The transnationalization of the Taliban

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Abstract

This article introduces a framework for the analysis of transnationalization – understood as the process by which non-state groups integrate with transnational actors – that distinguishes between (1) organization, (2) resource mobilization, (3) tactical repertoire and (4) ideological framing. This framework is then applied to an examination of the Afghan Taliban's relationships to Al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban (and other local militants) and the Pakistani state. Contrary to dominant analyses, the article finds that the transnationalization of the Taliban has been limited. The Afghan Taliban have been concerned both about losing local support and about coming under the influence of actors with objectives very different from their own, and have therefore consciously limited their own integration into transnational networks.

Introduction

Afghanistan's Taliban is probably the only armed group that, having gained command of a whole country, lost its power because of a reluctance to end its protection of a globally oriented terror network, Al-Qaeda. Afghanistan's *de facto* government from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden and renounce its support for Al-Qaeda, despite the imminent threat of an armed attack by the United States following the terror attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. Three months after those attacks, an interim administration was in place in Kabul, and the Taliban leadership found its organizational infrastructure in a state of total disintegration. In this article, I will argue that, since that time, the Taliban has sought to preserve its own independence with considerable vigour, enjoying substantial success in its efforts to balance its relations with various actors. Although it lost power on account of the company it had been keeping in 2001, the movement has subsequently remained focused on its domestic objectives. While it

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has cooperated closely with both Al-Qaeda and a variety of Islamist insurgent groups from the wider region around Afghanistan, the Taliban's own role in transnational terror remains very limited. If we examine the period following the 2001 intervention and the ensuing demolition of the Taliban organization, we find a movement working hard to maintain a degree of independence, torn between various forces that each seek to maximize their own influence over the movement, while clinging on to their own domestic agendas.

In an influential article published in early 2001, five of the world's leading Afghanistan scholars declared squarely that the war in Afghanistan was not a civil war, but a transnational one (Rubin et al., 2001). The implications of this could be devastating, suggested the five authors, since the rich supply of resources from outside prevents a 'hurting stalemate' from emerging:

> In transnational wars like Afghanistan, however, access to international aid and international markets (drugs, gems, smuggled consumer goods), international volunteers or recruits from refugees, diaspora or allied states, provides replenishable resources. The parties are never exhausted. (Rubin et al., 2001: 36)

A key question, then, is to what extent transnational resource flows – money and arms in particular – have been a necessary precondition for the Taliban's survival. Another important question is whether the recruitment of foreign fighters – Pakistani citizens in particular – in the late 1990s, when the Taliban was facing increasing resistance to local recruitment in its core areas of southern Afghanistan, was instrumental to that survival.

Powerful states may disrupt transnational linkages, argued the authors of the 2001 article, but are unlikely to be willing to commit the resources required to do so. The 9/11 attacks on the United States evoked new international interest in Afghanistan. Yet, in autumn 2012, following a long decade of international warfare, we see a Taliban that has been steadily progressing in terms of both political influence and military capability. While the Taliban phenomenon continues to grow in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, opinions differ as to whether the relevant developments should be understood as a single congruent movement. Relatedly, there is disagreement over the extent to which the organization is inspired by the transnational global ideology of Al-Qaeda, as opposed to being driven by an amalgamation of local-level grievances with the Afghan government and its international supporters. Similarly, there are diverging views regarding the extent to which state support – primarily from Pakistan – is essential to the Taliban's success. The responses to these questions will undoubtedly be vital for our understanding of today's Afghanistan, as well as for the debate over which policy measures stand a chance of breaking the ongoing cycle of violence – and which may be exacerbating it.

The aim of this article is to examine how a specific rebel movement – the Afghan Taliban – has dealt with the quest for transnationalization, and in the process to develop an analytical framework that may be applied to the study of other similar movements, preferably as part of a larger comparative effort. There is massive interest in the transnational aspects of civil war, and recent publications that have established the prevalence and impact of the transnational through large-*n* statistical studies (Gleditsch, 2007; Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008; Salehyan, 2009) have been widely noted. Encouragingly, we see that there is increasing dialogue between those who approach the relevant phenomena through quantitative studies, as these increasingly incorporate case studies in their work (Salehyan, 2009), and a new generation of qualitative case studies that find inspiration in, and seek to inform, large-*n* work (Checkel, 2013b). Also importantly, a long-overdue interaction with the large literature on transnationalism outside of violent contexts, and in particular on transnational social movements, is now underway (Tarrow, 2007). The article at hand is firmly situated within this wave of renewed interest in the impact of transnationalism, but differs in that it takes a particular armed group as its point of departure and examines how that group deals with the

contradictory pressures of external actors, before suggesting a framework that might permit us to examine the depth and durability of transnationalization across multiple dimensions (Bakke, 2013).

Both before and after 9/11, it has been widely assumed that Afghanistan's Taliban – through its organization, resource streams, tactical repertoire and ideological framing – is part and parcel of a terror network of global reach (see, for example, Bergen, 2009). The willingness to nuance understandings of the depth of that integration into transnational networks, however, is often limited. There has also been only scant examination of how the robustness of transnational linkages varies across various dimensions, which would also open up for analysis of the interaction between these dimensions. Ultimately, there is also a dire need for deconstructing the various transnational networks, which I will do here, somewhat simplistically, by distinguishing between Al-Qaeda central, the various local Islamist insurgent groups that have some association with the Al-Qaeda network, and state supporters (mainly Pakistan). These various actors may act in concert, but are just as often in competition for the goodwill of the Taliban. Making things still more complicated – as we will see when we examine the role of Pakistan – caution should be taken regarding assumptions that any of these actors are unitary.

As in any study of armed conflict, there are serious data challenges (Lee, 1995; Wood, 2006). Having suffered from little academic interest in the 1990s, Afghanistan has seen an explosion of studies on all aspects of society post-2001 (Bleuer, 2011, 2012). At the time of this writing, in mid-2012, with international withdrawal under way, the interest is rapidly declining, however, and it may be time to investigate whether the immense research effort has yielded the insights that might have been expected. Possible limitations notwithstanding, over the past few years several noteworthy contributions focusing on the evolution of the Taliban have appeared (e.g. Gopal, 2010; Giustozzi, 2007, 2009; Van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012). Particularly noteworthy is Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn's (2012) book *An Enemy We Created*, which is based on years of observation and interviews conducted during an extended residency in Kandahar, and is currently the most carefully researched account of the fraught relationship between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban (but see also Stenersen, 2011). This is complemented by the author's own interviews, observations and longstanding engagement in seeking to understand political mobilization and violence in Afghanistan (Harpviken, 1995, 1997, 2009). As will be clear from the discussion, however, the facts are often unclear or disputed, and the only remedies are critical judgement, careful interpolation and conventional data triangulation.

We will now turn to a discussion of transnational mobilization, where the aim is to situate the present study within the literature, to define the idea of transnationalization in relation to other related concepts, and to lay out in greater detail the analytical framework that this article seeks to advance. From there, we move on to a brief exposition of the Taliban movement's trajectory, from its first appearance in 1994 through its dramatic fall from power in 2001, followed by a long decade of gradual resurgence. The next four sections are devoted to individual elements of the analytical framework – organization, resource mobilization, tactical repertoire and ideological framing – and will focus on key events and processes in the history of the Taliban and the mechanisms of transnationalization, with a view to examining the depth and durability of each dimension, as well as the interaction between them. In conclusion, I will offer some reflections on the impact of this case application for studies of the transnationalization of rebel groups more broadly.

Transnationalization in civil war

In the last few years, new, quantitative work on civil war has documented the impact of transnational factors in a wide array of cases (Buhaug and Gates, 2002; Gleditsch, 2007). These studies

establish the correlation between transnational factors – such as flows of refugees or material goods across borders, cross-border recruitment and mobilization patterns, and foreign-state or non-state support for rebel groups – and the occurrence and duration of civil war. Yet, while methodologically advanced and offering important insights, these studies do not take us very far in terms of understanding the processes by which groups taking part in civil wars become transnationalized (Bennett, 2013). Interestingly, though, there has been a longstanding research effort on studying nonviolent challengers to the state that has paid ample attention to the transnational aspects of mobilization (Risse-Kappen, 1995; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2004; James and Sharma, 2006; Orenstein and Schmitz, 2006). Over the past decade or so, there has been a turn towards looking for causal mechanisms in this literature, seeking to uncover the social processes through which a particular factor (or combination of factors) comes to produce a distinct outcome (Tilly, 2001; Gerring, 2007; Tarrow, 2010). A 'mechanismic' approach, argues Andrew Bennett (2013), may have considerable costs in lost parsimony, yet that may be 'a necessary price for improving our understandings of the complexities of political life'.

