Taliban even indicated that it was positive to allow king Zahir Shah return to power. Zahir Shah had fled Afghanistan in 1973 after being ousted in a coup by his nephew.[198] However, once the Taliban had taken power in Kabul they decided to take control of the state themselves. Mullah Omar explained it like this:

> "True, we did not intend to take power. Our goal is not simply to rule, and this is how we did it in the beginning. But when we managed to end corruption, we had a large *ulama* gathering. Their decision after shura was that we should take power to implement God's laws and Sharia on earth."[199]

As in the past, the current statements regarding the IEA's (lack of) political ambitions do not necessarily reflect the IEA's real power ambitions. Rather, the Islamic Emirate makes constant efforts through its propaganda to picture the insurgent movement in Afghanistan as a people-based and unified movement. The purpose is not only to recruit and legitimize themselves, but probably also to distance themselves from the *mujahidin* groups of the early 1990s, who after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 started fighting each other in order to assume power in Kabul. The IEA's propaganda specifically brought up this topic in an issue of *al-Sumud*, where one of the questions asked of Mullah Baradir was, "will the withdrawal of American forces lead to civil war, like it did in the 1990s after the USSR withdrawal?" Unsurprisingly, Mullah Baradir answers that

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[194] "Interview with Mullah Baradir [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.22 (April 2008): 13.

[195] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Declaration from Zabihallah (Mujahid) regarding the two foreign diplomats," 27 Dec 2007.

[196] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A statement from the Taliban leadership in response to Karzai," 28 Oct 2006.

[197] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Press-interview with the deputy Leader of the Faithful on the truth of the false negotiations," 19 Nov 2008.

[198] Mullah Omar, in "First interview with the Islamic Emirate Magazine," undated, probably late 1990 or early 2000s; www.alemarh.com, via Archive (page saved Aug 2001).

[199] Ibid.

"such a situation is impossible because the *mujahidin* movement of today is completely united..." Due to the history of Afghanistan, and the fragmented nature of the current insurgent movement, it is understandable that the IEA's statements do not include a detailed vision for the future, as this may sow splits in the movement.

It is interesting to note that not all of the IEA's leaders share the organization's view of the desired end state (the withdrawal of foreign troops and the instalment of an Islamic regime in Afghanistan). Mullah Dadullah expressed a more global view of the warfare when he in an interview with al-Jazeera in February 2006 stated that a condition for the IEA to stop fighting is that the U.S. withdraws "from Afghanistan *and Iraq* [emphasis added]." He further stated that the IEA is not fighting for Afghanistan, but for the whole Muslim world, and that "if they [coalition forces] withdraw from Afghanistan we will still fight them."[200] This should not be interpreted as a sign that the IEA has changed direction (the official Islamic Emirate propaganda has both before and after 2006 denied any ambitions outside Afghanistan, although they have not explicitly denied Mullah Dadullah's statements), but rather, indicative of internal disagreements within the movement.

Overall, the IEA's propaganda does not express a sophisticated vision of the future of Afghanistan – the vision is simply to establish an Islamic state implementing a narrow and selective interpretation of Islamic law. IEA's propaganda focuses on the short-term goal of expelling foreign forces, rather than on the ultimate goal of re-establishing the Islamic Emirate.[201] This does not necessarily mean that the IEA has no plans or ambitions for the future state at all. After all, several of IEA's current senior leaders held office in the previous Taliban government. However, it indicates that the "occupation discourse" has far greater mobilizing power among potential followers, than the idea of resurrecting the Taliban state or bringing Mullah Omar back to power.

5.3   Who should do it and why?

In short, the IEA argues that fighting the occupation of Afghanistan should be carried out by all Muslims, because it is a "religious duty" to defend Islam. The armed struggle is legitimized in religious terms, by referring to the duty of "jihad" and fatwas (religious rulings) by Islamic scholars. In October 2001, right before the start of the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan, Mullah Omar stated that "the Islamic Ummah and the Imams have all agreed that in the current situation, jihad against these aggressors becomes an individual duty for all Muslims."[202] At the same time, the struggle is also described as a struggle of the Afghan people against occupation. In September 2008, Mullah Omar stated that "the enemy will not be pleased until we accept their slavery, and therefore we must fight them, as described in the Koran, in order to preserve our land and faith."[203]

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[200] "Interview with Mullah Dadullah," *al-Jazeera*, Feb 2006.

[201] Foxley, "The Taliban's propaganda activities," 6.

[202] Mullah Omar, "Support, oh People of Islam [in Arabic]," 4 Oct 2001, http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=vvk4tuw3 (accessed 26 March 2009).

[203] The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A message from the Leader of the Faithful, may God preserve him, on the occasion of *'eid al-fitr*", 29 Sept 2008.

To sum up the discussion so far, the IEA's narrative post-2001 does not seem to reflect a 'new' ideology or movement. Rather, it follows in the same track as the Taliban government's narrative of the 1990s and the narrative of the *mujahidin* movement of the 1980s. In principle, the IEA's ideology also appears to have many things in common with that of other militant Islamist groups: There is a realization that Islam is absent from society, and the only way to redress this is to fight a violent jihad in order to overthrow existing power structures and replace them with an Islamic regime.

In order to highlight the differences between IEA's worldview and that of other militant Islamists, a set of more specific questions need to be added, such as: How does the IEA describe itself? How does it describe its allies and enemies? And what are its attitudes towards negotiations and power-sharing?

6   Identity and self-perception

When reading the IEA's propaganda, the IEA appears to have several identities at the same time, some of which appear to contradict each other. The Islamic Emirate is sometimes described as a hierarchical organization led by Pashtuns,[204] other times as a grassroots movement including the whole Afghan population.[205] It is described as an Afghan liberation movement fighting to free Afghanistan from occupation, but also as a pan-Islamist movement whose sole purpose is to fight for Islam. This does not mean that the Islamic Emirate's description of its own identity is so inconsistent that it is impossible to describe. The different "identities" are used in different contexts, and serve different purposes. This chapter will argue that fundamentally, the Taliban leadership views itself as a centralised organization with a clearly defined structure, rather than a loosely organised resistance movement. Secondly, it views itself as a government in exile representing the ousted Taliban government, rather than some kind of "new" movement. Finally, it views itself as an Afghan nationalist movement, fighting primarily for the future of Afghanistan rather than for a "pan-Islamist" cause on behalf of all the world's Muslims.

6.1   Central organization, or a loose alliance of militia groups?

The IEA's statements are careful to emphasise that the Afghan resistance movement is a united movement completely void of any form of factionalism or rivalries. One obvious reason for this is that the IEA needs to distance themselves from the *mujahidin* parties who fought the USSR in the 1980s, and who afterwards started to fight among themselves for power. The IEA, therefore, consistently dismisses any rumours of splits within the resistance movement, and at times even denies the existence of separate resistance groups.

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[204] "The organizational structure of the Taliban Islamic Movement," *al-Sumud* 2 no.21 (March 2008): 14–17.

[205] In 2007, Taliban stated that "The Taliban movement is a popular uprising, it was created from the core of the people." The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Important news about the publication of one of the Human Rights organizations," 11 May 2007.

On the other hand, the IEA's members seem to have a definite idea of who they are and how they relate to other actors on the Afghan arena. One visible sign of this is that the organization has an official name, crest and constitution; it has official spokesmen and media outlets such as the *Voice of Jihad* web page, and it also publishes its own newspapers and periodicals, and runs its own radio stations. In May 2008, it even outlined its organizational structure.[206] The IEA has also claimed to regulate the actions of their operatives through a set of "rules of engagement." In 2007, an IEA spokesman denied claims that the IEA does not have a legitimate central entity, saying that "these words are baseless."[207] This indicates that the Taliban leadership wants to promote itself as an active and influential organization, rather than a shadowy resistance movement with no clear leadership or identity.

6.2   A "government in exile" or neo-Taliban?

The Taliban's propaganda refers to the movement as "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" and the leadership views itself as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, which was unlawfully ousted from power during the U.S. invasion in 2001.[208] The IEA has continued to use the name, symbols, and even the constitution of the Taliban regime which ruled Afghanistan before 2001. They also tend to describe the period of the Taliban regime (1996–2001) as a golden age in Afghanistan's history. It was a period of prosperity and it was the only time Afghans lived in "complete security and freedom."[209]

The use of the old regime's symbols appears not to have been done in a systematic manner, but rather adapted gradually, as the IEA's media campaign became more sophisticated and the insurgency gained momentum. Since at least 2004, the IEA's official statements have been signed by "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (Pashto: *da afghanistan islami imarat*), which is the same name that the Taliban government applied to Afghanistan during 1996–2001. Mullah Omar has also retained the symbolic title of Leader of the Faithful (a*mir al-mu'minin*), which he was given at a gathering of *ulama* in 1996 to indicate he was the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate. Moreover, the current Taliban leadership uses the same crest as the former Islamic Emirate (a circular symbol consisting of two crossed swords, two wheat bundles, and in the middle the *shahada* under an open door, a Koran and a rising sun), as well as the flag (white with the *shahada* written on it in black letters) (see Appendix D). In 2006, the IEA also posted its constitution (*dustur*) online. The document was claimed to be identical to the constitution adopted by the Taliban government in 1998, and the document stated that the original constitution had

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[206] "The Organizational structure of the Taliban Islamic movement," *al-Sumud* 2 no.21 (March 2008): 14–17.

[207] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The official spokesman denies Karzai's claims about the Taliban," 23 Nov 2007.

[208] The Taliban government was never internationally recognized (only three states, Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia, recognized the Taliban, while the rest of the world and the UN continued to regard the Rabbani government as representatives of Afghanistan). Taliban, on its side, based its claim to legitimacy on the fact that they claimed to control 90–95% of Afghanistan's territory. In a statement from 2005, for example, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan is described as "baseless and unlawful" (*la usuli wala qanuni*). Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from the High Council of the Islamic Emirate regarding the 11 September events,"
11 Sept 2005.

