

EVOLUTION OF THE MILITARY UNDER THE TALIBAN REGIME AFTER THE US WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The study is an analysis of the new armed forces of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA)” under the Taliban regime on the remnants of the former Ashraf Ghani-led government. It is evolving and playing a role for the Taliban to justify the socially constructed ideology of their version of Sharia Law in the domain of military affairs. The paper focuses on the question of how the Taliban regime used propaganda to undermine the former Afghan government in its last days and how the decentralized potential of information warfare is keeping the Taliban upward over the recent security affairs of Afghanistan. National integration is being redefined by revamping the armed forces under the Taliban. The Taliban regime desires to gain international legitimacy through a sustainable security apparatus at home to manage internal security and its role in regional stability. The study provides an insightful inquiry into how the Taliban are following suit in the evolution of the military over the existing structures to reshape their administrative affairs in war-torn Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, Afghan military, Security, South Asia

Introduction

In the past three decades since the 1990s, the Afghan Taliban remained a major player in Afghanistan. The group that was formed under the religious and autocratic leadership of Mullah Muhammad Omar in 1994 has been a subject of discussion in terrorism and international security studies. The administration under the ideological norms of the extreme interpretation of

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Deobandi Islam was formed for the first time after the Soviet-Afghan war after severe infighting between various Afghan groups over the control of the country. Afghan Army did not exist as a proper functioning institute at that time, and the state-run militia-styled forces were conducting law enforcement and security duties with no proper ranks and units due to the government's inefficiency. The so-called Islamic Army of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA)” was formed on the foundation of political loyalties under the commanders linked with the Taliban. The commanders had also inducted their tribal militants, which shows the lack of national integrity within the military of Afghanistan. The military basis existed, but the army organization was nonexistent (Jalali, 2001). Nevertheless, a group of former *Mujaheedin* under the new name “Taliban” managed to get into power in 1996 after years of striving for power against other Islamist groups in power and former Communist leadership (Rubin, 2002). Taliban got the gains from war remains like Russian-made weapons, attaining control of stockpiles from the former Afghan Communist government militias of Burhan Uddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Abdul Rasheed Dostum, which strengthened their ideological cause.

With the Experience of irregular war against the Western forces and allied Afghan military during the “War on Terror,” the Taliban were able to increase capacity in the usage of technology, conducting guerilla warfare tactics and diplomacy with the international community under the shadow government. The evolution could be seen in the Taliban’s military muscle during the government of President Ashraf Ghani when new methods of irregular warfare by the group were introduced. The induction of information warfare tactics through social media and technology platforms eventually proved to be a significant source for the Taliban to not only get control of the land but also to manipulate the masses. The situation favored the Taliban during the Afghan Peace Process, which led to the signing of the Doha Accord in 2020. Taliban used non-traditional tactics of warfare, and ultimately, it was also proven through the withdrawal phase of the United States that the Afghan forces and law enforcement trained by the Western states proved to be utter failures due to massive corruption inside the Afghan government.

The use of non-traditional tactics of militarism along with political activism like propaganda and narrative not only helped them in getting benefits from the vacuum inside the defunct “Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF),” but also in determining their position of reorganizing their security apparatus inside Afghanistan (Wintour,2021). Undoubtedly, the

Taliban decentralized its offensives under the commanders deployed in different provinces of Afghanistan, conducting their ground and information-based operations by better understanding varying terrains. This factor not only let the Taliban utilize a blitzkrieg with around 80,000-foot soldiers to dismember the US-backed Afghan forces but eventually strengthened their political position of being the administrators by using military means to sustain the rule of fear and terror in the period of the Post-US Withdrawal (Jensen, 2021). The Taliban military muscle strengthened with leftover billions of dollars of weapons and military equipment that were formerly owned by either the NATO forces or the ANDSF. This study explores how the Afghan military had transitioned under the resurged “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA),” which claims to be an inclusive government transitioning towards an improved security situation. The study also looks into whether military evolution would help achieve the political objectives of state-building.