While the concept of the transnational and related terms such as transnationalism and transnationalization are increasingly used in the literature on armed conflict, they are not always clearly defined (Checkel, 2013a). Current studies of the transnational focus primarily on three substantive areas: migration, the economy and civil society activism. Within migration studies, transnational relations are at the top of the research agenda, the main interest being in understanding the social continuity between migrants' new countries and their countries of origin, mediated through social networks and regular flows of information, money and people (Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Portes et al., 1999; Lyons and Mandaville, 2010). Within the second domain – transnational economic relations – there has been a particular interest in multinational corporations (Keohane and Nye, 1971). This literature has inspired mobilization theorists pursuing resistance to globalization (Tarrow, 2001), as well as civil war analysts interested in the political economy of war (Duffield, 2001). A final domain has been that of transnational activism, analysing the ways in which nongovernmental organizations and activist networks seek to affect the policies of international and domestic actors (Florini, 2000). While this latter track has been occupied with political action, this has been largely within a pluralist vision of international politics, where coordination rather than conflict becomes the main issue (Tarrow, 2001). While I will here be drawing particularly on the insights gained within this third domain, there are ample insights to be gained from the studies both of the globalizing economy and of migratory networks.

The concept of the transnational forms a contrast to that of the international – understood as concerning the relationships that exist between states – focusing on the ability of a group of actors, operating in more than one country, to engage in sustained action. The concept is intended as a way of capturing actions, flows and processes that cut across state boundaries, yet are outside the control of the central state. Transnational networks – whether they are migratory, economic or take the form of social movements – may be conceptualized as a combination of non-state and state actors – an approach that lies at the heart of Tarrow's (2005: 25) definition of transnational contention. However, a focus on transnational networks that includes states as actors risks causing confusion, as it incorporates states as actors both in the international (interstate) and in the transnational domains (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). It is accordingly important to establish as a reference point that a transnational actor is a non-state entity that operates in more than one state (Nye and Welch, 2013: 299–300). While understanding the interaction between states and violent non-state groups is a key challenge, it does not in itself constitute transnational action when states engage in the support of such groups, as they regularly do. However, states, and the international system of which they are a part, are key in setting the parameters for transnational political action. Not only

that: in being challenged by – and through engaging with – transnational political and violent movements, the state and its institutions are themselves transformed. None of this makes the state a transnational actor in its own right.

The main challenge for studies of the transnational, however, lies not in separating out a field of study distinct from international relations, but rather in distinguishing between the transnational and the international in ways that are conducive for understanding how the two influence and interact with each other. Early conceptualizations gave the impression that transnational activity could only weaken the state (Tarrow, 2005; Orenstein and Schmitz, 2006). A particular concern has been uncertainty about loyalty to the state when an individual's identity ties him or her to more than one state or – even worse – when such a situation is reified through multiple citizenships (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). As Charles Tilly (1997) succinctly noted, states are bureaucratically inclined, instinctively seeking to assign individuals to 'crisp categories'. Yet, regardless of whether or not they are engaged in transnational activism of any kind, humans are not necessarily easily delineated into one category or another.

Rather than seeing the transnational in contrast to the international, many analysts have pointed out that multilateral bodies – albeit mandated by their state members – have their own organizational dynamics and may build up considerable political leverage in their own right. In what emerges as a critique of classical realism, one may then conceive of international bodies as transnational actors (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). Going one step further, others have argued that individual states also increasingly act transnationally, engaging in a variety of specialized horizontal networks, whose members only partly represent defined state interests (Slaughter, 2004). Studying such hybrid forms of action may have particular potential for informing our understanding of the interplay between the system of states and the transnational sphere. Nonetheless, rather than seeing states and their constituent parts as transnational actors in their own right, it seems more fruitful to see states (or entities within states) as essential to the structure within which transnational action plays out. That, of course, should not preclude us – despite the methodological challenges it may entail – from identifying states that strategically engage with transnational actors in order to pursue particular state objectives.

Apart from being non-state, transnational groups are rooted in more than one state. For transnational militants, it is the very ability to base themselves in a territory that is not under the control of the state they are challenging that gives them a major advantage (Salehyan, 2005). This dramatically increases the difficulties of pursuing rebels, and is particularly effective when militants enjoy the support of the host state. Whether the latter is the case is, of course, closely linked to the ability of transnational militants to play on conflicts between two or more states (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). Militant transnational groups are likely to have a very different relationship to international institutions and states than those groups that focus on advocacy and reform. The study of groups such as the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, or that movement's symbiotic relationship to many state actors, can only in part shed light on transnational armed action. While advocacy groups may seek to directly influence international agendas, armed groups will only be able to do so through combining the 'creation of facts on the ground' with media work and lobbying (Tarrow, 2005). The expansion of a 'complex internationalism', however, including the increasing influence of international organizations, does create new opportunities for transnational mobilization, violent or otherwise (Orenstein and Schmitz, 2006). Ultimately, we know that states and international organizations are all but immune to the claims made by militant groups who seek recognition.

My focus here is on transnationalization – more specifically, on how armed groups that challenge their own governments embed in, and get embedded in, transnational networks. The concept of 'contentious politics' (Tarrow, 1996; Tilly, 1996), well established within the social movements

litterature, has been increasingly applied also to the study of transnational political mobilization (Tarrow, 2001). In contrast to this literature, however, I shall be adding organization as a dimension in its own right (as opposed to an outcome), in recognition of the insight that a movement's ability to build on and mobilize pre-existing networks and forms of social organization is critical to its success (Harpviken, 1997; Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2008). The other three dimensions – resource mobilization, tactical repertoire and ideological framing – are more standard, although the concepts used to capture them may vary (Bakke, 2013; Checkel, 2013b). In short, we will in the following be examining transnationalism across the following four dimensions:

- *Organization*. We will presume that leadership – and hence the social and political institutions that underpin authority – is essential to the success of rebel groups. By extension, the recruitment of fighters and people in support functions – which may be by force, against payment or on the basis of shared objectives – is crucial. The extent to which authority or recruitment transcends state boundaries will be key to transnationalization.
- *Resource mobilization*. A successful fight hinges on a steady supply of financial and military resources; the sustenance of an organization rests on its ability to reward its members, or at least provide for their existential minimum. Rebel movements can develop their own (domestic) sources of income, or they can rely on external support. The extent of external support – with the possible expectations of influence – defines transnationalization in this area.
- *Tactical repertoire*. Rebel groups, almost always the weaker party in a given fight, rely on their ability to innovate and renew their repertoire of contention (which will often include both violent and nonviolent means). It is on the tactical dimension that rebel groups most immediately encounter the state they are opposing, as each side pursues continuous tactical innovation in response to the approach of the other. A tactic may be merely emulated or it may be transferred with intent. The latter development entails a transnational process.
- *Ideological framing*. The ultimate objective of a rebel group may be to capture state power, to share power at the centre, to secede and form a new state, or to gain partial autonomy. In most cases, objectives are framed within a larger ideological discourse, which also demonstrates political propinquity in transnational space. The sharing of sophisticated ideological frames demands sustained socialization of members, but when successful may contribute to a deep transnational consciousness.

With the above, we move towards a conceptual apparatus for a nuanced understanding of what transnationalization of armed groups entails. In this context, transnationalization ranges from pragmatically motivated alliances to seamless integration with entities that operate transnationally. At one end of the spectrum are those entities that operate across a single state boundary (most often based on common identity); at the other end are groups that operate globally (not rarely based on a common interest in sharing knowledge and resources). Yet how does transnationalization come about? The dimensions above are all dynamic; they are all subject to various pressures and to innovation. Yet, while the organizational dimension is necessarily about the shape of social interaction between real people, can the three other dimensions principally be seen as processes of diffusion, in which direct interaction is only one possible mechanism? In delineating the mechanisms of diffusion, Tarrow (2010) has sought to distinguish between the relational, the mediated and the nonrelational. The relational is through direct personal contact, face-to-face; rooted in trust or deep familiarity, it has a particular strength when it comes to conveying complex skills or messages. Diffusion through mediation – what network analysts would often call brokerage (Burt, 1987;

Gould and Fernandez, 1989) – implies that there is a third party that conveys the information, ultimately with the ability to affect the message. The non-relational is the diffusion that goes through various types of media and gets adopted through emulation rather than through direct learning. As we examine the transnationalization of the Taliban, we will keep these mechanisms in mind.