[209] See, for example, "The International day of peace and American barbarity," *al-Sumud* 28 (Oct 2008).

been "re-approved by the IEA's shura council in 2006."[210] The IEA thus differs from other Sunni militant groups which typically do not have a constitution (*dustur*), but rather a doctrine or creed (*'aqida*). The Taliban leadership has also been involved in activities typical of a "shadow government," with the purpose of creating an alternative power structure in the country to undermine the authority of the present government.[211]

In sum, the IEA's propaganda indicates that the IEA wants to pose as a "government in exile" rather than some kind of new movement. While this is an important part of the IEA's narrative, it should be noted that in reality, the IEA-led insurgency is *not* identical to the organization that ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. While there is a certain continuity in leadership (see Chapter 4.1), there are important differences in organizational structure, coherence, tactics and, some would argue, ideology of the "old" and "new" Taliban. The literature often puts emphasis on changes in the IEA's ideology, tactics and the use of media (in particular the IEA's endorsement of Internet, DVDs and other modern communications technologies).[212] A more fundamental difference is probably the organizational structure and coherence of the IEA's organization. The IEA-led insurgency appears to be a more localized force than the Taliban force that took control over Afghanistan in the last half of the 1990s, and it also appears to be more closely connected to criminal networks.[213]

6.3 Fighting for a nationalist or divine cause?

The IEA's statements are ambiguous regarding the motivations of the movement: Is it a nation-oriented movement fighting for the Afghans and the future of the Afghan state, or is it purely fighting for the cause of God and a universal "Islamic nation," making national borders unimportant? There are many examples of statements belonging to the first category. IEA's official spokesperson said in 2008 that "the struggle in Afghanistan is the struggle of the Afghans," denying any kind of interference from outside (the IEA strenuously denies that they receive any kind of support from neighbouring states, especially Pakistan and the Pakistani intelligence service ISI).[214] The IEA's fighters are described as being united not only by faith, but also by a desire to defend their homeland. They are:

> "one rank and fight side by side against the Crusader forces, because Afghanistan is a religious country and a homeland (*balad dini wa watani*) for all its inhabitants, regardless whether they are Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara or others. Because the invader forces have violated

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[210] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Constitution," downloaded via *al-Hisba*, 19 June 2007.

[211] As Giustozzi has observed, one of these actions was to set up Islamic courts in areas under Taliban control. Another action was to develop a centralized propaganda campaign designed to counter the propaganda of the Afghan authorities and of the coalition forces. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 110–23.

[212] See, for example, Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop*, 236

[213] Author's interviews with sources in Kabul, Afghanistan, autumn 2009.

[214] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "We will increase the speed of our jihadi programs, and escalate its present frequency," 16 July 2008.

their religion, country and homeland, it is their duty to defend their religion, creed and homeland."[215]

This is, of course, countered by other rhetoric. Mullah Dadullah is the most visible example of an IEA commander who seeks to "globalize" the IEA's discourse and focus on the divine, rather than nationalist motivations. In February 2006, for example, he stated that:

> "we are not fighting here for Afghanistan, but we are fighting for Muslims everywhere and also the *mujahidin* in Iraq. The infidels attacked Muslim lands and it is a must that every Muslim should support his Muslim brothers."[216]

It should be stressed that it is not uncommon for groups fighting for nationalist causes to identify themselves with a "larger cause." This gives the movement legitimacy and support worldwide, but the movement usually retains a nationalist focus and identity. There are a few examples of truly "global" and universal movements (who have no homeland, but fight everywhere and typically as supporters of local conflicts). The al-Qaida network is the most obvious example of this in recent times. The International Communist brigades formed in the 1930s could also be seen as an example of the same phenomenon.[217]

In sum, the IEA appears to be fighting for a divine cause but within a nationalist context, seeking to restore God's rule in the context of Afghanistan. The IEA has consistently denied having any ambition to use military force outside Afghanistan's borders. A possible exception may be the Pashtun areas of Pakistan, but this remains an open question. The Durand line dividing Afghanistan and Pakistan has never been acknowledged by any Afghan ruler, including the Taliban regime. However, the question is absent from the IEA's current propaganda and does not constitute part of its political program. This would also be an unlikely move of the Taliban leadership, given its dependence on sanctuaries in Pakistan. As for now, it seems more important for the IEA to bring all ethnicities in Afghanistan under IEA rule, than to bring the Pashtun areas of Pakistan under IEA rule.

6.4   A movement encompassing all Afghans?

The IEA makes efforts to portray itself as a broad-based popular movement in order to increase its legitimacy. The IEA's propaganda often emphasizes that the insurgent movement is a movement for all Afghans and that it is not divided according to ethnic or tribal affiliation. In its Arabic-language journal *al-Sumud*, the field commander of Ghor province denied that the insurgent movement is a Pashtun movement, stating that the resistance in his province (and also in Faryab, Herat and Nimruz) is mostly carried out by Tajiks. On the other hand, IEA indirectly admits that it is a movement *led* by Pashtuns, in that all commanders who have been named by the IEA's propaganda are of Pashtun origin. The IEA's "martyr biographies" also feature almost exclusively Pashtuns. So although the IEA likes to describe itself as a movement encompassing

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[215] "Interview with the commander of Laghman province [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 3, no.26.

[216] "Interview with Mullah Dadullah," *al-Jazeera*, Feb 2006.

[217] See, for example, R. Dan Richardson, "Foreign fighters in Spanish militias: The Spanish civil war 1936–1939," *Military Affairs* 40, No.1 (Feb 1976): 7–11.

all segments and ethnicities of Afghan society, they also do not hide the fact that it is a fundamentally Pashtun-dominated organization.

In sum, the IEA-led insurgent movement of today sees itself as the continuation of the ousted Taliban government of the 1990s. It describes the Taliban regime of the 1990s as a golden age in Afghanistan's history which it seeks to return to. It tends to present itself as part of the Muslim world and to put its grievances into a global perspective, but fundamentally, it remains a nationalist and traditionalist Pashtun-dominated movement.

7   View of other insurgent groups

As mentioned previously, it is important for the Taliban leadership to emphasise the unity of the insurgent movement in Afghanistan. For this reason, it consistently denies media reports of splits or factionalism or even the existence of separate groups within the insurgent movement. A statement by Mullah Dadullah from 2006 can serve to illustrate this: When asked whether he had "any ties with other *mujahidin* parties who fight Americans, such as Haqqani, Hekmatyar and Yunus Khalis' party" he said:

> "Thank Allah, the whole world stands with the *mujahidin*. The blood which runs in our veins is the same and our religion and enemy are the same and any Mujahid who fight in any place is considered a brother of ours and we support him as much as we can. All the *mujahidin* are unified with themselves."[218]

On the other hand, the Islamic Emirate has a definite idea of who they are and how they relate to other actors on the Afghan arena. One visible sign of this was described above, namely that the Islamic Emirate has an official name, crest and constitution, and to some extent sees itself as a "government in exile" that represents the remnants of the Taliban government which was ousted in 2001. It has a centralized media campaign, it claims to have a definite organizational structure and it has issued rules and regulations to apply to its followers. The fact that the IEA views itself as having a separate identity becomes even clearer when we look at how it describes other militant actors in Afghanistan. A close reading of various statements shows that the IEA sees itself as having a full spectrum of "allies" – from those described as full members of the organization, such as Jalaluddin Haqqani's network, to more pragmatic "bed fellows" such as Hekmatyar who are tolerated due to their fighting for the same goal.

7.1   Afghan groups

The networks of Jalaluddin Haqqani and Yunus Khalis are described by IEA's propaganda as part of the Islamic Emirate. Both Haqqani and Khalis were part of the *mujahidin* resistance during the Soviet occupation, and both were allied with the Taliban government during the Taliban regime. Jalaluddin Haqqani served as Taliban's minister for tribal affairs, while Yunus Khalis retained authority over the Eastern province of Nangarhar. Khalis died in 2007 while Haqqani is ageing

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[218] "Interview with Mullah Dadullah," *al-Jazeera*, Feb 2006.

but still alive. Today, their activities are largely carried out by their sons; Sirajuddin Haqqani in South-eastern Afghanistan and Khalis' son Anwar al-Haq Mujahid who leads a group called the "Tora Bora front" in Eastern Afghanistan.

At one point, IEA's spokesman was quoted as saying that the Tora Bora front is not part of the Islamic Emirate, but later claimed that the newspaper had quoted him wrongly.[219] Both Haqqani and Khalis' networks, however, seem to have retained their separate identity. This is visible by the fact that they issue statements not through the media committee of the Taliban leadership, but through their own media outlets. The Haqqanis have issued statements through videos that have been sent to international media agencies and/or posted online, and through at least one interview with the Pakistani journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai.[220] The Tora Bora front has its own webpage, *Tora Bora*, in Pashto.[221] On the other hand, both the Haqqanis and Abd al-Haq Mujahid have also been featured in the IEA's official propaganda, unlike other militant actors on the arena such as Hekmatyar, Pakistani Taliban, and Arab militants.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is the founder of the radical Islamist party Hizb-e-Islami (today referred to as Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, or HIG). Hekmatyar was one of the major players in the Afghan-USSR war in the 1980s, and received substantial financial backing from Pakistan. After the Soviet withdrawal he became entangled in the civil war in Afghanistan, and became notorious for shelling Kabul with thousands of rockets in the early 1990s. He was forced to flee the country when Taliban seized the capital in 1996. During 1996–2001 he lived in exile in Iran, but came back to Afghanistan after the Taliban regime was ousted, and decided to join the insurgency. After 2001 his group has been mostly active in north-eastern Afghanistan, and he is said to have a support base in the Shamshatoo refugee camp in the NWFP.[222]

The IEA's public statements contain very few references to Hekmatyar or his organization. This indicates, perhaps, that their relationship is a somewhat contentious issue. The IEA has never directly criticized Hekmatyar after 2001, but due to their different ideologies and political stances, the IEA and HIG are likely to be pragmatic allies at best.[223] Hekmatyar, on his side, has denied that he is part of the IEA or other insurgent groups in Afghanistan or Pakistan. In an interview in 2008 he stated, "We don't have any kind of link with al-Qaeda, Afghan or Pakistani Taliban."[224]

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[219] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "BBC and Azadi Radio distort the statements of the official spokesperson and attribute lies to him," 17 Nov 2008.