Leftovers of Billions of Dollars Weapons/Equipment

The leftovers of billions of dollars of military equipment and weapons to the Afghan Taliban after the withdrawal of the US forces and the collapse of ANDSF is said to be a power multiplier for the political objectives of the Taliban in post-conflict Afghanistan (Burns, 2021). The US spent billions of dollars to provide money, gasoline, APCs, helicopters, fighter jets, firearms, ammunition, and other crucial military equipment for the military and security purposes of Afghanistan, only to be left to the Taliban after the US withdrawal. The firepower left by Americans and the defunct Afghan forces turned out to be the prize of overrunning and capturing provincial capitals one by one wherever the Taliban entered the military bases/police establishments. The sophisticated weapons acquired by the Taliban strengthened their claimed constructed reality of political developments against the Western-backed Afghan government through propaganda. Taliban declared that the leftover weapons belonged to IEA and the people of Afghanistan. The guns and technological components necessary for military use were inducted into the Taliban’s evolving military.

Taliban opened crates of communication systems, night vision goggles, ammunition, and dollar bills, along with getting hands-on advanced drones and long lines of vehicles provided through military support to Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, threats had been raised when the US officials

showed concerns that weapons might be sold out to other highest bidders for revenue for the Taliban's government and be used against civilians by either the Taliban or ISKP. There were also fears that China or Russia may get hands over such weapons and military equipment that included attack/reconnaissance drones, including ScanEagle and UH-60 Black Hawks. There was also the inclusion of 2000 highly sophisticated and equipped with advanced technology, armored trucks, and jeeps (Ali et al., 2021). Seventy aircraft were taken by fleeing pilots and soldiers of Afghan forces that are still inside states like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The problem remains for the Taliban of not knowing the operation of such equipment (Mehra et al., 2022). Sources claimed that the Taliban was the only extremist organization that had an air force while having the ability of forty-four advanced military helicopters and seven UAVs (Reuters, 2021). The Taliban regime is also equipped with navigation technology that may help them further advance their power and political position in the rugged terrain of Afghanistan. The international community is concerned with the fact that the Taliban may engage in arms business and trafficking to use weapons as sources of income while facing international sanctions. This would also increase the mobility of the Taliban, which may help them govern and enforce their authority inside post-conflict Afghanistan (Oryx, 2023). The main issue regarding the handling of leftover weapons is the point of its handling and management. The abolition of the "Mahaz System" of the former government's Ministry of Defense for the recordkeeping of personnel, unit commanders, and weapon caches by the Taliban eventually raised issues for accountability and overall procedures of arms handling (Jackson et al., 2023).

The arms control system through a centralized mechanism would be beneficial for the Taliban itself as the group is struggling to reorganize the Afghan forces under their control into formal armed forces. The handling procedures of arms and weapons would be followed through the record-keeping system of handwriting on paper or registers after the Taliban took control of the guns left by the former government and Western forces. The threat of such weapons being used for terrorist activities in the region and adjoining states was raised when there was a missing stockpile of 6000-7000 weapons that were in the control of the Taliban from military storage at Kunduz province. This is the point that is the most concerning regarding the weapons that were used by NATO forces, which cannot only enhance the military forces under the Taliban but also put regional security at stake.

Dreaming of a “Grand Army”

The possession of the US-left stockpile helped the Taliban to immediately secure government buildings and other essential establishments that are important for both civilian/military affairs. The special force of the Taliban, “Badri 313,” which was active during the American invasion, was responsible for conducting tactical operations for the Taliban while targeting American troops and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. Even before the US withdrawal, the Taliban militants were adopting technological and tactical aspects of the military by acquiring weapons from underground markets and other essential military equipment, including reconnaissance drones/communication systems, which were being sold to the Taliban by corrupt officials in former security forces (Fahrenkopf, 2021). As the withdrawal started in Afghanistan by coalition forces, the US President, Joe Biden, stated that there was no chance that 300,000 firm personnel of Afghanistan’s military would surrender in front of the Taliban and lead themselves towards failure (Roston & Bose, 2021). The fact cannot be denied here that Taliban’s Afghan armed forces are now able to manage 150,000 active personnel as the military chief of the Taliban, Qari Fasihuddin, had urged to increase it with the number of 50,000 more to enhance the security and defense of Afghanistan under their administration (Zaman, 2024). Nevertheless, the Taliban were already asserting and making the security forces and police of Afghanistan surrender. Afghan security forces relied totally on the US/NATO's intelligence, logistics, and aerial support of the US/NATO, and there was discontent within the Afghan military (Basit, 2021).