The Taliban

The Taliban – as an armed group with that name – emerged in mid-1994. The most common account of its origins is that the core of the movement was formed when a group of local religious leaders – mullahs – took up arms against local commanders who were renowned both for harassing travellers and for abducting and raping women in Kandahar (Rashid, 2000: 21–30). By October, the Taliban had taken over control of a large arms depot at the border with Pakistan from the Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar group), a major Islamist resistance party from the anti-Soviet war of the 1980s. Soon after this, at the request of Pakistan, the Taliban played an instrumental role in releasing a Pakistani trade convoy that had been taken into custody by local commanders. From its local origins, the Taliban expanded quickly (Maley, 1998). By mid-February 1995, the movement had taken over the main Hezb-e Islami base just south of Kabul. In these first months of its existence, the Taliban hardly needed to engage in fighting. Widespread discontent with the existing rulers translated into support for the new alternative, and the local commanders gave up their control without a fight, many joining the Taliban themselves (Sinno, 2008: 222–253).

The Taliban did not come from out of nowhere, however, and the movement's emergence can be viewed in terms of the revival of religious networks that had played a role throughout the wars of the late 1970s and the 1980s (Van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 113–121). The Harakat-e-Inqelab party, one of the seven Afghan resistance parties based in Pakistan in the 1980s, was really the party of Afghanistan's traditional Sunni Islamic clergy. The same network – made up of teachers, alumni and religious students from the madrasas – also came to form the foundation on which the Taliban was based (Dorronsoro, 2005). This was always a transnational network with little regard for state boundaries, where the main religious authorities would be in Pakistan. The Sunni religious leadership is not structured in terms of tight hierarchical organizations, but rather operates in loose networks based on personal loyalties. This is precisely why the Taliban during the mid-1990s was able to mobilize a relatively coherent movement with a single leadership, influential throughout most of Afghanistan's Pashtun south, in such impressive fashion (Harpviken, 1997). The Taliban themselves came mainly from madrasas in the Deobandi tradition, named after the city of Deoband in India, historically its main centre of learning. The Deobandi approach represents a traditionalist interpretation of Islam, aiming at a society based on the Koran and the *Sunnah* – the practice of the Prophet (Butt, 1998). The Deobandi – as well as the Taliban – were marked by their opposition to secularism in general and to modern state-led education in particular. Likewise, the Deobandi are opposed to the radical Islamists, whose backgrounds tend to be in the modern educational system (Metcalf, 2002).

Following Pakistan's separation from India in 1947, the leading Deobandi madrasas were located in Pakistan: in Peshawar, Karachi and Lahore. The network of madrasas in Pakistan expanded massively throughout the 1980s as an integral part of the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (Fair, 2009). Many of the recruits were Afghans. Today, Afghan students at a relatively well-reputed madrasa in Wardak, just some 45 minutes' drive south of Kabul, finalize their religious training by going to one of the more prestigious madrasas in Pakistan, where they may spend anything from six months to several years (Borchgrevink, 2007; Wardak et al., 2007). The network of Deobandi madrasas that spans the Afghan–Pakistani border is for most purposes

seen as a coherent whole, where Afghan and Pakistani students work side by side and there is considerable circulation of students. Over the past decade, numerous initiatives aiming at reform of the madrasa system in Pakistan have been attempted (International Crisis Group, 2002b, 2004); in the last few years, similar efforts have been initiated by the Afghan government. Within the madrasa sector, however, there is considerable scepticism to the idea of state control, which limits the impact of potential and actual reform programmes (Borchgrevink and Harpviken, 2010). In certain areas, reform programmes have been further hampered by the Taliban monitoring madrasas, threatening religious leaders regarded as collaborating with the state. The battle for religious legitimacy has been at the heart of the post-2001 Taliban revival.

The US-led intervention that aimed to dethrone the Taliban and to demolish Al-Qaeda's abilities to conduct acts of terror started on 7 October 2001. The ground presence of US (and allied) personnel was very limited, giving the operation a clear Afghan face while limiting risks on the interveners' part (Crumpton, 2005). Combining the allied forces' vastly superior air power and use of special operatives with large-scale indigenous ground forces, the intervention represented, in the words of the general in command, 'a new kind of war' (Franks, 2004: 238). The main Afghan force during the peak of the intervention was the so-called Northern Alliance. The strongest party within the alliance, Jamiat-e Islami, had managed to maintain control over perhaps 10% of Afghanistan's territory, in the northeastern corner of the country, bordering on Tajikistan where it had its support base. By 2001, Jamiat's main forces were primarily located in Afghanistan, from where they launched their fight. Other groups within the alliance had recently returned from exile, or were doing so in the process of remobilization (Rashid, 2008; Harpviken and Lischer, 2013).

In the early phases, the intervention was widely popular among Afghans. The Taliban regime collapsed virtually overnight, although there were serious battles in certain areas, such as the northern city of Kunduz, where a large contingent of foreign fighters was involved. Within a couple of months, the war was effectively over. As the main leadership fled, mostly to Pakistan, the rank-and-file Taliban fighters effectively demobilized, overwhelmingly with the intention of not re-engaging in war (Van Bijlert, 2009; Van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2011). Anand Gopal (2010), one of the most perceptive observers of the Taliban's resurgence, notes the following regarding the dynamics in Kandahar, the movement's very nerve centre:

> After 2001, most senior Taliban leaders in the province had accepted the new government, or at least rejected it but declined to fight against it. Most did not invoke the notion of jihad as an immediate reaction to the new government. Rather, only after a protracted campaign against former Taliban did many of them feel they had no place in the new state of affairs and began to see the presence of the government and foreign fighters as necessitating jihad.

By 2003–2004, an increasing number of former Taliban supporters were reconsidering their plans for retirement, joined by a new, younger generation (Nixon, 2011). Within just a couple of years, what by late 2001 seemed to have been a full victory by the international forces and their Afghan counterparts was rapidly converted into a sustained resurgence of the Taliban.

The literature on the Taliban's resurgence (Giustozzi, 2007; Rashid, 2008) discusses the importance of the support provided by the Pakistani state – including access to sanctuary – but does little to explore the Taliban's relations to other transnational actors (but see Franco, 2009; Stenersen, 2009). Yet, if we are to understand the post-2001 Taliban mobilization, we need a fine-grained analysis of whether and how it was rooted in a genuinely transnational reorientation of the movement. We will need to move beyond a simple dichotomy, according to which we view the Taliban either as an integral part of a transnational terror network or as a genuinely local movement with

its eyes fixed firmly on power in Afghanistan. What is clear, in any case, is that the re-emergence of the Taliban is in large part reflective of more than two decades of widespread migration (Harpviken, 2009; Harpviken and Lischer, 2013). Recruitment among recent returnees, as well as among exile Afghans in Pakistan, has been essential to the organization. Patterns of movement across the border, however, had become increasingly complex. The Taliban resurgence was neither a purely refugee-based insurgency nor a purely returnee-based one, but it certainly drew on decades of intensive mobility that had fostered dense networks of interaction across the border.

The Gopal quote above makes it clear that the governance and security offered by Afghanistan's new government and its international backers were in themselves instrumental in bringing about the Taliban's resurgence. However, beyond merely being an alternative, what did the Taliban have to offer? The Taliban was never a welfare organization; its vision of the state's responsibilities was very narrow (Moghadam, 2001). What citizens could expect – certainly not negligible under the circumstances – was the provision of basic security and Islamic justice, and, at the personal level, recognition and positions of power. As the Taliban challenge intensified, it became common among military and political leaders in the countries involved in the international war operation to speak about non-ideological, easy-to-convert, 'ten-dollar-a-day' Taliban (see, for example, Milliband, 2009). The analysis was misleading: the Taliban was not first and foremost an army of guns for hire. What undoubtedly contributed to its resurgence was the fact that the great expectations of aid and economic development that had been raised in the course of the US-led intervention had not materialized. The impression that formed soon after 2001 was that the Pashtun south had been disprivileged (International Crisis Group, 2003). With deteriorating security, neither the government apparatus nor the internationals operating in the country could mount a successful challenge to that impression.

Most importantly, however, the government and its international allies failed to produce security, particularly in the south of the country, where the insurgency first started. The international forces were not set up to offer security for citizens: the forces of Operation Enduring Freedom commanded the ground, focusing on tracking down Al-Qaeda and high-level Taliban, with a net effect that was negative, as both non-aligned citizens and demobilized citizens had to bear the cost of collateral damage to life and property (Suhrke, 2011: 37–72). The UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) expanded to the south in mid-2006, but was unable to change the existing dynamics. As the ISAF commander at the time, Stanley McChrystal (2009), wrote in his assessment from autumn 2009:

> we have operated in a manner that distances us – physically and psychologically – from the people we seek to protect. In addition, we run the risk of strategic defeat by pursuing tactical wins that cause civilian casualties or unnecessary collateral damage. The insurgents cannot defeat us militarily, but we can defeat ourselves.