[220] See, for example, "Video» Afghanistan: Veteran mujahadeen defies west," *Adnkronos International*, undated, www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Video/?vid=1.0.2036914523 (accessed 17 Aug 2009); "Interview with Taliban commander Sirajuddin Haqqani," *NEFA Foundation*, 18 Aug 2008, http://www1.nefafoundation.org/multimedia-intvu.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[221] *Tora Bora*, www.toorabora.com (accessed 16 Aug 2009).

[222] Omid Marzban, "Shamshatoo refugee camp: A base of support for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar," Terrorism *Monitor* 5, No.10 (24 May 2007), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4189&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=182&no_cache=1 (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

[223] "Qazi Amin Waqad assesses the threat from Hizb-e Islami," Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, 1 Oct 2007, http://kabulcenter.org/?p=91 (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

[224] Candace Rondeaux, "Afghan rebel positioned for key role," *Washington Post*, 5 Nov 2008, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/04/AR2008110403604.html (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

According to a former Hizb-e-Islami member, Qazi Amin Waqad, Hekmatyar is more likely to ally himself with the Karzai government than with the IEA.[225] Rumours of peace talks between Hekmatyar and the Afghan government is probably one reason why the IEA does not want to be associated with his group.[226] On the other hand, the IEA avoids criticizing him openly in order to uphold the image of a united Afghan insurgent movement.

7.2   The Pakistani Taliban

The term "Pakistani Taliban" usually refers to a loose coalition of militant groups based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. Since 2006, they have been known under the name Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella organization of perhaps as many as 40 groups led by the South Waziristan-based militant Beitullah Mehsud. However, it appears that the various groups within the TTP have continued to operate autonomously, due to differences in ideology and strategy.[227]

In spite of their common interests in fighting U.S. forces in Afghanistan, the IEA has repeatedly denied that it has any kind of organizational ties with the Pakistani Taliban. The reason for this appears to be divergence in ideology and strategy. In particular, the IEA has criticised the Pak-Taliban for attacking Pakistani targets inside Pakistan. In June 2006, Sirajuddin Haqqani allegedly issued a statement explaining that fighting Pakistan does not conform to the IEA's policies: "[Fighting Pakistan] is not our policy. Those who agree with us are our friends and those who do not agree and (continue to wage) an undeclared war against Pakistan are neither our friends nor shall we allow them in our ranks."[228]

In practice, deep-rooted ties exist between Pashtun militants on both sides of the Durand line, blurring the distinction between the IEA and Pakistani Taliban. It has even been argued that the IEA's leadership exerts direct control over some of the FATA-based local commanders.[229] The IEA's rhetoric must be viewed in light of the IEA's long history of ties with Pakistan and their dependence on cross-border sanctuaries in the country. The IEA is probably afraid that a militant campaign inside Pakistan will jeopardize the IEA's own sanctuaries in FATA, NWFP and Baluchistan. The IEA, therefore, has consistently denied having anything to do with militant activities directed against Pakistani authorities.

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[225] "Qazi Amin Waqad assesses the threat from Hizb-e Islami," Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, 1 Oct 2007, http://kabulcenter.org/?p=91 (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

[226] "Karzai in move to share power with warlord wanted by US," *The Sunday Times*, 10 May 2009, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6256675.ece (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

[227] See Qandeel Siddique, "The Red Mosque operation and its impact on the growth of the Pakistani Taliban," FFI-Report No. 2008/01915, www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00115/Qandeel_Siddique_-_115418a.pdf (accessed 17 Dec 2009).

[228] Ismail Khan, "Forces, militants heading for truce," *Dawn,* 23 June 2006, www.dawn.com/2006/06/23/top2.htm (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[229] Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the new Taliban: Insights from the Afghan field* (London: Hurst, 2009): 281–284.

7.3   The al-Qaida network

The relationship between the Taliban regime and Osama bin Laden started in 1996, when the Taliban took power in Afghanistan. Throughout the 1990s, their relationship remained somewhat turbulent, but the Taliban regime never wavered in the question of whether to expel bin Laden from Afghanistan, a policy which ultimately led to the regime's demise.

How does the IEA look upon al-Qaida today? Officially, the IEA has never blamed bin Laden or al-Qaida for their demise. As discussed above, the IEA has consistently refused to accept the U.S. explanation for why they invaded Afghanistan, and claim there is no proof that bin Laden was involved in the 11 September attacks. The statements of Taliban leaders also tend to emphasise that the relationship between them and the Arab *mujahidin* continues to be strong. This, of course, follows the IEA's line of always emphasising the strength and unity of the insurgent movement. The Taliban leaders who have most clearly exaggerated the close relationship between the IEA and al-Qaida is Mullah Dadullah and his brother and successor, Mansur Dadullah. The Saudi-educated Afghan sheikh Muhammad Yasir has also talked warmly about al-Qaida, and so has the IEA's deputy commander Mullah Baradir.

Up until his death in 2007, Dadullah was leader of the IEA's operations in southern Afghanistan. He was known as a charismatic commander who lost one of his legs during the jihad against the Soviets, and was famous for saying that he would limp his way to Paradise. He was also notorious for his brutality, and in 1998 he was accused of committing atrocities against civilians during a military campaign in Hazarajat in central Afghanistan.[230] After 2001, he continued to use brutal tactics (such as videos of beheadings[231]). In 2005, Dadullah gave two interviews to al-Jazeera, in which he stressed the IEA's "close links" to al-Qaeda. "Our cooperation is ideal," he said. He also claimed that Osama bin Laden was issuing orders directly to the IEA. However, this does not correspond with what other IEA figures, or other al-Qaida leaders, have said about the command structure of the IEA. The IEA holds that Mullah Omar is the undisputed leader of the Islamic Emirate, a view which is also expressed by al-Qaida. Ayman al-Zawahiri said in 2008 that "Mullah Omar is the commander for Afghanistan, and Sheikh Osama is one of his soldiers."[232]

After the death of Mullah Dadullah in June 2007, his brother Mansur Dadullah took over his responsibilities. He was quickly featured by several jihad propaganda outlets, including videos by *al-Sahab*.[233] In October 2007, he said that the IEA and al-Qaida were sharing strategic information with each other as well as cooperating on a tactical level. "We praise Allah that our work and the work of Al-Qaeda are one ... The coordination between us is organized and very strong."[234] In the same interview, however, he also stated that "we have contact with each other

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[230] Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, 242–43.

[231] The first decapitation of an Afghan hostage was posted online on 25 December 2005. Hekmat Karzai, "Afghanistan and the globalization of terrorist tactics," *IDSS Commentaries*, 4 Jan 2006, www.pvtr.org/pdf/commentaries/IDSS0012006.pdf (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[232] "Open meeting with Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri, part two [in Arabic]," *al-Sahab*, April 2008.

[233] Only three high-ranking Taliban members have to this date been featured by *al-Sahab*: Mullah Dadullah, Mansur Dadullah and Sheikh Muhammad Yasir.

[234] "Video interview with the Taliban field commander, Mullah Mansur Dadullah [in Arabic]," *al-Sahab*, Oct 2007.

through magazines and the Internet," indicating, perhaps, that their relations to foreign militants were more of an ideological nature, rather than a direct personal and practical relationship.[235]

In line with this argument, Mullah Omar is alleged to have said in 2007 that he had no personal relationship with Osama bin Laden anymore: "I have not met bin Laden for the past five years, nor attempted to meet him." He also said that "we have never felt the need for a permanent relationship with al-Qaida."[236] The authenticity of the interview has not been confirmed. According to the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*, the interview was carried out by e-mail correspondence between the Pakistani journalist and the IEA's media office. If it is authentic, it represents a rare interview with Mullah Omar, who has not given any official interviews to external media since 2002 (with the possible exception of an unauthenticated phone interview with a Pakistani journalist in 2004).

It is hard to establish the real nature of the relationship between the IEA and al-Qaida militants, based on open sources. From the IEA's propaganda, however, we can make at least two observations: That al-Qaida is portrayed as an ally, rather than part of the organization; and that al-Qaida militants are tolerated as long as they do not try to challenge the IEA's power.

As we have already discussed, the Islamic Emirate does not admit to have any foreigners (or even non-Pashtuns) among their leaders, and they do not feature interviews with Arabs in their official propaganda. It appears that this was the case from the very beginning of the insurgency. Mullah Omar's list of Shura council members from 2003 only included Afghan Pashtuns (see Appendix B). The Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid also observed that "the Quetta shura in 2002–2003 deliberately did not include any Arabs, to not attract attention from the U.S."[237] In spite of Mullah Dadullah's statements quoted above, it appears that the IEA strives to appear as an indigenous Afghan movement.

It is also important for the Islamic Emirate to emphasize that al-Qaida is not interested in establishing a rival organization in Afghanistan, but is merely there to help the IEA. In 2008, Mullah Baradir stressed this last point:

> "After the U.S. attack on Afghanistan devoted youth from the Muslim world came to support us in the fight, and they still do. They did not come to Afghanistan to establish political parties and organizations ... they know that what is valuable for Muslims is to fight as one. The bond between the Taliban and their [foreign] helpers is one of brotherhood and common creed ... and the West can not break it with whatever means. To those who say there are foreigners in the Taliban, I say: Defending Afghanistan is an individual duty for all Muslims. The only goal of the foreigners is martyrdom; they do not have any political goal behind it.