Unquestionably, all these developments also made the Taliban realize the importance of a sense of morality and courage among its troops while facing any circumstances not to face the fate of Afghan forces which they faced towards them (Boot, 2021). The interim government faced the challenge of a strong military under their rule. Acting Defense Minister Mullah Yaqoob and Army Chief Qari Fasihuddin were given the task of reestablishing the military, as the military’s strength is one of the key factors that legitimize the authority of the Taliban over post-conflict Afghanistan (Rehman, 2021). First, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) were renamed the “Armed Forces of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”. Nevertheless, Mullah Yaqoob had already led engagement through defense diplomacy and appeared confident that no group (including the National Resistance Front) could undermine the Taliban’s armed forces in any battle (Rezahi, 2023). The insurgents-turned-administrators kept believing that establishing

a military would protect the borders of Afghanistan and deal with internal security threats (Rehman, 2021).

Table no. 1		
Rebranded Titles	Past Titles	Sector Headquarters
313 Central Corps	Special Operations Corps	Kabul
201 Khalid Ibn Waleed Corps	201 st Corps	Laghman
203 Mansoori Corps	203 rd Corps	Gardez
207 Al-Farooq Corps	207 th Corps	Herat
205 Al-Badr Corps	205 th Corps	Kandahar
209 Al-Fatah Corps	209 th Corps	Mazar-e-Sharif
217 Omari Corps	217 th Corps	Kunduz
215 Azam Corps	215 th Corps	Helmand

The old “Afghan National Army (ANA)” unit formation was reorganized, and the names of the units were changed, with Taliban commanders appointed as commandants. The group followed the changing of names through rebranding procedures in which the “Special Operations Corps” in Kabul was renamed as “Central Corps” (Khan, 2021). While the “209th Shaheen Corp” was renamed “Al-Fatah,” and “201st Sailab Corps” of the ANA was rebranded as “Khalid Ibn Waleed” Corps (further details in Table no.1) (Lalzoy, 2021). Subsequently, the suit was also followed by the other units of the ANA to justify their victory over the Afghan masses and legitimize themselves as the new guarantors of security (Bezhan & Saber, 2024).

A 20-member committee was tasked with reorganizing the Afghan Army, selecting soldiers, and forming new units for security forces (Sanz, 2022). Taliban were positioned in the provision of training as per their respective “Islamic Ideology” to keep the factor of faith ingrained in the newly established standing army. The purpose is to reduce tribal loyalties and attain cooperation among the troops to eradicate disunity and stubbornness. There are also follow-ups of training to the personnel of the Army of Afghanistan, providing them enough training to conduct mines clearing operations and bomb defusal along with the advancement of tactics to fight guerilla warfare. Taliban’s security forces also focus on the induction of historical aspects in the modern

military organization, for example, the formation of the “Panipat” Unit (Hindustan Times, 2022).

The name was taken from the third Panipat War, fought between Afghans and Marathas in the historic site of Panipat in India. Ahmad Shah Abdali remains an essential figure for Afghans as well as for the Taliban because he was the first Afghan ruler to unite Afghanistan as a modern state and took its borders towards the Indian subcontinent. The unit had been deployed for special counterterrorist operations in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan, which shares a border with Pakistan. The unit paraded in the city of Jalalabad to assert the legitimacy of the Taliban’s government towards Afghans (Khan, 2016). Similarly, another unit of the Taliban’s Afghan Military can also be seen as being inducted into the military forces known as the “Red Unit” or “Danger Group” (Roggio, 2018). The Red Unit was formed in 2016 and was supposed to be an elite commando unit of the Taliban’s militancy. It was raised in Helmand. The unit was formed with 200 fighters that gradually saw an increase and was involved in potential attacks against the former ANA and Afghan Local Police. It was already recognized as the most formidable unit of the Taliban by former security officials of Afghanistan as the group was organized with commando techniques and modes of warfare, and they proved their capacities in dismantling supply lines of the ANA in Helmand province several times.