For many, the new government – whose organizational structure was in large measure built on people whom the Taliban had driven from power in the 1990s – constituted a threat rather than a source of protection. While there were virtually no ordinary armed forces, various groups operating under the command of local officials and other strongmen engaged in a range of different pursuits – from local power struggles to subcontracting for international forces – but again with a net negative effect on local citizens' security (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al., 2008; Gopal, 2010). Once insecurity started to trigger armed protest and neither the international forces nor the government proved capable of retooling their roles, what was in effect a spiralling insecurity dynamic began to unfold, whereby the armed responses of various actors mutually reinforced each other.

Staying outside the conflict became more difficult by the day, and for many there was no alternative to the Taliban. By 2010, McChrystal's (2009) report had set the tone for the dominant analysis of the situation. By now, counterinsurgency (COIN) was the universal frame of discussion in all circles, and there was a strong sense that operations on the ground had failed to breed popular confidence. Stronger critics saw the military strategy as outright counterproductive (e.g. Dorronsoro, 2009). In the meantime, however, the insurgency had grown strong – in terms of numbers, geographical reach, tactical innovation and political resolve. In Afghanistan, many saw the international withdrawal plan that manifested itself in the course of the spring of 2012 as a partial victory for the Taliban.

However, what was the role of the transnational dimension to the Taliban's post-2001 resurgence? Is there a further radicalization of the movement under way, and, if so, is this a reflection of a fundamental transnationalization of the movement? Undoubtedly, the religious networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan played a major role during the 1990s. The Taliban hosted Al-Qaeda – a relationship that was always somewhat contrived and in the end caused the movement's fall from power. Let us, then, examine the extent of the Taliban's transnationalization, with a focus on the period after 2001, across each of the four dimensions discussed above: organization, resource mobilization, tactical repertoire and ideological framing.

Organization

What do transnational militant movements produce? Ultimately, of course, they produce organized contentious action. The ability to build organization, including the recruitment and maintenance of a membership, lies at the core of their sustenance. The most solid indicator of successful mobilization is that people join an organization and subordinate themselves to its leadership (even if not citizens of a single state). In the absence of an organizational structure that spans borders, there simply is no transnational movement. Movements may start out as local entities, situated within a single state, only to gradually verge into the transnational, or they may start out as wide-reaching transnational entities that over time retract into the confines of a single polity. In other words, the transnational dimension of any given movement may wax and wane over the course of its history, subject to a range of factors, some of which are internal to the movement itself (e.g. leaders' ability to portray themselves as truly representative of grievances in several states), while others are external (changing political currents in the states in which the movement operates or in the international system). A thorough understanding of the transnational phenomenon must therefore be capable of capturing its dynamism. Transnationalization ought to be understood as a process, and as such it is also reversible.

The Taliban leadership is not transnational. The top echelons consist exclusively of Afghan citizens. The executive council is led by Mullah Omar and originally consisted of 10 men who appear to have been selected primarily because of their credentials as military leaders, the members of the council being in charge of the fighting in various areas of the country. Within the Pakistani Taliban, there are many members who declare their loyalty to Mullah Omar as their spiritual leader. Yet, it is conspicuous that the Afghan Taliban has no integration – neither with the Pakistani Taliban (or other radical movements from the region), nor with Al-Qaeda – at the level of its formal leadership bodies.

Among parallel movements in the region, the Pakistani Taliban stands out as a particularly likely candidate for integration with the Afghan Taliban. The two groups operate across a contiguous border; they draw their members from the same institutions, with the implication that there are rich network connections, and to quite an extent, there are ethnic and tribal commonalities. Once

we take the next step, however, and ask what the implications of this may be for possible integration between the movements, even the best-informed accounts differ widely in their conclusions (Franco, 2009; Zahab, 2012). Where Claudio Franco sees a tightly integrated group, with Pakistan's Taliban operating as a de facto 'governorate' under Mullah Omar's command – 'a limb of the mainstream Afghan Taliban' (Franco, 2009: 281), Mariam Abou Zahab describes an utterly fragmented movement that self-identifies with but nonetheless operates in separation from the Afghan Taliban's struggle. While such widely opposing analysis can in part be traced back to an emphasis on different empirical facts, the main reason lies in the underlying analytical assumptions.

Already by the end of the 1990s, several observers had begun to talk of an emerging 'Talibanization' of Pakistan (Rashid, 1998). At that time, a number of groups that referred to themselves as Taliban were engaged in contentious political action, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the Afghan border, but the main concern was with the potential for blowback when Pakistani youth, hardened from taking part in the fighting in Afghanistan, would return home. Pakistan's emerging Taliban were certainly inspired by the relative success in Afghanistan, and members of the movement had a background in madrasas where they had studied alongside Afghan students under the same (largely Pakistani, sometimes international) teachers. Many took part in the fighting in Afghanistan, gaining military experience that could be combined with the already strong networks rooted in the madrasa structure.

What is commonly referred to as the Pakistani Taliban – the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan – was officially formed in late 2007, when some 13 distinct groups joined together. Many of these groups had a history that dated back one or two decades, and several of them had fought alongside Afghanistan's resistance in the 1980s, or with the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s. Several of the groups also had their training camps in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, under an understanding with the Afghan Taliban (and Pakistani authorities, who were under US pressure to stop hosting groups stirring unrest with India). Already in the first few years after 2001, it was not uncommon for leaders of the Pakistani movements to make reference to Mullah Omar when taking major decisions. When the government of Pakistan signed a peace deal with locals (referred to as local elders) in the embattled North Waziristan area of Federally Administered Tribal Areas in October 2006, for example, local leaders claimed to have consulted Mullah Omar before signing the deal. As an organization, however, the Pakistani Taliban continues to struggle with internal differences between its constituent groups. There is regular contact with the Afghan Taliban, but in the absence of a consolidated central leadership for the Pakistani Taliban, it would be difficult to envisage Mullah Omar being able to control the group, even if he should wish to.

While the drivers of the insurgency in Pakistan are not too different from their counterparts in Afghanistan, the Pakistani case differs in that it has been limited to certain areas in which armed contention is prevalent, such as North Waziristan, where a much-disputed local peace agreement was entered into in 2006. In those areas, it seems that the Taliban, while expressing opposition to traditional strongmen, have been able to build wider coalitions with other groups that are generally dissatisfied with local governance. As a whole, the political–religious environment in Pakistan is even more variegated than in Afghanistan, and hence also more divided, in large part because state agencies (operating in Kashmir and Afghanistan) have encouraged and supported splits and new establishments (Zahab and Roy, 2004). One implication of this is that the Taliban in Pakistan is rather dependent on alliances with other political groups, much more so than is the case in Afghanistan. In Pakistan, the association with Deobandi-oriented political parties is of massive importance, first and foremost in relation to the Jamiat-e Ulama Islami led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman (and a splinter group from the same party led by Maulana Sami-ul Haq). These groups, despite their relatively small slices of the vote in Pakistani elections, have sought power through

alliances with other parties, and have often gained significant influence on certain areas. In the mid-1990s, for example, when Pakistan provided massive military and financial support to the Taliban in Afghanistan, it had a coalition government of which the Jamiat-e Ulama Islami was a member.

The recruits to the Taliban, from both sides of the border, have deep commonalities of identity. One element of commonality is the particular Deobandi branch of Islam they share, which binds individuals together even across different ethnic backgrounds. As important, however, is shared Pashtun ethnicity. The majority of Taliban recruits in Pakistan are of Pashtun origin, while in Afghanistan most stem from the Pashtun part of the population.[1] While the Taliban have never promoted a Pashtun nationalist cause, their shared ethnicity is embodied not only in longstanding networks, but also in language, customs and ways of seeing the world, and together these form a forceful foundation for collective action (see, for example, Tarrow, 2005). In the case of the Taliban, there is a certain affinity between traditionalist Pashtun ways of interpreting Islam and the ideologies pursued by the Taliban. This is not to belittle the fact that the two Talibans are exposed to an Al-Qaeda version of Wahabism (which many see as a foreign construct).

In the absence of a true integration of the two movements, recruitment may be another avenue to transnational organization. The Taliban that was chased from power in 2001 was a movement that had its gunsights set almost exclusively on political power in Afghanistan. It was already transnational in the sense that it recruited successfully among Pakistani citizens, first and foremost through the madrasa system. While not all the recruits from Pakistan were Pashtuns, the latter were certainly overrepresented. In the late 1990s, US estimates of the share of the Taliban troops fighting in Afghanistan that were Pakistani citizens were as high as 25–30% (Rubin, 2000). It is hard to verify such figures, yet it is clear that there were several massive recruitment drives in madrasas in Pakistan, particularly at times when the Taliban's armed campaigns in Afghanistan were in critical need of additional manpower. As of 2012, it is hard to say how many of those fighting under the name of the Taliban in Afghanistan are recruited in Pakistan, or how many are Pakistani citizens. What seems clear is that, among the suicide bombers, a fair share are of Pakistani origin, while some are from further afield (Gall, 2006). What is interesting, though, is that Afghan involvement in the armed actions of the Pakistani Taliban is virtually non-existent. Cross-border recruitment is largely a one-way traffic – perhaps because the Afghan struggle offers an opportunity for real battle training, perhaps because it has a legitimacy that draws in recruits who would not be prone to engaging in fighting in Pakistan. In either case, the imbalance of recruitment streams does not suggest one unified movement on both sides of the border.