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[235] "Interview with commander Mullah Mansur during his visit to the Islamic Nuclear Deterrent Training Center," Umar Studio, Aug 2007.

[236] "Mullah Omar says hasn't seen bin Laden for years," *Reuters*, 4 Jan 2007, www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP137015.htm (accessed 19 May 2009).

[237] Rashid, *Descent into chaos*, 265.

> Secondly; there are many examples, even from early history of Islam, of "foreigners" fighting for Muslims in a country. And that's the tradition we have to follow. We don't allow foreigners to come here to establish parties."[238]

At this point, one can only speculate what the IEA's leadership thinks of recent statements by al-Qaida leaders calling Pakistanis to jihad against the Pakistani regime.[239] While such a policy is in line with the goals of certain Pakistani militant groups, such as Baitullah Mehsud's organization, it is hardly in harmony with the IEA's policy of staying out of Pakistani internal affairs. On the other hand, al-Qaida has not carried out an extensive militant campaign in Pakistan the same way as Pak-Taliban, but appears to have only taken responsibility for a handful of "symbolic" operations aimed at assassinating former president Pervez Musharraf and attacking Western embassies in Karachi and Islamabad.

In 2008, there were rumours in the international press that the IEA had split with al-Qaida. This information allegedly came to the surface during a secret meeting between representatives of the Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami and others, held in Saudi Arabia on 24–27 September 2008. According to the CNN, the talks ."..involved 11 Taliban delegates, two Afghan government officials, a representative of former mujahadeen commander and U.S. foe Gulbadin Hekmatyar, and three others."[240] An article in New York Times claimed that the Islamic Emirate's official spokesmen had confirmed that there was such a split: "The two Afghan Taliban spokesmen, Mr. [Zabihullah] Mujahed and Qari Yousuf Ahmadi ... claim that the Afghan Taliban broke with Al Qaeda after the Sept. 11 attacks which led to the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan."[241] However, the IEA's own propaganda outlets have not published any statements confirming this quote. U.S. military sources told that there is no evidence that al-Qaida split from the IEA, and that those "Taliban members" who had claimed it (i.e. the delegation that went to Saudi Arabia to negotiate with King Abdullah) had no influence within Mullah Omar's Taliban movement.[242]

7.4 The IEA's hierarchy of allies

One of the prime goals of the IEA's propaganda is to emphasise the strength and unity of the Afghan insurgent movement. At the same time, they have various ways of describing the other militant groups in Afghanistan – from pragmatic allies to full-fledged members of the IEA's organizational structure. We cannot say that this "hierarchy" is defined by common ethnicity, since the Arabs in al-Qaida appear as closer allies than the Afghan Pashtun Hekmatyar. Neither does it appear to be defined by common goals – the goals of Hekmatyar and the IEA are essentially the same (expelling foreign forces from Afghanistan and establishing an Afghan state

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[238] "Interview with Mullah Baradir," *al-Sumud* (2008).

[239] See, for example, Ayman al-Zawahiri, "My Muslim brothers and sisters in Pakistan," *al-Sahab*, July 2009, FFI's Jihadist video database, #793.

[240] Nic Robertson, "Sources: Taliban split with al Qaeda, seek peace," *CNN*, undated, www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/10/06/afghan.saudi.talks/index.html#cnnSTCText (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[241] Carlotta Gall, "Ragtag Taliban show tenacity in Afghanistan," *New York Times,* 4 Aug 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/08/04/world/asia/04taliban.html?pagewanted=all (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[242] Bill Roggio, "Taliban have not split from al Qaeda: sources," *The Long War Journal*, 7 Oct 2008, www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/10/taliban_have_not_spl.php (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

based on Sharia law), while those of al-Qaida and Pakistani Taliban differ, at least in the long run (al-Qaida seeks to expand the conflict beyond Afghanistan, while Pakistani Taliban fight to establish an Islamic regime in Pakistan).

On the other hand, *historic relations* appear to be important: Haqqani and Khalis were members of the Taliban government in the 1990s, while al-Qaida and Pakistani militants provided material and military support. Hekmatyar, in contrast, turned down an offer to ally himself with the Taliban in 1996, and fled the country instead. He did not return until 2002, after the Taliban had been ousted from power. Another defining feature of the IEA's hierarchy of allies appears to be the question of *authority*: Hekmatyar has not sworn allegiance to Mullah Omar, and his party pursues an independent political strategy in Afghanistan, although it occasionally converges with that of the IEA. For example, when there are allegations of talks between insurgents and the Afghan government, Hizb-e-Islami is the only party besides the IEA said to have their own representatives present. His party, therefore, appears to be a potential challenger to the IEA's hegemony in the Afghan insurgency. The foreign fighters, in contrast, were commended by Mullah Baradir in 2008 because they "did not come to Afghanistan to establish political parties and organizations." Here probably lies some of al-Qaida's relative success in integrating themselves into the militant environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the Afghan insurgency, al-Qaida has not attempted to challenge the IEA's power, but have concentrated on providing advice, funds and military support for their local allies. Table 7.1 provides a summary of the IEA's "hierarchy of allies."

	Status with the Taliban leadership	Pashtun ethnicity	Common goal	Allies in the past (1980s-1990s)	Challenge to the IEA's authority?
Haqqani, Khalis	Integrated part of the IEA's organization.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Al-Qaida	Separate organization. Acknowledged ally. Oath of allegiance.	No	No	Yes	No
Pakistani Taliban	Separate organization. Sometimes acknowledged ally. Oath of allegiance.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Hekmatyar	Separate organization. No oath of allegiance. Tolerated as an ally.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Table 7.1   The Islamic Emirate's hierarchy of allies

8   View of adversaries

The next step to learning more about the IEA's worldview is to look at how they relate to other actors on the arena in Afghanistan. Some actors are obviously described as enemies (the international coalition forces and the Afghan government), while others, such as NGOs or foreign civilians, may have a more diffuse status. One way of defining the IEA's enemy hierarchy is to take a quantitative approach: What types of targets are attacked by the insurgents, and how frequently? A search in the Global Terrorism Database, for example, reveals that out of 602 incidents perpetrated by "Taliban" in Afghanistan between 2002–2007, the most frequent targets were:

- 'Police' (190 incidents)
- 'Private citizens, property' (151 incidents)
- 'Government (general)' (113 incidents)
- 'Military' (108 incidents).[243]

In comparison, there were 27 attacks on 'NGOs' and 15 attacks on 'Government (Diplomatic)'. This method has of course a number of limitations. The databases may contain incomplete and inaccurate data, and the perpetrator of an incident is often unclear or unknown. Moreover, the choice of target may be influenced by pragmatic, rather than ideological, concerns. Nevertheless, the statistics seem to correspond with the IEA's own propaganda which argues that the IEA's main enemies are the international forces in Afghanistan and the local "puppet regime" (see Chapter 8). On the other hand, it also indicates that a substantial portion of insurgent attacks are affecting Afghan civilians, something the IEA would be very reluctant to admit.

The method of using attack statistics is well suited for analysing general trends within the insurgency, and for getting an indication of what types of targets are most frequently attacked. However, the statistics do little to clarify the main topic for this report, which is the IEA's worldview and attitudes. The raw numbers do not explain why the IEA prefers some targets and not others, how they justify their attacks, or how they view international bodies and institutions, such as the United Nations and the Muslim World League. In order to answer these and other questions, a more qualitative approach is needed. In the following, we have therefore looked at the IEA's statements with regards to the following four types of adversaries: a) Coalition forces; b) Afghan government and security forces; c) Foreign civilians in Afghanistan (including diplomats, journalists and NGO workers); and d) International institutions.

8.1   Coalition forces

As mentioned earlier, the IEA views it as its most urgent task to make U.S. and NATO forces leave Afghanistan and thereby end the "foreign occupation" of the country. Foreign troops are looked upon as infidels who should be fought and killed, until they are compelled to withdraw

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[243] The following search criteria were used: Years: 'between 2002 and 2007'; 'All incidents regardless of doubt'; Perpetrators: 'Taliban'; and Country: 'Afghanistan.' *Global Terrorism Database,* www.start.umd.edu (accessed 15 Aug 2009).

from Afghanistan.[244] There appears to be no difference in how to deal with American troops and troops from other countries; or between ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). However, the IEA is aware of the structure of the coalition as well as its internal debates and disagreements, and has frequently tried to exploit these differences. For example, the IEA's propaganda has addressed people of European countries and encouraged them to stop fighting for U.S. interests.[245] The disagreements within the NATO alliance is also presented by IEA propaganda as "proof" that the international coalition is on the verge of collapse, the same way that the Communist Warsaw pact collapsed in the early 1990s.

Is there any alternative ways to deal with the U.S. and NATO troops, other than armed struggle? The IEA has repeatedly stated that it is an absolute condition that foreign troops leave Afghanistan, before any kind of negotiations with the other parties in Afghanistan can take place. The Emirate is not interested in dealing directly with the coalition forces, neither before nor after their withdrawal, except on the topic of paying compensation to Afghan civilians. Mullah Dadullah said in 2006 that they might consider discussing with the U.S. and NATO after they have withdrawn from Afghanistan, but "only one particular thing: The wrongdoings that are performed here, and only after they pay compensation for what they did."[246]

How would the IEA treat NATO troops who surrendered? In a message from Mullah Omar dated September 2008, he seems to offer the coalition forces a safe passage out of Afghanistan, should they decide to surrender:

> "We say to the occupation: at the beginning, you were conceited with the power of your technology. You attacked our land directly without understanding or acceptable proof. Now, in light of the deteriorated conditions, reconsider your wrong decision of wrong occupation, and seek a safe exit to withdraw your forces. If you leave our lands, we can arrange for you a reasonable opportunity for your departure."[247]

In any case, the IEA gives the impression that until the NATO surrenders or seeks to withdraw from Afghanistan, there is no alternative to armed struggle against them. However, the IEA has indicated an interest in cooperating with NATO on one specific issue: In May 2008, the IEA's Shura Council issued a statement calling for a neutral investigation commission to be established

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[244] "Interview with Mullah Baradir [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.22 (April 2008): 14.