The Red Unit was already proven as vital in not only combatting the former Afghan government but also in giving significant defeats to the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), especially in the province of Jawzjan in 2018 (Roggio, 2018). The Red Unit was also inducted after the Taliban takeover, which is also referred to as a vital counterterrorism military unit for the group to conduct combing operations against ISKP in Afghanistan and had been successful in freeing the Hazara citizens that ISKP kidnapped. The military unit is said to be trained per the dynamics of different country provinces while operating there. It is said to be a vital force in combating ISKP, one of the tangible threats that remained with them after the fall of Kabul in 2021 (Qazizai, 2021). Taliban had already initiated efforts to stabilize and operationalize its aerial power, whether under the aspects of transport or to conduct attacks or reconnaissance.

The Taliban had sought to focus on strengthening the air defense system under their respective armed forces. This point came after the Taliban raised concerns and criticisms against

neighboring Pakistan and other states for using drone technologies to instigate incursions for targeting militants linked to different terrorist organizations in the country. The responsible persons of the Taliban's defense ministry had urged for acquiring anti-aircraft weapons (Yawar, 2023). Taliban hired engineers/technicians of ANDSF to reorganize the new Afghan air force and aviation corps of IEA's army by providing technical and operational support. The engineers managed to repair aircraft but required missing equipment for operations of the new air force that were either separated or destroyed by the US while leaving (Stewart, 2021). Taliban had also welcomed the old aircraft pilots, including personnel like Major Farid Ahmad, who used to conduct anti-Taliban aerial operations recently and was granted general amnesty to perform new duties (Al Jazeera, 2021). This explains the Taliban's desire to sustain their positive image to the Afghan and international community while making the officers of the former military bring life to the airfields of Afghanistan. In October 2021, the Taliban took the initiative of establishing a proper border police or security force and trained the former guerilla fighters to secure the Afghan borders with neighbors (South China Morning Post, 2021). Dozens of new Afghan border security force troops were graduated through traditional camps that the Taliban established to train their fighters for insurgency. Taliban believes in having control over the whole country; hence, reestablishing armed forces will ultimately help attain national integrity under the principles of the Taliban's interpreted Sharia Law (South China Morning Post, 2021).

Development regarding Afghanistan's military is reflected in the numbers. Under the leadership of Mullah Yaqoob, Afghanistan had aimed to establish a 110,000-strong army and take the initiative of already graduating 10,000 personnel from Taliban-run military schools. The International Crisis Group mentioned that such developments would be presented as potential achievements of the Taliban, shifting from insurgents to national administrators. The UN estimates that there has been a 90% decline in violence and armed attacks since the Taliban takeover (Dawi, 2022). Taliban also showed interest in developing military diplomacy tactics to enhance capabilities. Afghanistan, under the Taliban, desires diplomatic relations with other states, including India, to strengthen defense cooperation by sending troops for training to India, just like the previous Afghan government did (The Express Tribune, 2022). The remnants of the advanced military stockpile, along with the addition of personnel from both Taliban and former Afghan forces, are said to be meaningful goals for the Taliban to operationalize its military by

bringing advancements to its military units and making the army to be strengthened to combat in different environments. The reorganization of the military under the Taliban also legitimizes their position as administrators now responsible for Afghanistan's security and political matters (Rehman, 2021). The restructuring of the armed forces of Afghanistan under the Taliban is an approach that is considered for getting both local and international acknowledgments as they are trying to give a message of being a responsible state actor instead of acting like an armed militia. There is no doubt that steps for evolving the military under the Taliban must need international recognition, as experts state that the Taliban can approach both China and Pakistan to do so (Vasudeva, 2021).