When we seek to disentangle the recruitment patterns of the Taliban, insights from the literature on transnational migrant networks can be useful (Kearney, 1986). The Taliban is heavily rooted in the enduring settlement in Pakistan of many Afghans, migrants who for the most part were refugees of war. Its transnational character has gained depth over the years, however. In the mid-1990s, the Taliban recruited Afghans only – partly in Afghanistan, partly among Afghan refugees in Pakistan – and fought for political power in the home country. Pakistan served as a supporter and a sanctuary (Harpviken and Lischer, 2013). Since 2001, the Afghan Taliban have retained firm control of several of the refugee camps in Pakistan. By 2011, these camps are reportedly the only places where the movement is able to conscript new recruits by force (Giustozzi and Ibrahimi, 2012). Increasingly, however, the Taliban came to recruit among both Afghan and Pakistani citizens, particularly for its fighting in Afghanistan.

The Pakistani security apparatus has found it convenient to support the Afghan Taliban, for the same reasons that it has supported various armed groups in Pakistan. The country's existential relationship with India lies at the core of this situation – in the former case as a motive for wanting

a friendly government in Kabul, in the latter case in order to stir unrest in Indian-controlled Kashmir (and beyond) with deniability. The various Pakistani groups, though, have increasingly turned against the Pakistani state after 2001, in large part as a reaction to Islamabad's collaboration in the 'war on terror' and the armed campaigns in the semi-autonomous tribal areas. When the capital's Red Mosque – the Lal Masjid – was stormed by the army in July 2007, this marked a turning point in the state's relations to the militants (Zahab, 2012: 375–376). The now-direct hostility between the government and the various militant groups had the dual effect of bringing the latter even closer to various Al-Qaeda elements that had sought sanctuary in Pakistan after fleeing from Afghanistan in 2001, while at the same time forcing the Afghan Taliban to mark their distance from their Pakistani name brothers in order to avoid becoming embroiled in a military campaign against a state apparatus on whose support it depended. Undoubtedly, the Taliban's respect for Pakistani state-security needs yields only a tactical alliance, which can be quickly undone, yet the differences with the Pakistani Taliban seem far too deep to talk of a genuinely unitary movement.

What emerges is that there is a need to distinguish between transnational movements and transnational coalitions. For the latter, we have groups with distinctly different objectives, often aimed at domestic political agendas, which choose to collaborate across borders. As Khagram et al. (2002) have pointed out, transnational movements – understood as movements whose members live in different states but engage in joint and sustained collective action – are extremely rare. More commonly, what we see is that several domestic movements link up in transnational coalitions, which have largely similar objectives, but yet may adapt both the ways in which they frame the relevant issues and their tactical repertoires to a specific country situation. A new literature on 'foreign fighters' – used in the main to connote those coming from afar to take part in a domestic armed struggle, be that in Afghanistan, Chechnya or the Philippines – has emerged in recent years (Malet, 2009; Hegghammer, 2010). In a hitherto unpublished paper, Paul Staniland and Sarah Zukerman (2007) suggest that transnational cooptation of a domestic movement hinges on a combination of two factors: significant power differentials in relation to the state it opposes and the degree of fragmentation within the group itself. This resonates well with the fact that the Afghan Taliban has been less susceptible than its Pakistani counterpart to transnational cooptation.

When the Taliban took control over Jalalabad in September 1996, they inherited the infamous guests – Osama bin Laden and the top echelon of Al-Qaeda – from the withdrawing *mujahedin* government, which pulled back to areas further north (Stenersen, 2011: 152–156). International pressure was mounting on the Taliban, particularly from 1997 onwards. Meanwhile, the more moderate factions of the Taliban, who argued that their government had to build up relations to the larger international community, were sidelined, in part because their arguments for international accommodation were undermined by an increasingly isolationist response from key international actors. Despite vast differences between the two groups in terms of ideology, tactics, recruitment basis and organizational setup, it was widely believed that the Taliban leadership grew increasingly close to the transnational terror network (Van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012). Al-Qaeda equipped units to join in the fighting against the remnants of the mujahedin government. Interestingly, the Taliban – cognizant of the potential tensions, as well as the risk of ideological contamination of its own recruits – made sure that foreign units fought as separate entities under their own command, not side by side with the Taliban's own fighters.

Most important, of course, was the generous hospitality that the Taliban offered to Al-Qaeda, which included sanctuary for its leaders and training grounds for its recruits. Yet, the Taliban did not even marginally identify itself with the global struggle pursued by its guests. Zahab and Roy (2004: 47) describe the relationship to Al-Qaeda as follows:

The Taliban did not play a coordinating role; they were part of the general military agglomeration, but were not at its center. Their particular function was to give refuge to fleeing militants and lay the groundwork for the construction of Islamic fighting formations in which ethnic origins would supposedly no longer be an issue. Afghanistan served as a melting pot for a new generation of transnational combatants, but it was not the headquarters of radical Islamism.

In clear contrast to what its radical guests might want, the Taliban leadership continued to hope for international recognition until the end of its reign. When the UN Security Council introduced sanctions in 1999, the focus was on three issues: involvement in drugs production and trade; violation of human rights (women's rights in particular); and harbouring of international terrorists. The sanctions followed several years of virtual isolation by large sections of the international community, yet contributed to a further hardening of the once so unlikely alliance between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. A last attempt to accommodate the concerns of the international community was made in the summer of 2000, when, following a round of consultations with international diplomats, the Taliban decided to clamp down on drugs production. To its dismay, it discovered that its campaign, which involved considerable domestic political costs, did not meet international recognition.

After what had apparently been a warm encounter in Jalalabad in 1996, the Taliban soon realized that its international guests could be a problem. The story of the relationship in the last few years before 9/11 is one of a continuous – and in large part futile – effort on the Taliban's part to ensure that Osama bin Laden did not draw further negative attention to Afghanistan through his rhetoric – or, worse, through attacks. In one account, though, Mullah Omar's dissatisfaction with Bin Laden and his entourage was not so much about the international costs incurred from the Al-Qaeda leader's activities, as it was about the way in which the refusal to abide by his instructions undermined Omar's domestic authority (Stenersen, 2011: 151–208). Both of these motives for controlling Bin Laden's outreach, however, are hard to reconcile with the image of a Taliban that is firmly embedded within a transnational network.

The Taliban came to host a number of opposition groups from the region. This was in line with the priorities of Al-Qaeda, who both encouraged and mediated such relationships. Already in 1998, for example, when the Taliban took control over Kunduz in north-east Afghanistan, they established links with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its leader Juma Namangani (Zahab and Roy, 2004). For the IMU, overthrowing Uzbekistan's President Karimov was the primary aim. Yet, the IMU is a transnational movement of regional scope. Namangani was fighting with the Islamist groups in Tajikistan, but objected to the 1997 peace agreement. Keeping a small base in the Tavildara valley of Tajikistan, Namangani got more involved both with the Taliban and with the international groups operating in Afghanistan, and moved to Afghanistan in 1998, which is when the IMU was officially formed. Since then, the IMU has been involved in insurgent operations in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, operating from bases in Afghanistan, as well as within the Central Asian states (Rashid, 2002).[2] It is indicative of a larger pattern when the members of these movements, in the wake of the 2001 intervention, sought sanctuary in Pakistan, where they found welcome among local militant groups.

After the 2001 terror attacks in New York and Washington, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were increasingly seen as two sides of the same coin, as can be seen in the reasoning behind the armed intervention that was launched in Afghanistan to change the regime and constrain the ability of the Taliban to operate. Within a couple of months, the Taliban regime seemed to be beaten and dismantled, and a new government – led by Hamid Karzai – was installed. The Taliban insistence on protecting Bin Laden, which would cost it power, is explained first and foremost by Mullah Omar's concern about his standing in the Islamic world, as a moral and religious force in his own right

(Stenersen 2011, 349–366; Van Linschoten and Kuehn 2012: 233–236). Secondarily, Omar and his closest advisors thought a firm stance was the best response to the threat of organizational fragmentation, and ultimately, the top leader himself – mistakenly – did not think a full-scale US-led attack was at all likely.