[245] See, for example, the message to the people of the West in April 2008: "The Islamic Emirate calls, once again, to the peoples of the Western countries that if they want to have a peaceful and prosperous life in the world, they must not give the rulers of their countries, or the writers who support the statement of freedom of expression and belief, an opportunity for their despicable wishes and selfish policies to push the West, with the rest of the world, especially the people of the Islamic states, into crises, conflicts, and greater wars over this." Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The eternal enemies of Islam have committed another historic crime!"
1 April 2008.

[246] "Interview with Mullah Dadullah," *al-Jazeera*, Feb 2006.

[247] The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A message from the Leader of the Faithful, may God preserve him, on the occasion of '*eid al-fitr*", 29 Sept 2008.

in Afghanistan in order to investigate atrocities carried out against the Afghan population. The committee should be:

> "... consisting of scholars, dignitaries of Afghanistan, independent journalists, and deputies from human rights associations, and a deputy from the International Red Cross. ... In order to solidify this team and its security, two deputies from the Islamic Emirate and the NATO alliance will accompany it, so that it identifies clearly, through an independent and transparent investigation, who kills the masses, who puts them in prisons without charge and without question, who demolishes their homes and their countryside, and who burns the harvest of their plantations."[248]

It is not uncommon of the IEA to claim that it is NATO forces and the Afghan government, rather than the IEA itself, who are behind the majority of atrocities committed towards Afghan civilians. The above statement must be seen in relation to this other propaganda. However, it is interesting that the IEA here opens up for a role played by a NATO representative in the current conflict, whereas the IEA in the past has consistently denied any kind of role for the NATO at all, lest they decide to surrender or withdraw from Afghan soil first. On the other hand it is yet too early to conclude that the IEA has "softened" its stance towards the NATO.

8.2   The Afghan government and security forces

The Afghan government and security forces are the target type most frequently attacked by insurgents in Afghanistan. The IEA's leaders, on their side, spends considerable effort trying to justify these types of attacks. Undoubtedly, this is rooted in the fact that killing other Muslims is a controversial question among the IEA's potential followers; it is also rooted in the fact that in order to gain credibility, the IEA must portray itself as different from militant groups and warlords who committed atrocities against the Afghan population in the past.

Shortly after the fall of the Taliban and the start of the insurgency, *fatwas* appeared that legitimized the killing of anyone who cooperates with the occupation forces, including Afghan Muslims. Several statements have later been issued that seek to defame and de-legitimize President Hamid Karzai and his administration.[249] The basic argument is that Karzai is a lackey of the U.S. who has no power to make independent policy decisions. He is an agent who represents the occupation forces, rather than the Afghan people, and it is therefore legal to target him and members of his administration. A typical such statement reads:

> "... Karzai is a tool for the foreigners who appointed him, he has no competent authority, and he failed in his promises to the Afghan people ... If he was free [from American influence] he should stop the killing of Afghans, and stop the occupation of the country."[250]

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[248] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Shura Council requests neutral investigation commission in Afghanistan," 18 May 2008.

[249] See, for example, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "There is nothing new in the meeting between Karzai and Bush, and Karzai's announcements are amusing," 7 Aug 2007; "The official spokesman denies Karzai's claims about the Taliban," 23 Nov 2007; "The Bonn Agreement and six years old Afghanistan," 12 Dec 2007.

[250] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The official spokesman denies Karzai's claims about the Taliban," 23 Nov 2007.

The Afghan National Army is also a popular target for defamatory statements: Mullah Dadullah said, "Their resistance for us is very fragile. Seventy thousand or fifty thousand, they are like chickens in a chicken farm. This army is composed of drug addicts or thieves, but the real people are not with them."[251] Mullah Omar echoed this in 2008, lashing out at both Afghan security forces as well as local and national government representatives. Afghan security forces were described as:

> "... the worst creation among mankind, of little faith, tarnished with liquor and impudence, and people who are let out from detention, how can they keep the money, glory, and the purity of the people? ... And the ministers and rulers of provinces are leaders of groups of loot and pillage, international smugglers, deputies of the international mafia, or members of the intelligence agencies of the occupation forces." [252]

Such defamation of local authorities seems to be a more frequent theme in the IEA's propaganda now than at the beginning of the insurgency.

While there is little doubt in the IEA's propaganda that NATO can only be approached by violent means, the Emirate is somewhat vaguer with regards to how the Karzai administration can be approached. The IEA has repeatedly warned Karzai and others who work for the Americans that they must change their ways and repent, or face the consequences. They have warned Afghan "agents of the U.S." that the U.S. are only using them for their own benefit, and that the U.S. will probably not save them, should they decided to pull out.[253] But what would the IEA actually do with Karzai and the others, should the IEA come to power in Afghanistan? In one statement from 2007, the IEA's spokesman Qari Yusuf likened Karzai government to that of the Communist president Najibullah, and stated that when the Americans pull out of Afghanistan, "Karzai will face the same fate [as Najibullah] and will be dragged to justice as soon as possible."[254] It is an ominous parallel given the fact that when the Taliban entered Kabul in 1996, Najibullah was tortured and hanged from a lamp post in Kabul, and pictures of it circulated around the world. On the other hand, it is not clear whether the statement was meant to be taken literally. It is more common for the IEA to say that when the time comes, Karzai's destiny will be decided upon by an Islamic court. It can be noted that while Mullah Omar offered a "safe passage" for foreign troops to leave the country, such an option is not available for Karzai:

> "I say that Karzai, the agent of the aggressors and the invaders, and his followers are looking for ways to escape, but we do not leave for them a way to be saved. By the Will of Allah we shall bring them to the Islamic court and they know the authority of our court."[255]

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[251] "Interview with Mullah Dadullah," *al-Jazeera*, Feb 2006.

[252] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A message from the Leader of the Faithful, may God preserve him, on the occasion of '*eid al-fitr*," 29 Sept 2008.

[253] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The future of those who eat the American crumbs!" 21 Feb 2008.

[254] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Message from the Leader of the Faithful on the Occasion of '*eid al-fitr*,"
11 Oct 2007.

[255] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from Mullah Omar threatening attacks of greater intensity,"

There are statements that show a more pragmatic side of the IEA as well, at least with regards to members of the Afghan parliament. In July 2008, the IEA abducted a member of the Afghan Senate, Dr. Abdul Wali. He did not have to face trial in a religious court, however; in September, the IEA announced that they had released him "in exchange for three imprisoned *mujahidin*, in accordance with the Islamic Emirate's demands."[256] The IEA's "Code of conduct" from 2006 stated that for government employees who wish to change sides the decision must be taken on a higher level: "If members of the opposition or the civil government wish to be loyal to the Taliban, we may take their conditions into consideration. A final decision must be made by the military council."[257] The Taliban leadership seems to open up, at least, for recruitment of Afghan government officials who wish to change sides.

With regards to former Taliban members and *mujahidin* fighters who have now decided to cooperate with the Afghan government, the IEA's official line is somewhat unclear. On one hand, the IEA has issued statements to them encouraging them to change sides, but without issuing threats of reprisals. When Mullah Dadullah was asked in 2006 what he thought about the former Taliban officials who are now taking part in elections, he stated:

> "Maybe they were mistaken or they had been pressured and Mutawakkil [former Taliban foreign minister, and candidate in the 2004 presidential elections] couldn't stand it. The election which he participated in was an attempt from the infidels to tarnish the image of Taliban and make people lose faith in the movement. We advise people not to participate in this game in the future."[258]

In contrast, Mullah Mansur Dadullah, used a much harsher tone in a statement in 2007, encouraging people to "kill [these former *mujahidin*] wherever they find them":

> "I don't see that it is appropriate at all to call these people *mujahidin*. I see that it is an insult to the *mujahidin* if we relate those deceivers to them. They are not *mujahidin*, they are apostates, and it is the duty of every Muslim to kill them. They hurt the reputation of the jihad, the *mujahidin*, Muslims and Afghanistan. We reject them and advice all the *mujahidin* to kill them wherever they find them because this is an obligatory duty."[259]

This is also quite contradictory to a statement by Mullah Omar from September 2008, where he asked former *mujahidin* to stop their support for the Afghan government and encouraged them to join the IEA. Notably, he does not demand that these figures actively join the IEA's armed struggle, but at least they should stop opposing the IEA:

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23 Oct 2006.

[256] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The release of Dr. Abdul Wali, a member of the Senate in the agent administration," 16 Sept 2008.

[257] Quoted in "A new layeha for the Mujahideen," *Signandsight*.com, 29 Nov 2006, www.signandsight.com/features/1071.html (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

[258] "Interview with Mullah Dadullah," *al-Jazeera*, Feb 2008.

[259] "Video interview with the Taliban field commander, Mullah Mansur Dadullah," *al-Sahab*, Oct 2007.

> "I ask those leaders who consider themselves *mujahidin* and still stand by the Americanized administration, for the second time, do not to stand any closer to the foreigners against the mujahid people ... Let them come and stand by their brothers, the *mujahidin*, and if they cannot do a practical jihad, at least they should stop their opposition and separate themselves from it."[260]

Mullah Omar, more than Mansur Dadullah, probably views these figures as potential allies in the future, and therefore sees it as a much wiser policy to seek cooperation rather than threatening to kill them. Comparing Mullah Omar and Mansur Dadullah's statements, one can perhaps discern some of the background for why Mansur Dadullah was finally sacked from his position by the Taliban leadership in the autumn of 2007, although the direct reasons remain obscure.