Re-formation of Special Forces and Intelligence Agency

Taliban strengthened its elite unit of “Badri 313,” which was engaged in both propaganda and leading deadly attacks on NATO/former Afghan security forces (TRT World, 2021). The group was founded by Badruddin Haqqani, who was the son of Jalal Uddin Haqqani and was killed in the 2012 US drone strike (Stewart, 2021). This unit aimed to conduct tactical and special operations during the American invasion. After the US Withdrawal, it took charge of protection and patrolling duties inside the airport and outside important buildings in Kabul and other cities. Badri 313 used the Special Forces uniforms with tactical pads, leftover American M4 carbines, and other sophisticated firearms (Stewart, 2021).

The unit seems different from the rest of the Taliban’s forces while having the special duties of tactical and special operations for contemporary Afghan security forces. The hiring criteria are different from those of previous Afghan armed forces recruitment. A person must have physical fitness and be willing to lay down his life in the way of God (TRT World, 2021). Even before the takeover of Kabul, the unit had advanced training and handling of weapons similar to highly professional militaries. Taliban adopted experiences of war and dealing with the enemy while fighting a powerful force that helps the Taliban narrative to manipulate their political objectives. Badri 313 has advanced vehicles like Humvees, armored personnel carriers, and traditional insurgent Toyota technical vehicles. They have also equipped themselves with Mi-17 Russian helicopters and other transport helicopters left by former Afghan forces (Vasudeva, 2021).

Badri 313 unit would be well trained to deal with rising threats of ISKP, not controlled by former security forces (Bokhari, 2021). After the withdrawal of the US, the Taliban further focused on Badri 313's modernization and made them parade inside Hamid Karzai International Airport and at other sites in Kabul. The Taliban defines Badri 313 as more than a security and military establishment to establish IEA's strong image among the people and portray that the Taliban are battle-ready for any further security threats inside Afghanistan in the future. The MRAP armored vehicles and Humvees that are commissioned to this unit were also used in photography sessions for propaganda measures on social media while convincing the people that the Taliban are now taking responsibility for security with advanced measures (Al Jazeera, 2022). Even some international analysts have claimed that the special force of Badri 313 of IEA will play the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) of Taliban's Afghanistan to secure its ideological and political objectives in every domain (Al Arabiya English, 2021).

Taliban took the initiative to reorganize the intelligence services to secure the objectives of its ideological state-building. The former intelligence agency, known as the National Directorate of Security (NDS), a successor agency of KHAD, had been reorganized by IEA's leadership in 2021, giving responsibilities for internal and external security and political issues. The agency is named the "General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI)," which conducted spy operations in arresting and neutralizing top ISKP commanders in November 2021. Taliban has shown commitment that GDI will conduct special operations to clear Afghanistan from the threat of ISKP (Gul, 2021). GDI has conducted operations initially to support the Taliban's police in arresting kidnappers and freeing civilians.

Hence, intelligence assistance to local law enforcement duties is also being provided against criminals to gain legitimacy inside Afghan society (Xinhua, 2021). The head of GDI is Abdul Haq Wasiq, who was deputy minister of intelligence of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001; he was detained at Guantanamo Bay by the United States on terrorism charges and for providing intelligence to Al Qaeda. He was swapped in prisoner exchange by the US for Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl (BBC, 2014).

GDI's immediate focus includes Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Islam, ISKP, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (Seldin, 2022). Unlike the previous government's

NDS, responsible for domestic and international operations to the Loya Jirga of Afghanistan, the GDI is now only accountable to the Interior Ministry. The GDI has been blamed for achieving the political objectives of the Taliban at the local level while involved in extrajudicial killings of civilians and military officials linked to the former government (Rahmani & Butler, 2022).