The majority of those who had been with the Taliban demobilized quietly, seemingly intent on adapting to the new political situation. The Taliban leadership, with Mullah Omar as its undisputed head, also withdrew, but expressed a commitment to contesting the new political setup. Many – both among the rank and file and from the leadership – went across the border to Pakistan. Over the next few years, the Taliban leadership effectively tapped local grievances throughout most of Afghanistan's Pashtun south, greatly helped by the 'collateral damage' caused by international warfare, to rebuild an armed organization. Stathis Kalyvas (2006: 365) captures this dynamic elegantly when he points out that 'conflicts and violence "on the ground" often seem more related to local issues rather than the "master cleavage" that drives the civil war at the national level' – although he hastens to add that, even so, one finds that the local conflict narrative is couched in the language of the larger war.

The relationship between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban was transformed in the years following 2001. Many of Al-Qaeda's leaders settled in Pakistan's border areas. Although much remains unknown about the activities of the Al-Qaeda leadership during these years, it does seem that their influence over the Afghan Taliban leaders was generally weakened, while it became stronger with the various Pakistani militant groups. It remains striking that the ability of the Al-Qaeda network to bring the Taliban on board its globalist Islamic struggle has been so limited. There have been very few instances where persons from Afghanistan have participated in terrorist attacks elsewhere in the world. One exception is the case of Wali Khan Amin Shah, who had become close to Bin Laden in the 1980s and was central in the so-called Bojinka plot, a failed plot to blow up 11 airplanes (Sageman, 2004: 72). A second exception is Najibullah Zazi, who came to the United States as a 14-year-old and, after training in Pakistan, committed to a suicide mission in the New York subway (Van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 297). Despite the exceptions, however, it is – as Sageman (2004) points out – quite a surprise that Afghanistan, a main centre for militant training and the long-time host of Al-Qaeda's headquarters, has not produced more recruits to global terror.

The reason seems simply to be that the Taliban continue to focus mainly on national and local issues, despite their occasional use of globalist rhetoric. In the analysis of Zahab and Roy (2004: 68):

> The networks operate with two set of criteria in view, the local and the global. One should not allow the resemblances between the language in which the two is set forth, with their appeal to *jihad* and the *umma*, to hide the essentially ethnic motivations that arise within the local context.

The way in which the global Islamist struggle has allied itself with the Taliban, a group rooted in its own local political settings, is not unique. The Al-Qaeda network has to a large extent based itself on alliances with such local groups, contributing to their local battles while at the same time seeking to influence them ideologically and recruiting activists for its own global war (see Hoffman, 2004; Leheny, 2005). The irony in the Afghan case is that, while Afghanistan played such a vital role in the build-up of Al-Qaeda – first as sanctuary for the network, later as one of the main battlegrounds in a confrontation with the West – the ability to integrate Afghans into the main network has been limited. Even locally, in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the contact between the Taliban entities and Al Qaeda has been mainly at the level of the top- and mid-level leadership.

For the Taliban, their association with the global Islamist struggle has been a mixed blessing (Sinno, 2008: 16). As Tarrow (2005) points out, it is not uncommon that local groups end up taking considerable costs when they enter into global alliances (see also Orenstein and Schmitz, 2006). Undoubtedly, the association with Al-Qaeda speeded up Afghanistan's isolation by the international community, which became a precursor to the Taliban's demise as a regime.[3] Zahab and Roy (2004: 52) suggest that 'without the role played by Al-Qaida, the Taliban, who have never been accused of playing an active part in the attacks of 11 September, would in all probability have continued in power'. Even if the Taliban do not share the globalist jihad agenda, their movement has been radicalized through the relationship to Al-Qaeda, first and foremost at the leadership level. The relationship has also made it less likely for the movement – and for locals who are somehow identified with it, regardless of whether or not they share its larger agenda – to be accepted as legitimate political stakeholders.

At the local level in Afghanistan, there is a wide diversity of groups, many with their own specific grievances in relation to the government and the international armed presence. In the centre and north of the country, such grievances run deep, but, despite occasional flare-ups, they have been largely contained. In the south, however, armed opposition has continued to gain momentum, in part as a reflection of a genuine feeling that the inhabitants of these parts of the country carry most of the costs of an internationally imposed settlement, but see few of the gains and are poorly represented in central politics. Elsewhere this has been referred to as 'Pashtun alienation' (International Crisis Group, 2003). This has led Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his radically Islamist Hezb-e Islami to strike up an unlikely – and unstable – alliance with the Taliban (DuPee and Gopal, 2010). Other local groups, many of whom have few political ambitions beyond their local areas, have also joined in. Hence, local grievances – and local conflicts – are effectively tapped by the Taliban, which is the only entity to represent the interests of a largely tradition-oriented Pashtun rural population.

Organizationally, the Taliban has proven capable of identifying many of the risks inherent in transnational alliances, and has tried to take precautions in order to tackle them. It has kept the foreign fighters (at least, those from far afield) in separate entities, and has sought to restrain the freedom of movement and communication of its globally militant guests (albeit unsuccessfully). Despite the respect being expressed for Mullah Omar's leadership, the Afghan Taliban operates with a command structure that is distinct from those of both Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban. The recruitment aspect of organization is even more ambiguous, as the flow of recruits to the Taliban has been generous (mainly from Pakistan), whereas there has been effectively no supply of recruits from the Afghan Taliban to the struggle in Pakistan, or to the global fight.

Resource mobilization

Access to resources – as well as the ability to control how they are distributed within an organization – is critical for the ability to fight an insurgency, and in this regard the case of the Taliban is no exception. External supporters always expect something in return and, as noted above, may force a movement to make dangerous compromises. In the Taliban's case, opportunities for monitoring members and distributing rewards in ways that are seen as fair are in many ways inherent in the organizational structure and have been indirectly discussed in the section. In short, the Taliban combines dense networks of trust with a formalized capacity to monitor and a willingness to reward – or penalize – its membership (Giustozzi, 2007: 85–89). Here, we will focus on the access to resources – admittedly a difficult issue on which to state anything with certainty – focusing on what we can reasonably assume about resource streams from, respectively, Al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban (and other regional movements) and the Pakistani state apparatus.

The role of the Al-Qaeda network in providing direct funding for the Taliban was probably always marginal. Yet, in the 1990s, it was able to gain leverage over the Taliban in two ways related to resources. First, it seems that the promise of funding played a major role in attracting Mullah Omar's interest in 1996–1967 (Stenersen, 2011: 158–160). The actual support stemming from Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, cash-strapped at the time, was most likely marginal. Second, and probably more important in monetary terms, was the ability of Bin Laden and his associates to either broker money from various supporters in the Gulf or to help the direct fundraising of the Taliban by acting as truth witnesses. While none of this made Al-Qaeda an important source of funding, it played a certain role as a foundation for the relationship in the 1990s. Post-2001, however, seems to be a very different matter, as this is a period in which Al-Qaeda's resources were marginal and – faced with the financial control measures of the 'war on terror' – its ability to move money around was limited (Van Linschoten and Kuehn, 2012: 265).

The Pakistani Taliban has been no better placed to provide direct support to their Afghan counterparts over the post-2001 period. Yet, it cannot be ruled out that these organizations had some role in channelling funds from other sources in Pakistan, including sources within the state apparatus, although the deteriorating relationship from late 2007 would have limited that. Accordingly, although empirical data are scarce, it seems reasonable to think that the Pakistani Taliban were no more capable of channelling money or other tangible assets to the Afghan Taliban than Al-Qaeda, and were therefore also unable to use this to cement the relationship.

The nature of Pakistani state support to the Taliban is disputed (Giustozzi, 2007; Rashid, 2008). Some would see Pakistan as a weak government, lacking the capacity to disrupt the Taliban and its supporters from using it as a sanctuary, while others are adamant that Pakistan actively supports the insurgency across the border. Over the past few years, the documentation of Pakistan's active supportive role has become much stronger, even if it remains somewhat elusive which individuals and institutions stand behind the relationship, and to what extent such a role is fully endorsed by the country's political leadership (Giustozzi, 2007: 24). In actual fact, we know more about other ways in which Pakistan supports the Afghan Taliban than we know about financial support. Very importantly, Pakistan does allow the Taliban considerable freedom of movement, enabling the group to use the country as a sanctuary, for training purposes, for planning and for interacting with international contacts (Rubin, 2007: 72). Furthermore, personalities closely associated with state institutions – most prominently the Inter-Services Intelligence – continue to advise the Taliban. Similarly, there is little or no doubt about the involvement of Pakistani state actors in training Taliban commanders and fighters militarily. None of this comes for free, however, and the Pakistani state actors seemingly have considerable success in influencing the Taliban's dispositions – whether these concern not interacting with the most radical of Pakistan's Taliban groupings; holding back on political negotiations with the United States or the Karzai government unless Pakistan is at the table; or prioritizing military targets in Afghanistan. Van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012: 317) even suggest that Mullah Omar himself may be residing in a form of house-arrest in Pakistan, his hosts significantly controlling his appearances and statements, effectively weakening his authority as a leader.