8.3 Foreign civilians in Afghanistan

Foreign civilians in Afghanistan may be attacked or taken hostage under the pretext that they are "spies," "missionaries," or in other ways supporting the occupation. The IEA has claimed responsibility for several attacks against foreign diplomatic missions in Kabul, for example the attack against the German Embassy in Kabul in January 2009. That attack was justified by saying that "The Germans have forces in the north of Afghanistan and they are involved in the killing of innocent Afghans." The IEA threatened that they will target "all those countries that have forces in Afghanistan."[261] Diplomatic missions are attacked because they are seen as representing the occupation forces in Afghanistan.

The IEA has also taken responsibility for attacks targeting Westerns in general. In December 2008, an attack was carried out against the Serena Hotel in Kabul, which is frequented by Western visitors. The Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs was present at the hotel at the time of the attack, but the attackers seemed unaware of this at the time. The attack was afterwards justified by saying that the hotel is host to foreigners who are supporting the Karzai regime. Mullah Baradir claimed at a later stage that "the attack was carried out because the Norwegian foreign minister was present at the hotel,"[262] but this is contradicted by the statements of the arrested attackers, who claimed they had no instructions to target the Norwegian Minister, but just that the purpose of the attack was to kill as many foreigners as possible.[263]

There are several cases of hostage takings of foreigners, which have been actively used by the IEA to create media attention and promote their cause. In September 2007, *al-Sumud* published an article listing the positive effects of hostage takings for the IEA: The hostage takings give the IEA media attention, it creates dispute among NATO members, and it forces the enemy to recognize the IEA as a negotiation partner. It has also led to the release of imprisoned *mujahidin*,

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[260] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A message from the Leader of the Faithful, may God preserve him, on the occasion of '*eid al-fitr*," 29 Sept 2008.

[261] "Two dead in explosion near German Embassy", *Spiegel Online*, 17 Jan 2009, www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,601844,00.html (accessed 18 Jan 2009).

[262] "Interview with Mullah Baradir [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.22 (April 2008).

[263] (In Norwegian) Fredrik Græsvik, *Skuddene på Serena hotel* (Oslo: Kagge, 2009).

and some governments have promised the withdrawal of their forces, which is a painful blow to the NATO alliance.[264]

While there are brutal videos of executions of Afghan hostages, this seems not to be the policy for Western hostages. On the contrary, there have been cases where Western hostages have been released, and the incident used in the IEA's propaganda to portray the organization as peace-seeking, respecting human rights, and in particular women's rights. But there are also more pragmatic reasons. In many cases of hostage takings, the IEA's demands include the release of Taliban members from jail. Ransom has probably also been paid in some cases, but this is denied officially by the IEA. Mullah Dadullah has stated that the purpose of hostage taking is to get *mujahidin* released from prison. While Dadullah, in his familiar line of rhetoric, has claimed that he wanted to have prisoners released from Guantanamo and Bagram,[265] the demand is usually concerned with releasing *mujahidin* imprisoned in Afghanistan. This demand has also been accommodated on several occasions.[266] Two brief cases will illustrate this further:
On 2 April 2007 two French aid workers, Celine Cordelier and Eric Damfreville, were taken hostage in Nimruz. The IEA's initial demands were release of imprisoned *mujahidin*, and that all French forces should withdraw from Afghanistan.[267] On 28 April, the IEA issued a statement saying that they had released the female aid worker "without conditions, as a signal from the Islamic Emirate that they only want peace and that they respect the rights of women."[268] The aid worker was given a letter from the IEA addressed to the French people, stating that the IEA only has good intentions, and that the West are carrying out atrocities in Afghanistan, and that French forces must withdraw. They upheld their original demands.[269] After the French elections in May, the other French hostage was also released, "because the newly elected French president, Sarkozy, said that if he was elected he would withdraw all French forces from Afghanistan."[270] This was a claim made by the IEA; the French President never actually took any steps to withdraw French forces from Afghanistan.

In August 2007, 23 Korean aid workers from a Christian charity organization were taken hostage. The IEA justified this by saying:

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[264] "The new strategy for the *mujahidin* against the occupation forces [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.14 (14 Sept 2007).

[265] "PERSONALITY: Mullah Dadullah (shaheed)," *The Unjust Media*, www.theunjustmedia.com/Afghanistan/Statements/Jan%202008/PERSONALITY%20Mulla%20Dadullah%20(Shaheed).htm (accessed 17 Jan 2009).

[266] For example, in 2007, the IEA announced that five of its members had been released from Afghan prisons in return for the IEA's release of an Italian hostage, Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo. "Taliban: Afghan government freed prominent Taliban members to secure release of the Italian hostage," *Islamist Websites Monitor* No.78 (23 March 2007), www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/2113.htm (accessed 20 Dec 2009).

[267] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Demands regarding two French aid workers taken hostage in Nimruz," 20 Apr 2007.

[268] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement to the French people regarding the release of the French hostage (Celine)," 28 Apr 2007.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Freeing the French worker (Eric) today, Friday, 5/11/2007," 5 Nov 2007.

> **"**Your country has supported America and has sent 200 troops to kill our people, but the most
> dangerous step that your country has taken against us is that it has sent Christians preachers
> to our homeland to convert Afghans and Afghanistan to Christianity from holy religion
> Islam. We did this to defend Islam. We do not have any bad intention towards your
> government, and we want friendly relations ... We only want from you that you not take part
> in killing us on our soil and stop every kind of support for the invaders."[271]

The IEA later killed two of the (male) hostages and finally released the rest, insisting that their
release was due to that a number of their conditions were met. They denied that any ransom was
paid, which was also denied by the Korean government. [272] The main condition was that South
Korea would pull out a contingent of 200 non-combatant troops from Afghanistan (who were due
to be pulled out by the end of the year anyway).

With regards to foreign NGOs and humanitarian organizations, the IEA has expressed a rather
hostile attitude, seeing humanitarian work as having a hidden agenda. The IEA's "Code of
conduct" states:

> "… those NGOs that come to the country under the rule of the infidels must be treated as the
> government is treated. They have come under the guise of helping people but in fact are part
> of the regime. Thus we tolerate none of their activities, whether it be building of streets,
> bridges, clinics, schools, madrases (schools for Koran study) or other works."[273]

Seeking to defame and de-legitimize re-construction efforts carried out by the West, IEA
spokesman Muhammad Yusuf stated in May 2008:

> "They only conduct the rebuilding that they need in the military field, such as paving roads to
> Kunar, Uruzgan, and Kandahar provinces. Or, they rebuild the centres of indecency and
> singing, such as movie theatres, night centres, dance-clubs, and so on and so forth."[274]

In sum, the IEA's attitude to foreign civilians is somewhat ambivalent. In their propaganda, the
IEA appears to legitimize attacks on both foreign diplomatic missions and luxury hotels
frequented by foreigners, but also foreign NGOs and humanitarian aid workers. The reality on the
ground is different. In some provinces, foreign NGOs are attacked but in other provinces not,
reflecting the localized nature of the insurgency. In the capital city of Kabul, there are plenty of
ways to target foreign civilians, but attackers have preferred targets of higher symbolic value,
such as ISAF and foreign embassies, although these are usually better protected (see Chapter 3.2).

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[271] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A message to the people of Korea from Islamic Emirate of
Afghanistan following the hostage release," 30 Aug 2007.
[272] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Taliban Shura Council insists that no money was paid as ransom for
the Korean hostages," 13 Sept 2007.
[273] Quoted in "A new layeha for the Mujahideen," *Signandsight*.com, 29 Nov 2006,
www.signandsight.com/features/1071.html (accessed 19 Dec 2009).
[274] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Taliban interview with Muhammad Yusuf, spokesman of the Taliban,"
20 May 2008.

Cases of hostage taking where the IEA has been involved indicates that their goal is not always to kill foreigners in terrorist attacks, but also use hostages to exert political leverage on a national and international level.

8.4 International organizations

The IEA demonstrates a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards international organizations such as the United Nations. On one hand, the IEA criticises these organizations for being tools for the United States to carry out its politics. Mullah Omar said in 2006:

> "Today the United Nations governs by America's authority; they shape things according to America's interpretation... By looking at the Islamic Nation since the founding of the United Nations we see that there is no decision or a ruling which was ever observed in the favour of the Islamic Nation."[275]

Mullah Baradir echoed this, saying that "We regard all the decisions of the United Nations towards Afghanistan, as American orders; and all the criminal acts they do in Afghanistan are American acts, because they have a long hand into their affairs."[276]

On the other hand, the IEA has repeatedly called on international bodies to investigate the human rights situation in Afghanistan. It points out the double standard of such organizations, saying:

> "The Karzai administration has admitted that civilian people die in air raids. International Human Rights organizations should monitor this. It is very unfortunate that the United Nations so far as legalized bloodshed of ordinary Afghans by America, and makes it laws honey for Americans and poison for Afghans ... where can humanitarian law be found in this?"[277]

The IEA has claimed that some Human Rights organizations report in favour of the United States in order to please their donors. In 2008, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a report analysing the Human Rights situation in Afghanistan. It claimed that both the Taliban as well as the coalition were responsible for the death of civilian Afghans. The IEA, however, issued a series of statements refuting the claims in the HRW report. They described the HRW as being a "tool for American propaganda" and that the HRW is an "agent" for Americans and it has double standards: Civilians killed by NATO/U.S. forces are killed "by mistake" but civilians killed by the *mujahidin* are "intentionally" killed. The IEA calls for a neutral survey to find out whether it is *mujahidin* or Americans who "kill the most civilians," and it should be done all over Afghanistan.[278]

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[275] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from Mullah Omar, threatening attacks of greater intensity," 23 Oct 2006.