The GDI agents had also been involved in arresting the women activists who were protesting against discriminatory policies towards Afghan women. The agency is also infamous for silencing the voices of media persons critical of the Taliban regime. The unaccountable GDI works on unwritten regulations to address the threats to IEA's ideological foundations. The GDI even arrested Iranian journalists for reporting on human rights violations and discrimination against Hazaras in peripheral areas of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's political and security ecosystem is said to be badly impacted after the reorganizing of GDI (Dunham, 2022). It is also being criticized for using the tactics of silencing the news outlets in Afghanistan that often publish content that is either critical to the Taliban administration or uses methods of apprehension against the local journalists and news reporters. Thus, freedom of speech and freedom of the press in Afghanistan is being impacted widely (Yousaf & Yousafzai, 2023). As the administration of Taliban had been criticized for harboring the militants and extremists linked to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other terrorist outfits inside Afghanistan by the Pakistani government, the GDI had several times taken moves to ensure Pakistan regarding the restriction of actions from the side of TTP against Pakistan that can be proven from its delegation's secret visit to Islamabad in 2023 (Yousaf & Yousafzai, 2023).

Assimilation of the former troops/officers

After the announcement of general amnesty by the Taliban after the US withdrawal, many Afghans hoped that the Taliban would grant protection to the masses. In contrast, many civilians and military officials left the country in the exodus stage. The notion of "general amnesty" was constructed on the principles of Islam based on Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) principle of general amnesty after Muslims took over the Islamic holy city of Makkah in the 6th Century, resulting in the treaty of Hudaibyah (Ahmed, 2011). The "written" assurances of no harm given to the military officials were hollow by many international observers working in

Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover (Marcolini, Sohail, & Stockton, 2022). It is added that almost five hundred former military officials were killed by the Taliban. The revenge killings conducted against such personnel exposed the claim of moderation and the Taliban being tolerant. Forensic data collected by international watchdogs does not qualify for the Taliban's stance. The group is also accused of violating the legal aspects of anti-torture conventions and other grave violations of international law when it comes to defying their general amnesty.

Nevertheless, the Taliban regime claims that it believes in the post-conflict norms of integrating the former or serving combatants back into society, whether it comes to their fighters or the fighters of opposing sides in Afghanistan. Zabiullah Mujahid, Taliban's acting Minister of Information, stated the withdrawal of the US forces on rebuilding state institutions and strengthening the security apparatus of Afghanistan. He requested that the former troops and officers become part of the newly established IEA's military forces for national integrity and to sustain the security mechanisms for dealing with external and internal security threats (NDTV, 2021). Taliban also asked the US-trained pilots and aviation experts of the former Afghan Airforce to join the newly established air force of Afghanistan under them. The representatives of the Taliban also claimed that they had contacted the pilots. Waleeullah Hashmi, a representative of IEA, stated, "We have contact with many pilots," he further added, "And we have asked them to come and join, join their brothers, their government." (Reuters, 2021)

More than 40 pilots took the Afghan Air Force aircraft along with their families to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in exodus. One hundred and fifty military personnel were left in such developments; the Taliban asked them to return and then threatened these countries to bring the aircraft back to Afghanistan. Uzbekistan clearly stated that these aircraft will be shipped to the US (Shandilya, 2022). Many of the pilots, technicians, and strategic planners from the former air force had joined the Taliban's new air force as they either had no alternative or feared that the Taliban might harm their relatives after leaving Afghanistan. Taliban aggressively worked on reintegrating former troops into the new armed forces to sustain stability and state-building initiated under the Taliban's new administration (Zucchini & Akbary, 2022).

Air Force of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

There are hundreds of Afghan Air Force pilots and aviation technicians that the United States trained for flying gunship and transport helicopters along with fighter and support jets. The training of such pilots had a considerable cost of US\$ 80 billion, which was spent on rebuilding the ANDSF (O'Donnell, 2023). The Afghan Air Force, over which thirty coalition partners brought their efforts to sustain and equip the fighters and technicians of the relevant force to be a competitive force in the fight against the Taliban. The force failed to be resilient enough to counter the threat of Taliban like ANA, which was justified by the US's "Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)" as a factor that was paved due to corruption and mismanagement (Cunningham & Windrem, 2022). Some of those trained pilots had no option but to either stay or join Afghanistan's new rulers or to hide from the Taliban's death squads (O'Donnell, 2023).

