**Taliban: questions, answers, and facts**

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Have the Taliban achieved power through the process of Shariah? Islam is clear that transfer of power is only credible through one route – and that is through advice and seeking the opinion of the people. The Quran has explained this in these words: (Ashura; 83:38). “And their system is based upon mutual consultation.”

Religious scholars usually explain this Quranic instruction from two aspects. The first is that this consultation would not be with all Muslims but only with those who have the power to act and give solutions – that is: scholars who possess firm belief and also those leaders of the nation who are recognised for their religious identity. The second aspect is that the act of consultation is necessary after coming into power, not before.

In our opinion, both these points go against the principle of what has been mentioned in the Quran. This is because the Quran has mentioned this in relation to all people, not restricted it to a specific group. Hence the consultation must be with all. Secondly, this consultation is not an additional or beneficial advice, but is the basis of the formation of the system. Every system that is set up without it would be against the instruction of our religion. Thus, in our view, the control on power by the Taliban is against religious instructions about transfer of power. All such governments are illegitimate by nature.

The Taliban talk about installing the Shariah: does this not provide justification to their government? The first requirement of the Shariah is that one should follow it oneself. In our view, the taking over of power by the Taliban is in itself against Shariah. We should also understand that there are two types of instructions in the Islamic Shariah. One relates to those that are given to an individual as a person. The other is given for Muslim society as a whole. The first type is between a person and God: no state has the right to intervene or enforce these. The others – that are given for society as a whole – are a few.

But this system has been turned upside down by the Taliban. They have in the past forced people to implement not only those instructions that are related to the individual, but also took away the individual right of a person to have a difference of opinion about these. The beard, purdah, women’s education, their right to work and travel, art, music, television and cameras, banking, sacred places of non-Muslims, their religious festivals and identity: in all of these matters, they have forced their own interpretations upon others. This was not implementation of the Shariah but in fact a serious violation of Shariah principles.

What can be the greatest challenge for the Taliban today? The greatest challenge for the Taliban today is their own past. If they compromised now upon the things which they had declared requirements of religion earlier, they would have to answer the big question of whether their religious ideals have changed.

We know that there is no foundation for such a change within the Taliban’s religious thought. In reality, they believe in the ideology they have been practising. If this change in their behaviour is a consequence of global pressure or the need to retain power, then their status would be greatly affected. Their internal groups would insist upon implementing their Shariah along the lines of the past. And in armed groups, this insistence reaches chaos very quickly.

The movement of the Taliban is really the realisation of the ideas that were initiated during the third and fourth centuries of the Muslim calendar. The background of this was the psychology behind considering the purpose of ending disbelief (kufr) as the glorification of and control by Islam at the global level; division of the world into regions of peace and regions of war; and organising of ordinary Muslims as subjects of rulers. While history has brought human beings to the heights of progress in the social sciences in the form of democratic values, independence of thought and freedom of expression of opinion, it is no longer possible to implement these ancient social ideas. Hence when the actions of the Taliban would deny their own ideals, the greatest challenge of traditional religious thought would be whether they are ready for reconstruction of their thought or whether they would come to adopt the ways of the world by giving up their religious ideas as impractical.

Why is there so much support for the Taliban in Pakistan? Pakistan’s society is in reality a religious society. Hence the religious views which our scholars communicate to our people, the latter accept these as true religious practices. At the level of these scholars, it has been accepted that democracy is not desirable in our religion. The religious parties that are a part of this democratic system also consider this to be merely a ladder to reach their destination.

Similarly, in the opinion of these scholars, a religious state has the right to punish crimes that are concerned with God – such as disbelief, polytheism and apostasy. Third, they believe in global control of Islam and an end to the power of disbelief. The Taliban have demonstrated these ideas practically. Its climax was the attack on September 11 – that was, for the Taliban, a challenge to the status of satanic forces and disbelief. Hence, support for them in Pakistan is natural. Through this support, the people of Pakistan not only agree with the Taliban but are supporting their own religious sentiments.

What lessons are there for the US in this war with the Taliban? The biggest lesson for the US is that the life of ideological groups is their thought. Unless this thought is challenged, their end or survival is all temporary. The Taliban represent the religious thought of Muslims that has approval from almost all scholars. The Taliban have shown their ideology in practice. This ideology has its own arguments and possesses its own history. To fight this thought, it is not sufficient to bring in B-52 planes. It is necessary to conduct a grand dialogue on this thought at a global level. Such a dialogue should be held with Muslim scholars.

Whether global peace is desired, or the stability of the region, the real war with ideological groups such as the Taliban can only be at the level of intellectual argument. But for this it is essential that there should be a narrative to counter the arguments of the Taliban – and that such a narrative arises from the sources that the Taliban also believe in. Power can only bring temporary protection, but not end permanent disturbance.

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Editor's Note: The News welcomes other views on this subject