[276] "Interview with Mullah Baradir [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.22 (April 2008): 19.

[277] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from the Shura Council regarding the killing of civilians," 29 Nov 2007.

[278] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Is it the monitoring of Human Rights, or defense of American grievances?" 17 April 2007.

It also complained that international human rights organizations did nothing to stop NATO's bombings of civilians in Afghanistan, or the Karzai regime's execution of sixteen prisoners in the Pul-e-Charki prison in October 2007, on accusations of being members of the Taliban.[279] With regards to the latest incident, it called upon Afghan parliament members, as well as "the United Nations, the European Union, and the Red Cross and all human rights organizations" to stop this act.[280]

Fundamentally, NGOs and international organizations are accepted as long as they serve the IEA's cause, but as soon as they criticise the IEA they are dismissed as being lackeys of the West. The IEA uses Western media statements in a similar fashion. The IEA has announced that Western media are all about manipulation and lies, but at the same time they quote them extensively when they write something that can serve the IEA's propaganda campaign.

The IEA's attitude towards Muslim international organizations seems no different. The IEA has called on the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Arab countries "to stop wavering and comfort the Islamic Nation, refuse to be agents of the West in general and America in particular, and come out to solve the problems of Palestine and the rest of the Islamic countries."[281] But to the question of whether the IEA would accept peace-keeping forces from Muslim countries, Mullah Baradir said that it is of no use, because Afghans themselves are responsible for what is going on in Afghanistan:

> "Afghanistan is the land of the Afghans, and they know perfectly well how to build a nation and how to establish security. Those who argue [about sending international troops], either they don't know the nature of Afghans, or they support a plan by the U.S. to hide that they are currently losing. Only *mujahidin* are able to establish security."[282]

It underlines the un-compromising stance of the IEA towards any kind of negotiation or compromises. The IEA sees no role of international organizations to solve the conflict – not even Muslim ones – as negotiations with these organizations would be seen as a sign of weakness on part of the IEA.

8.5   The IEA's hierarchy of enemies

Overall, IEA's propaganda is aimed at legitimizing the Islamic Emirate, and de-legitimizing all potential rivals. Still, the IEA has various ways of approaching its adversaries. With regards to the coalition forces in Afghanistan, they are clearly viewed as "occupants" and enemies that cannot be negotiated with, only fought with military means. It should be noted, however, that in spite of

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[279] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Message from the Leader of the Faithful on the occasion of 'eid al-fitr," 11 Oct 2007.

[280] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement and warning from the Shura Council regarding the intention of the Kabul rulers to execute the oppressed prisoners," 19 April 2008.

[281] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Israeli Holocaust in Palestine and the wavering of Islamic states," 6 March 2008.

[282] "Interview with Mullah Baradir [in Arabic]," *al-Sumud* 2, no.22 (April 2008): 12.

all of IEA's anti-Western rhetoric, killing Westerners seems to not be a goal in itself. The IEA's leadership seems not to care about what the coalition forces do, as long as they leave Afghanistan. Mullah Omar even indicated that if the foreigners chose to leave, the IEA could grant them a safe passage out. Members of the local Afghan government, however, have not been offered such opportunity to escape, but can only be dealt with by an Islamic court. The IEA is also spending considerable time and resources on attacking fellow Afghans (both security forces, government representatives, and various other civilians) – as opposed to the seemingly less "controversial" strategy of only attacking foreign coalition forces. All of this strengthens the hypothesis that the Taliban leadership's primary concern in Afghanistan is not to kill foreigners or to fight jihad for jihad's sake, but to position itself in relation to its local opponents – preparing the ground for the IEA to re-take power in Afghanistan. Lending credence to this fact is also Mullah Omar's relatively soft rhetoric towards former *mujahidin* and Taliban officials who have chosen to cooperate with the Afghan government: As they might be useful allies for a future Taliban state, he has so far avoided issuing threats or ultimatums towards them.

These findings can be seen in relation to general theories of counter-insurgency, which say that there are three actors in a conflict: Insurgents, indigenous government, and outside actors (supporting either the insurgents or the indigenous government). As argued by Jones, the main conflict is between the insurgents and the indigenous government.[283] The outside actors (whether they be the U.S., NATO, the UN or neighbouring states, or foreign fighters) can play a pivotal role in "tipping the conflict in favour of one of the parties, but can rarely win the war for either side."[284] In the case of the IEA, it appears clear that the goals of the Emirate, as one of many insurgent groups, are to fight the indigenous government, and not the external actors, as they frequently claim. The Emirate's attitude towards negotiations and power-sharing, which will be discussed in the next chapter, must also be understood in this context.

9   Attitude towards negotiations and power-sharing

In the West, there is an increasing realization that negotiations with the Taliban, at some level or another, must be an integrated part of the counter-insurgency effort in Afghanistan.[285] The need for a negotiated solution with Taliban insurgents has also been voiced by NATO and U.S. generals, perhaps most clearly by the departing commander of the British forces in Afghanistan, Brig. Mark Carleton-Smith, who said in October 2008 that the Taliban could not be defeated, indicating that the only way forward for Afghanistan was to find a political solution that would include the Taliban.[286] In practice, this usually means attempting to win over local commanders and tribal leaders inside Afghanistan and thereby undermine the authority of central leadership figures. However, others have called for more direct talks with the IEA's leadership

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[283] Seth G, Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," RAND Counterinsurgency study Vol. 4 (2008), www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG595.pdf (accessed 21 Dec 2009): 12–14.

[284] Seth G. Jones, "The rise of Afghanistan's insurgency: State failure and jihad," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 12.

[285] For a recent study on this topic, see also Michael Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009).

[286] "We can't defeat Taleban, says Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith," *Times Online*, 6 Oct 2008, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4887927.ece (accessed 15 Dec 2008).

council. The UN representative to Afghanistan, Kai Eide, has said that "effective dialogue must reach the insurgent leadership rather than just marginalised moderates."[287] Few believe that it is feasible to negotiate with the Taliban leaders directly, due to their rigid stance on the topic. Nevertheless, there are various allegations that the Afghan government has attempted to approach Mullah Omar directly. Below is a summary of these attempts – and the IEA's official responses.

9.1 Negotiation attempts with the IEA's leaders

Around 2006, the Afghan government started to talk openly about negotiating with Mullah Omar. The IEA promptly denied that any kind of negotiations had taken place, "neither with the occupation forces nor its followers," and said that it is impossible to hold negotiations when the country is under occupation.[288] Another statement specified that holding negotiations with Karzai would be "meaningless," because he is under the control of others. It also stated that the IEA does not want any political power, i.e. compromise or power-sharing is not an alternative, only "an independent Afghanistan and a sovereign state."[289]

In 2007, there was talk of a joint "tribal council" or "joint peace jirga" to be held, with the participation of Pashtun tribes from both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the press initially reported that the IEA considered participating in this jirga,[290] the statement was promptly denied by the Emirate's spokesman Muhammad Yusuf, who claimed he had been misquoted by Reuters.[291] Throughout 2007, the Emirate issued several statements condemning the peace jirga and repeating that the only solution to the conflict is that the foreign "occupation forces" leave Afghanistan.[292] The peace jirga took place in Kabul on 9-12 Aug 2007 and resulted in a declaration that contained, among others, a pledge."… that government and people of Afghanistan and Pakistan will not allow sanctuaries/training centres for terrorists in their respective countries, and a pledge to stop opium production.[293]

In the autumn of 2007, two foreign diplomats (Michael Semple and Mervyn Patterson) were expelled from Afghanistan, accused of trying to negotiate with Taliban representatives in Musa Qala, Helmand, without the permission of President Karzai. British troops had long fought with the Taliban in Helmand province for control over Musa Qala, with local Taliban forces

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[287] Michael Semple, "Talking to the Taliban might solve Afghanistan impasse," *Irish Times,* 6 Aug 2009, www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2009/0806/1224252079476.html (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[288] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Shura Council denies any negotiations with the occupying forces or their followers," 24 Aug 2006.

[289] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "A statement from the Taliban leadership in response to Karzai," 28 Oct 2006.

[290] "Taliban says might join Afghan tribal peace talks," Saeed Ali Achakzai, *Reuters*, 9 Dec 2006.

[291] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Taliban denies Reuters statements that they will participate in tribal councils (jirgas)," 10 Dec 2006.

[292] "Editorial," *al-Sumud* no.9 (26 Feb 2007); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement on the ongoing talks between Pakistan and the agent government [Karzai]," 6 May 2007; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "The Shura Council condemns the 'Jirga' of the occupying American enemy," 6 Aug 2007.