What all of this points towards is a Taliban that either is able to operate on a minimal budget (Giustozzi, 2007: 97), or is able to run a voluminous economy of its own in Afghanistan (Peters, 2009), or – which seems most likely – a combination of both. Again, opinions differ. If we look at the opium economy, however, we do see a picture in which the Taliban have successfully developed several income streams, based around taxes on poppy farmers; fees, and possibly also honoraria for protection, in relation to the transport of drugs; and taxation of refineries (Peters, 2009: 9–11). Gretchen Peters, who is firmly convinced that drug money forms a central part of the

Taliban's finances, estimates that the income provided by such may be as high as half a billion dollars annually, hastening to add that any estimate is highly uncertain. What is important here, though, is to notice the extraordinary effort laid down by the Taliban to develop local income streams, most likely because they understand how important this is to their ability to operate with some independence (although cooperating with drug smugglers and complicit government officials of course also entails trade-offs). Even more remarkably, it is also worth noting that, despite the decentralized nature of its domestic earnings, the organization seems very capable of maintaining a firm central control over the money coming in, and thereby minimizing in-fighting or the emergence of independent fiefdoms.

Tactical repertoire

In the study of contentious politics, says Sidney Tarrow (1996, 2001), it would be a mistake to pursue a one-sided focus on objectives, ideology and normative foundations. What distinguishes challengers of state authority is not solely their objectives, but also their willingness to act. After all, there are many institutionalized entities that live in harmony with the interests they challenge. This is not to say, of course, that ideology and tactics do not interact closely. In reality, the ideological framing of a group – its credibility, its transformation – is to a large extent reflective of the repertoire of contention that the group pursues. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of violent insurgent groups – engaging in asymmetric warfare – whose main tactical means almost always entail a challenge to basic normative principles. In the case of the Taliban, this can be seen in the movement's efforts to legitimize involvement in the drugs industry (discussed above) as a means of weakening the aggressor, as well as in the efforts to monopolize theological–ethical discussion regarding various violent tactics. Here, we will limit the discussion to two types of military tactics – the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide attacks – in addition to reflecting on the use of media and the establishment of shadow institutions. The underlying issue in relation to each of these elements, of course, is what it says about transnationalization.

IEDs have become a weapon of choice for the Afghan Taliban. Based on a number of different explosive ingredients and triggered either by impact or by remote control, IEDs were first reported as being used in 2004, but their employment picked up massively after the Taliban shelved its attempt to engage NATO forces in conventional warfare in Afghanistan's south in 2006. How did the Taliban acquire the skills to use IEDs and, over time, improve on their designs and diversify their use? Here, some of the pointers go in the direction of Al-Qaeda contacts. In late 2005, for example, there were reports of a small group of Afghan Taliban going to Iraq for three months to learn new techniques, not the least the use of IEDs (Yousafzay and Moreau, 2005). In July 2012 came the first reports of so-called sticky bombs – IEDs with magnets that could be fastened onto vehicles (Druzin, 2012). Interestingly, the Taliban spokesperson, while recognizing the Taliban's adaptation of the new technique, explicitly argued that it would entail less risk of civilian casualties than more primitive IEDs. Also interesting is that, in the 2005 example, it was Taliban fighters who travelled to Iraq to learn about IEDs directly. Nonetheless, IEDs did not represent a new technique on the Afghan battlefield, and seemingly the bulk of the Afghan Taliban's training took place locally. The main effect of the war in Iraq was to demonstrate how the tactic could be used successfully, which led to Taliban emulation.

The use of suicide attacks is an even more dramatic addition to the tactical repertoire, given not only the potential for civilian casualties but also the demonstrated disrespect for the human life of the attacker. Somewhat counter-intuitively, given Al-Qaeda's long history with Afghan militant groups, the tactic was virtually unheard of in an Afghan context until 2003, when the first few

attacks appeared (a campaign of targeted assassinations of independently minded religious leaders, government collaborators and others started simultaneously). The adaption of suicide attacks is often referred back to two particular individuals and their respective fronts: Jalaluddin Haqqani, operating in the Khost region in the east, and the late Mullah Dadullah, who was operational in the south (Ruttig, 2009; Smith, 2009). Both of these men had contacts with key people in the Al-Qaeda network, and Haqqani is known for participating in attacks involving a composite force that included not only his own men, but also Pakistani Taliban and Al-Qaeda.[4] Here, what we see is a technique previously unknown in the Afghan context (although not in Pakistan), where Al-Qaeda activists have served as brokers, transferring knowledge to Afghan Taliban, who in turn gain experience and train their own staff.

We also see a professionalization of the movement in the way it handles the media. Whereas the Taliban in power were rather clumsy with the media – when they related to it at all – they now have a set of eloquent media spokesmen and use the Internet actively (Giustozzi, 2007). It is a far cry from the Taliban's refusal to display images of humans in the 1990s to its current media engagement, with designated spokespersons, DVD distribution, and the use of websites and social media. In the course of a complex Taliban attack in Kabul in September 2011, in which several suicide activists were involved, there was a heated exchange between ISAF and a Taliban spokesperson on Twitter, where each side accused the other of being untruthful (Farmer, 2011). While the Taliban have brought back expertise from the diaspora, it seems most unlikely that the building of such a considerable capacity has been possible without more focused outside support, and while little firm evidence is available, it seems that Al-Qaeda may have played a role in institutional development, seconding key people to work with the Taliban's media department for extended periods. That does not rule out the possibility that others may also have contributed, but evidence thereof is slim.

In areas where the Taliban have been able to gain control, they have systematically set up shadow institutions, primarily sharia courts (Carter and Clark, 2010). These courts arbitrate on a range of types of disputes and – unlike the regular courts – they do not take bribes and they act swiftly (Elias, 2009). The shadow courts are an instrument that suits the Taliban's political message perfectly: what they offer is justice, a central part of what the group thinks the state should be providing. The courts are also important in that they mark the Taliban's preoccupation with justice and stability at the local level in Afghanistan, in contrast to spending resources and political capital on a global struggle. They are interesting in relation to Tarrow's point about how political contenders often end up in an iterative game with the authorities they challenge, revealing the state's weakness by mimicking it. For the Taliban, such an approach has the added benefit of marking continuity with their recent past as the de facto authority.

Overall, tactical innovation seems to have depended significantly more on interaction with Al-Qaeda than any of the other dimensions under scrutiny here. Not only that, but indications are that much of the competence transfer has been what Tarrow would call relational, through the direct interaction of individuals, often for extended periods of time. The exception, though, is the shadow administrations, which represent an entirely indigenous phenomenon, one that the Taliban clearly see as a linchpin in their competition for popular support. The ideological messaging by the various tactical adoptions is large, and the emphasis on shadow institutions is best understood as a means of stemming the negative images created by the use of military tactics that claim civilian victims.

Ideological framing

The formulation and maintenance of ideological justifications of a movement's cause to members, potential recruits and bystanders plays a crucial role in mobilization. The process of activating

existing normative foundations in innovative ways to justify contentious action is commonly referred to as ideological framing (Snow et al., 1986). It is precisely the ability to tie in with established modes of political thinking and action – yet in ways that give new opportunities for action – that lies at the heart of framing. The justification of a transnational cause, in violation of existing states' boundaries, is particularly demanding. The formulation of ideological frames can be taken care of by internal leaders and ideologues, it can be adopted from other movements, but is perhaps most often an amalgamation of local ideas and global frameworks, which mutually affect each other (James and Sharma, 2006: xvi).

Following their emergence in 1994, the Taliban's first programmatic declarations were based on wide-reaching consultations and can be summed up in terms of three basic points (Rashid, 2000):

(1) to re-establish peace;
(2) to disarm the population; and
(3) to ensure conformity with sharia law and defend the Islamic integrity of Afghanistan.