Many Afghan military pilots fled to neighbouring countries, as well as the United States and the United Kingdom, now facing issues regarding their asylum and financial situations. Nevertheless, some of those US-trained Afghan pilots have now joined the Taliban's "New" Air Force; they are capable of operating aircraft like Black Hawks, Russian Mi-17s, Lockheed fixed-wing C-130 Hercules, Super Tucano ground attack jets, MD530 helicopters, and Cessna 208 Caravans. Islamic Emirate officials claimed they had now repaired half of the planes and helicopters we had provided to the former authorities. The repairing of the aircraft on a greater level, along with the provision of maintenance services to the Taliban-led Air Force, led to concerns that one of the neighbouring states might be helping the Taliban to rebuild their air power. It is also to be added that 4300 individuals, including former pilots, had claimed to have joined the Air Force under the Taliban. Therefore, the general amnesty, which the Taliban announced after their takeover, may have convinced some former Afghan Air Force officials to rejoin the services under the new leadership (Rahbin & Rondeaux, 2022).

In June 2022, a pilot captured by the National Resistance Front (NRF) stated that he was working on supplying Taliban troops with necessary equipment during their offensive against the NRF in Panjshir province. The air force that the former monarch of Afghanistan, King Aman Ullah Khan, established in the 1920s with the support of the Soviet Union had now been run by the

Taliban but still lacked the formation of proper squadrons or units. It is to be added that some foreign-provided aircraft destroyed or disabled during the US withdrawal were repaired and painted with IEA's traditional white flags. It is added by the official of the IEA that during President Ashraf Ghani's government, there were 183 aircraft with the Afghan Air Force, out of which 70 were taken out by fleeing pilots to neighboring countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Today, most of the remaining aircraft have been repaired as per the sources of the Taliban government (The Express Tribune, 2022). Afghan Air Force under the Taliban may not pose a threat or retain deterrence for the regional countries given the fact that there have been at least five aircraft accidents in the Taliban's air force since their takeover due to a lack of training in running effectively. On the other hand, the leadership of the IEA claims that it may use leftover aircraft for humanitarian operations such as dealing with natural disasters. This leads to the argument that the Taliban are not ready yet to mobilize them in any combat situations. Amin Tarzi, director of the United States Marine Corps University Middle East, argued, "If anything, it can become more symbolic." This means the air force under the Taliban may just be used for the creation of a narrative that they can run the armed forces of the country effectively (Siddique, 2023).

Conclusion

The study focused on forming a new structure of armed forces over the remnants of former military forces inside Afghanistan. The group had managed to rebrand its units for its proclaimed "Grand Army" and managed to have 150,000 active personnel. However, challenges still prevail in many contexts, such as the proper deployment of units through proper command structures and the failure to have an appropriate record of the armed forces' equipment that is now under their control. The vast experience of the group in the war against the Western forces and allied Afghan military during the "War on Terror" prepared the group to enhance its capacity to use technology along with conducting guerilla warfare tactics in an advanced way. It is also to add here that the US left stockpile helped the Taliban to immediately secure government buildings and other essential establishments that are important for both civilian/military affairs.

The special force of the Taliban, "Badri 313," which was responsible for conducting the tactical operations for the group while targeting American troops and Afghan forces, is now playing the

role of sustaining Taliban control after the US withdrawal. Even before withdrawal, the Taliban were adopting technological and tactical aspects of the military by getting crucial military equipment, including reconnaissance drone/communication systems from underground markets. Taliban the reorganization of armed forces through 20 20-member committee established by the country's new administration. The reorganizing of armed forces under the Taliban achieves the political objectives of the group. Taliban believe that international legitimacy can be achieved through a proper and sustainable security apparatus at home, which can help run the country's affairs. The most important point concerns Mullah Yaqoob's efforts to establish the "Grand Army" of around 110,000. The re-formation of the Grand Army is not only described as a source of military evolution inside Afghanistan under the leadership of the Taliban but also to form a firm grip of the Taliban over Afghanistan. The rebuilding of the air force on the remnants of the previous one, which was financed through foreign funds, is also a significant challenge for the Taliban as the country is facing international sanctions and the freezing of its foreign monetary reserves. IEA's Air Force has taken initial steps towards operationalization that may help the current rulers use them in natural disasters or for utility support missions in combating non-state actors like the National Resistance Front or ISKP.

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