[293] "Text of Pak-Afghan peace jirga declaration," *Daily Times,* 13 Aug 2007, www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C08%5C13%5Cstory_13-8-2007_pg7_48 (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

periodically seizing control. It is unclear whether the diplomats really negotiated with the IEA, and on what level (media stated there were negotiations with "low-level commanders" only – which was most likely the case).[294] The IEA, however, denied that any negotiations had taken place at all, and that the surrender of Musa Qala had been a tactical decision that had nothing to do with negotiations.[295]

In the autumn of 2008, new reports surfaced that there had been secret talks between the Taliban and the Karzai regime, sponsored by Saudi Arabia and Great Britain. The talks were held in Saudi Arabia on 24–27 September 2008, and according to the CNN, "... involved 11 Taliban delegates, two Afghan government officials, a representative of former mujahadeen commander and U.S. foe Gulbadin Hekmatyar, and three others."[296] King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was also said to be present. Other sources, however, said that the so-called "Taliban delegates" were not representatives of Mullah Omar's organization, but rather, constituted former members of the Taliban regime such as Mullah Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil and others.[297] In the wake of these press reports, the IEA, again, issued a series of denials that they had been involved in the talks. This time, it included statements by both the deputy leader of the Emirate, Mullah Baradir, as well as of Mullah Omar himself. The double statement by both the leader and the deputy leader of the Emirate stresses the importance the Taliban leadership puts to upholding its image of being completely uncompromising in the issue of negotiations. Mullah Baradir stated, for example, that "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will never hold negotiations with America, NATO, and the Kabul agent administration."[298] He claimed that the Karzai administration only held talks with former members of the Taliban government, whom "it detains and whom it holds under house arrest. The reality is that those do not represent the Islamic Emirate in any manner."[299] He also stated that the IEA's goal is not to obtain political power, and "if the Islamic Emirate conducts negotiations, they will be on the basis of benefiting Islam and the people, and they will be hidden from nobody."[300] In December the same year, Mullah Omar issued a statement denying any role in the Saudi Arabian negotiations at all.[301]

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[294] "Diplomats expelled over talks with Taleban," *Times Online,* 27 Dec 2007, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3098560.ece ,"Western diplomats expelled from Kabul," *The Independent*, 26 Dec 2007, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/western-diplomats-expelled-from-kabul-766814.html (both accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[295] Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Declaration from Zabihullah (Mujahid) regarding the two foreign diplomats," 27 Dec 2007.

[296] Nic Robertson, "Sources: Taliban split with al Qaeda, seek peace," *CNN*, undated, www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/10/06/afghan.saudi.talks/index.html#cnnSTCText (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[297] Bill Roggio, "Taliban have not split from al Qaeda: sources," *The Long War Journal*, www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/10/taliban_have_not_spl.php (accessed 17 Aug 2009).

[298] *Al-Sumud* 3, no.29 (Nov 2008): 9; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Press-interview with the deputy Leader of the Faithful on the truth of the false negotiations," 19 Nov 2008.

[299] Ibid.

[300] Ibid.

[301] *Al-Sumud* 3, no.31 (Jan 2009); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Statement from the Leader of the Faithful about the baseless negotiations," 23 Dec 2008.

9.2   What if the IEA's demands were met?

The IEA seems to have taken an uncompromising stance when it comes to the conditions for negotiating: It has stated, on a number of occasions, that all foreign troops must withdraw from Afghanistan first. The IEA's official attitude towards the next stage in the process is more blurred. If foreign forces withdrew, then what? Would they be interested in power-sharing or local autonomy? Would they cease fighting if only the Afghan government implements Sharia law? Or would they continue fighting until the Emirate themselves took power in all of Afghanistan?

Overall, it is unlikely that the withdrawal of foreign troops would open the door to power-sharing with the Afghan government. The IEA's ultimate goal is the establishment of Sharia in Afghanistan, over which there can be no compromise. Sheikh Muhammad Yasir said in 2008:

> "There is nothing to discuss with the Kabul government until all aggressing forces pull out
> from all areas of Afghanistan, and until Islamic rule is established in Afghanistan, a cause for
> which our blood has been spilt for more than thirty-five years."[302]

As discussed previously, the IEA has increasingly sought to defame Karzai, and have promised to punish him according to Sharia law, should they come to power. There have also been repeated attempts to assassinate him. Mullah Baradir stated in an interview in April 2008 that the Emirate would not negotiate with Karzai, neither before or after a U.S. troop withdrawal – again stressing that the IEA would not accept any form of power-sharing with the Karzai government or any other government perceived as being agents of the West.[303] On the other hand they might be willing to share power with other groups they have previously reached out to, such as former *mujahidin* and former members of the Taliban government. This would be in line with what the Taliban government did in the 1990s, when government and army positions were not restricted to *madrasa*-educated rural Pashtuns, but a variety of groups including former Communists.

This situation might change, however, should the IEA's leaders find themselves in a position of weakness. As for now, proposing negotiations with the Taliban leadership only seems to strengthen them – not only does it boost the status of the Islamic Emirate, but it is also used as "proof" that the Afghan government and the NATO alliance are in a weak and desperate position.

10   Conclusion

The aim of this report has been to provide a better understanding of the Taliban movement and its role in the Afghan insurgency post-2001. The approach to this has been three-fold: The first part of the report summarized the nature of the Afghan insurgency as described by already existing literature. The second part looked at the organizational characteristics of the largest and most

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[302] Quoted in Mustafa Abu al-Yazid (Sheikh Abdullah Saeed), "The signs of victory looming over Afghanistan [in Arabic]," *Global Islamic Media Front*, May 2009. Accessed via *Ansar al-Jihad*, http://international.thabaat.net/showthread.php?t=5493 (accessed 18 May 2009).
[303] "Interview with Mullah Baradir," a*l-Sumud* 2, no.22 (April 2008).

well-known insurgent group in Afghanistan: the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan led by Mullah Omar. The third and longest part of the report analysed the Islamic Emirate's ideology and worldview, based on the official statements of its organization and leaders.

The intention of this report is not to compete with, but rather supplement, already existing studies of the Afghan insurgency. It cannot be stressed often enough that the primary purpose of the IEA's propaganda is not to represent reality on the ground; they merely represent an image the IEA seeks to project of itself, with the purpose of increasing its chances to win the war in the long run. The Emirate's leaders are well aware that they are fighting a "media war" with its adversaries, in addition to the physical struggle on the ground. The information found in its propaganda cannot be compared with the "hard facts" on the ground. At the same time, however, databases of insurgent attacks can hardly explain *why* a particular target was attacked, or what the insurgents think about the future. It is these and similar questions that have been examined in this report.

One of the findings of the study is that the Islamic Emirate sees itself as a nationalist-religious movement fighting to resurrect the Taliban regime of the 1990s and to bring the various ethnic groups of Afghanistan under its rule. The Taliban-led insurgency is primarily a Pashtun movement, and tribal and ethnic factors have direct influence on its recruitment and mobilization patterns. Its political agenda, however, is different than that of Pashtun separatists who advocate a separate Pashtun state.[304] The IEA's agenda also differs from that of its foreign allies (al-Qaida and Pakistani Taliban) because its primary concern is re-taking power in Afghanistan and implementing their interpretation of Islamic law in Afghanistan.

However, the IEA appears to have a closer relationship with its foreign allies than with the other major insurgent leader in Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. In spite of their fighting for the same broad goals, their relationship can be described as pragmatic at best. The main fault line in the IEA's relationship with its various allies appears to be centred on power and authority: Hekmatyar's group, the Hizb-e-Islami, is seen as a challenge to the IEA's power, while al-Qaida's fighters are not, because they have taken on the role as advisors and supporters. Here probably lies some of al-Qaida's key to success in the region, and the reason why they have not suffered the same destiny as al-Qaida in Iraq (in addition to the fact that al-Qaida in Afghanistan has access to numerous sanctuaries in neighbouring countries, primarily Pakistan, which al-Qaida in Iraq had not).

The IEA's attitude to its adversaries strengthens the impression that the IEA is a local insurgent movement whose main enemy is the Afghan government, rather than the international coalition forces. The IEA spends considerable time and resources on attacking Afghan targets, and on justifying these attacks through their propaganda. This report argues that this is not merely a pragmatic choice (because Afghan targets are easier to attack than coalition targets) – it is a deliberate strategy on part of the IEA because their primary concern is to contest for power locally, not to kill foreigners in itself or to wage jihad for jihad's sake. Outside actors such as

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[304] Selig S. Harrison, "The Pashtun time bomb," *New York Times*, 1 Aug 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/08/01/opinion/01iht-edharrison.1.6936601.html (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

NATO, the United States, Pakistan or even al-Qaida may play important, but nevertheless secondary, roles.

Lastly, the report discussed the IEA's attitudes towards negotiations and power-sharing. For the time being, it looks like any attempt to negotiate with the IEA's leaders directly would serve to strengthen the insurgent movement, rather than putting an end to the violent campaign in Afghanistan. A more realistic approach is probably to try to weaken the IEA's coherence through negotiating with low-level commanders and tribal leaders inside Afghanistan. The insurgent movement consists of a wide variety of actors, which may be seen as proof of its strength – but it could also constitute weakness if properly and systematically exploited.

Appendix A   Maps of Afghanistan and Pakistan

Provincial map of Afghanistan (Source: www.globalsecurity.org).

Map of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP) (Source: www.fata.gov.pk)

Appendix B   The Islamic Emirate's Shura Council 2003

Member	Position held in the Taliban government	Current status (2008)
Mullah Dadullah	Corps commander	Killed in Helmand, May 2007.
Mullah Baradir	Deputy Defence Minister	Deputy leader of the IEA
Abd al-Razzaq	Corps commander Interior Minister	Killed in Zabul, 2006.
Akhtar Muhammad Uthmani	Corps commander Army Chief	Killed in Helmand, Dec 2006
Akhtar Mansour	Chief of Kandahar Air Base	?
Mullah Obaidullah	Defence Minister	Captured in Quetta, March 2007
Muhammad Rasul	Province Governor	?
Hafiz Abdul Majeed	Security Chief of Kandahar	?
Sayf ur-Rehman Mansour	Commander in the battle of Shah-i-Kot, March 2002	?
Jalaluddin Haqqani	Minister of Tribal Affairs	Commander of the "Haqqani network" under the IEA

The Islamic Emirate's *shura* council in 2003.[305]

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[305] "Taliban's new hierarchy unveiled," *Islam Online,* 25 June 2003, www.islamonline.net/English/News/2003-06/25/article07.shtml (accessed 22 Dec 2009).

Appendix C   The IEA's flag and crest

IEA flag.

IEA crest.

Symbols used on top of the IEA's official webpage *Shahamat* (2009).[306]

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[306] *Shahamat*, www.shahamat1.org/ (accessed 19 Dec 2009).

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