Importantly, the point of reference for all these objectives was the Afghan state. There was no reference – explicit or implicit – to the global Islamic community of believers. The objectives seemed attractive to a large share of the Afghan population, although many had reservations both about the particular blending of Islam and politics and about what was seen as Pashtun dominance in the movement. There was certainly no reference to a transnational struggle of any sort. As they followed different Islamic doctrines, there were clear ideological tensions between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda – differences that many observers have neglected (Stenersen, 2011: 353–361). Ultimately, the Taliban's ambition was to stabilize and secure the country, transitioning to a new regime, the form of which was not specified at the time. By the time the Taliban took Kabul in autumn 1996, the talk of being transitionary had all but evaporated.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, a large share of former Taliban took steps to clarify their distance from a radical religio-political platform – incorporating elements of Wahabist Islamic thinking – which many Afghans felt was foreign. The Taliban leadership responded to this by modifying their political message – in Thomas Barfield's (2010: 327) words, portraying 'themselves less as Muslim zealots and more as God-fearing nationalists seeking to expel infidel foreigners from the country'. This resonated better with the dominant mode of thinking in the refugee environments in Pakistan and in most madrasas on both sides of the border. Helped by an international military campaign that focused on 'war on terror' – at times with severe consequences for civilians, while everyday security under the new government was declining severely – the Taliban's message resonated fairly well with ingrained attitudes. Also important, as soon as the insurgency got under way, by 2003 or 2004, there was a fresh supply of new recruits with a background in those madrasas that propagated a worldview in harmony with that of the Taliban.

Since 2006, the Taliban has published a Code of Conduct – the *Layeha* – which has been revised at regular intervals. This document, and its revision from one issue to the next, is interesting, and signals a deep awareness on the part of the Taliban that the struggle is in large part about breeding popular support. The *Layeha* must be understood as a response to perceived problems of command and control within the Taliban, and to concerns that violent tactics and radical ideological thought may alienate the movement's prospective supporters (Johnson and DuPee, 2012). The 2010 edition reiterates the importance of the Taliban's shadow judicial system and introduces, in addition, a complaints commission that will investigate abuse of civilians at the hands of Taliban personnel. While the series of *Layeha* publications does not necessarily codify all there is to say about the Taliban's command structure, it goes to great lengths in seeking to prevent the most extreme forms

of abuse, and as such goes hand in hand with a conscious effort to moderate the ideological profile (Brahimi, 2010).

In recognition of the immense political costs that follow from the abuse and mishandling of civilians, as well as from irreconciliatory political messages, what we see is a concerted effort by the Taliban to distance itself from the ideological messages that its transnational contacts have carried with them. Simultaneously, there have been more frequent references to participating in a global confrontation of the type promoted by the Al-Qaeda leadership. Nonetheless, the dominant message is about the re-establishment of a legitimate Islamic government in Afghanistan and the need for a withdrawal of foreign troops. For the Pakistan Taliban, the major claim is to maintain local autonomy, including practising the Sharia, rather than to win control at the national level. In concrete terms, despite the considerable difference in organization, what happens in Pakistan and in Afghanistan is strikingly similar: groups referring to themselves as Taliban take military control over an area, offering basic security and an Islamic court system.[5] The strategy seems to be to establish credibility through local demonstrations of their capability to deliver, in contrast to the two countries' respective governments.

There are prominent Taliban analysts, however, who have forwarded the thesis that the post-2001 Taliban – also referred to as 'neo-Taliban' – are much more attuned to the global Islamist battle spearheaded by Al-Qaeda. Antonio Giustozzi (2007: 13), for example, argues that the 'Neo-Taliban became much more integrated in the international jihadist movement after 2001', and backs this primarily with reference to a more radical ideological rhetoric. However, such rhetoric has not manifested itself in any type of contribution to the global struggle (Stenersen, 2009). As Stathis Kalyvas (2006: 5) has reminded us, care should be taken not to confuse militant ideology and violent action: neither necessarily depends on the other. Yet, it is noteworthy that the Taliban, who lost power because they had hosted globally oriented militants, have largely abstained from embracing such ideology.

There is no political declaration that outlines a joint political agenda for the Taliban on the two sides of the border. Such an agenda could be formulated, not least against the background of the claim for a larger Pashtun homeland uniting those of Pashtun ethnicity on both sides of the border. When the Taliban leadership has displayed no appetite for a joint program, this may be for the entirely pragmatic reason that such a move might revive the image of bringing back together the Pashtun populations in Afghanistan and Pakistan – calling for a new state called Pashtunistan – and therefore scare off Pakistani support. A more reasonable analysis, however, is that the Taliban leadership has little taste for a radical Islamist struggle, as much for ideological as for pragmatic reasons. Mullah Omar's declarations that the fight should be Afghanistan-focused may be read in such a light. There is a certain degree of irony in this, as it does mean that the movement's objectives are easier to reconcile with those of its main state supporter – Pakistan – than with similar movements operating elsewhere or with Al-Qaeda. Pakistan, whose prime purpose is to secure a government in Kabul that acts in accordance with Pakistan's national interests, does not necessarily need ideological congruence with the Taliban, whereas various elements of the international network of Islamic insurgents, much more reliant on the power of a shared commitment, do.

Yet even if the current top brass of the Taliban have been clearer in their efforts to distance themselves from Al-Qaeda's political thinking, this does not mean that there has been no element of contagion. As many have pointed out, there is a significant group within the new generation whose socialization has taken place exclusively in exile – or on the battleground – and who represent a much more militant and radical type. As Van Linschoten and Kuehn point to in the conclusion to their 2012 book, there is a real worry that a military strategy that aims to eliminate the Taliban's current commanders will simply create openings for this new generation to extend their

influence. The long-term effect may be a transformation of the Taliban into an organization more attuned to the means and ends that have been promoted by Al-Qaeda and closely related organizations.

Concluding Remarks

Examining the Afghan Taliban, from the vantage point of 2012, across four different dimensions of transnationalization – organization, resource mobilization, tactical repertoire and ideological framing – reveals that the level of Taliban integration with Al-Qaeda and other militant Islamist movements is relatively modest. The influence of the global militant circuit on the Taliban has been largest in the tactical domain and most limited in the organizational domain, with relatively modest impact on both tactics and resources. While contrary to widely held beliefs about the Taliban, this conclusion should be entirely unsurprising. The main mobilization rationale for the Taliban lies in local grievances in Afghanistan. The movement paid an enormous price for its earlier hosting of Al-Qaeda, and it is also deeply aware of how various alliance partners will seek to influence its priorities even they have objectives that are widely divergent. The dependence on Pakistani support pulls in a similar direction to the concern over Al-Qaeda influence: despite a fraught relationship, the Taliban can ill afford to provoke a rupture with Pakistan.

Distinguishing between various dimensions of transnationalization, as has been done here, allows for a more fine-grained analysis, as well as providing an opportunity to look at how the various factors interact. The organizational dimension is fundamental to the other dimensions. The Afghan Taliban has been guarding against organizational integration, even with the Pakistani Taliban, with whom it has considerable connections. In terms of resources, it is striking that, despite the relatively modest nature of the Afghan Taliban's needs, the ability of transnational actors to fulfil them appears limited. Tactics and ideology are most closely connected, as we can see both in the Taliban's struggle to control abuse and killing of civilians and in their formation of shadow institutions – both measures aimed at ensuring that their actions are seen as being consistent with their ultimate objectives. The analysis suggests that, while support from transnational actors may be essential at critical stages in a movement's life, it may be conventional state support combined with local mobilization and resource generation that works best.

None of the above is to say that if the Taliban were to regain power, at either the national or the subnational level, it would follow a political course that complies with basic international standards or with the expectations of local inhabitants. The group's history, both while in power in the 1990s and as insurgents after 2001, gives ample reason to be concerned. However, that concern is best handled with a realistic analysis. As it is, the conviction that the Taliban is a thoroughly transnationalized group guides current responses. In the worst-case scenario, there is a real risk that the dominant analysis becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. We know little about the mechanisms by which local armed contention links up with, or develops into, armed transnational entities. Hence, on the policy side, the main emphasis is currently on countering groups that have already transnationalized. Once we understand better the mechanisms through which local groups transnationalize, we should also be better able to formulate sensible responses, including types of interventions that may prevent – or redirect – processes of transnationalization.

Notes

1.   The recruitment base for the Afghan Taliban was slightly broader when it was in power.
2.   The other main Islamist movement active in Central Asia, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, has its roots in the Middle East and is a fully fledged transnational Islamic movement with branches in Western countries, including

offices in London. The Hizb-ut-Tahrir is in principle opposed to violence and professes what has been described as 'a utopian view of political Islam under which social problems . . . would be banished by the application of Islamic law and government' (International Crisis Group, 2002 a).

3. For an example of a movement that has consistently counteracted efforts by Al-Qaeda to gain influence, see Are Hovdenak's (2009) analysis of Hamas.

4. A suicide attack on a CIA compound in Khost in 2010 is the best-documented example. See Oppel et al. (2010).

5. This is very similar to what the Taliban saw as the main duties of the state while they functioned as Afghanistan's de facto government (1996–2001). The Talbian state was a rudimentary state, willing to apply the instruments of power to uphold the Sharia and to ensure their version of basic security.

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