

Linkages between fraternity, power, and time in Central Asia

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For the conference, "A decade of the Taliban, 1994-2004" at Stanford University

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I am struck by the rustic appearance of many of the movements that arose in the early 1990s along the frontier of the collapsing Soviet Union, the Taliban being but one of them. For instance, as Yugoslavia broke apart in the 1990s, Serb militiamen fighting their Croat and Bosnian neighbors adopted the appearance and demeanor of the hajduks, fourteenth century anti-Ottoman mountain brigands, bandits, and highwaymen. They wore the oval field cap and full beard of the hajduk as a deliberate pose, projecting an image of the rural against the urban, the sectarian against the secular, the communal against the civil. *1 Similarly, the anti-Russian insurgents in Chechnya appeared, at least to their enemies, to be semi-literate thugs capable of abduction and large scale murder. *2 In Uzbekistan Juma Namangani, leader of an anti-government force effected a Robin Hood image, reportedly holding rich hostages for ransom but paying peasants \$100 for one sheep. *3 In Afghanistan the mujahedin who fought the Soviets in the 1990s and turned against each other in the 1990s were largely rural in composition and perspective. All such movements – in the former Yugoslavia, in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, in Afghanistan and Pakistan – represented a distrust of urban society, civil institutions, and the secular world. But whatever the similarities among these movements, each was distinctive, arising out of local and particular tensions. For the activists with an Muslim background Islam provided the vocabulary by which to answer Western culture and especially American hegemony which was looming over them. *4

The quest for interlinked "certainties"

These groups coalesced in a geopolitical context that was changing on a scale not seen since the major refiguring of political identities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the Holy Roman Empire was expiring, the "interlinked certainties" of previous centuries lost their salience, and so, in the words of Benedict Anderson (1991:36), "a search was on ... for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together." He refers to the nationalism that would rise in the nineteenth century to enthrall the European

political imagination. In our time a similarly grand refiguring of the political imagination has been taking place in the wake of the Soviet Union.

The declining cultural order that Anderson was referring to was one in which a concept of “fraternity” was based on religious affiliation (such as Christendom or the Muslim “umma”); on a conception of “power” in which monarchs had the right to rule “by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation”; and on a presumption of “temporality” that fused “cosmology and history ...”. The modern concept of the “nation” replacing the old political mentality would construe collective interest groups as localized and bonded by a sense of common history. A “nation” was a collective body that had a place, a distinguishable tradition, and an ancestry; it was a kind of “race” that shared lifeways and traditions of thought. *5 And it was preeminently a moral entity. Loyalty to the nation, nationalism, says Kapferer (1988: 1) “makes the political religious The nation is created as an object of devotion ... the political is shrouded in the symbolism of a ‘higher’ purpose,” Even the most secular nations demand sacrifice – “supreme” sacrifices – for the collective good, a notion represented, for instance, in national cenotaphs and tombs to “Unknown Soldiers” (Anderson 1991:9). *6 The rise of this new cultural “certainty” was paralleled by changes in the economy -- specifically, Anderson claims, the rise of print capitalism, which grew as economic connections with the wider world enlarged, enabling dispersed speakers of a common language to envision a common moral bond. New imaginings were accompanied by new opportunities.

In the last couple of decades, long established “certainties” are similarly being replaced – or at least challenged -- by new conceptions of shared interest driven by a “search” for new social conventions where the old ones no longer apply – only the difference in our time is that, unlike the earlier transition, which was a slow process over a couple of centuries, the transition has been abrupt, marked by the sudden demise of the Soviet Union. Although it was a quiescent death (a brief announcement by Gorbachev on Christmas Day, 1991), the aftermath for the peoples around its frontiers (not to mention inside them) was cataclysmic. In material terms the flow of goods and information that had nourished the great imperial ecumene dried up. “The abolition of the convertible ruble ... disrupted trade, while the closure of Moscow’s financing facilities drained the monetary lifeline of entire nations. ...[T] the drawing of new borders between newly-formed countries

severed ancient trade routes, blocked irrigation systems and hindered agrarian commerce” (Napoleoni 2003:98-99). The political consequences were no less disruptive, for the demise of the Soviet Union left a vacuum of politico-moral terms by which political groups could identify their interests. In the previous paradigm of political oppositions Communism, or at least Marxism, had provided the world with the most trenchant response to Western capitalism. Communism was international in its claim and moral in its appeal to the oppressed peoples of the world. For half a century communism or Marxism (in various forms) provided the analytical critique by which to reject capitalism as a way of life.

In the absence of the political rhetoric of the cold war the terms by which alliances could be secured were now, in early 1990s, unclear, and precipitated in the ripple of political and military contests that broke out all along the frontier of the empire. The established certainties of former times – East and West, capitalist and communist, contraries by which the world had been polarized -- had vanished. The “search” for a new grand paradigm of political categories linking notions of fraternity, power, and time was now “on.” What Nazif Shahrani (1995:279) said about the peoples of Central Asia in the early 1990s was likewise true for all the peoples along the frontier of the former Soviet Union: They “are facing serious spiritual crises and are desperately in search of meaning and a moral compass.”

From ethno-nationalism to religious antinomies

In the early period after the collapse of the Soviet empire nationalistic – actually, ethno-nationalistic – ideologies came to prominence as various “nationalities” all along the frontier of the expiring Soviet Union began to assert themselves. In Afghanistan, when the war between Afghan communists and Afghan mujahedin finally ended (Harpviken 1996), the politico-military organizations that had prosecuted the war against the Soviets fought it out among themselves, and because they had been rather loosely formed along ethnic lines – as Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, or largely as a Pushtun tribe – their struggle simply confirmed the fighting groups as ethno-nationalist political bodies. The rise of the Taliban reflected the ethno-nationalist bias of the times, for they were Pushtuns, but other forces were also at work, international and global, that imposed upon their political situation other politico-moral demands. Western secularism would threaten established social conventions among Central Asian Muslims – a

confrontation that would stimulate forces and reactions of their own. The gathering importance of the Taliban and their incorporation into a wider network of similar-minded Muslims reflected a shift in the possibilities for meaningful cultural linkage that was taking place among Muslims in the region generally.

The new politico-moral orientation that emerged among some Central Asian Muslims expressed their distinctive problem with to the ineluctable advance of western hegemony. Islamism provided the moral critique by which to reject the overwhelming infusive and expanding presence of Western culture. Rejecting the West on grounds other than Marxism or communism, the Islamist critique is nevertheless like the communist/Marxist critique in that it is a moral view that resolutely stands apart from, even rises up against, western culture. Islamism resonates for a variety of Muslim groups because, while encompassing their specific, local, and individual problems, it presents them as particular manifestations of a general problem, enabling the various groups to envision a common problem and collectively join a common cause.

The Taliban as a political amalgam

The Taliban were a cultural body that arose in particular circumstances but were gradually brought into relation to other similar groups in the Muslim world. They changed in their perspective and cultural practice as the wider geopolitical field was transforming, acquiring new cultural features through the infusion of personnel and perspectives from several groups. I here describe the transformation in the political consciousness of the Taliban as other groups joined them. I do so only speculatively – or rather, as a kind of problematique, as a set of issues ideally to be examined, if I had access to the right people. I describe each of the groups allied with or embedded in the Taliban as a social entity marked by a particular way of defining the situation, with a particular sense of the past and a particular sense of commonality. Each, that is, had its own way of linking fraternity, power, and time. Each also had financial and material sources that enabled them to exist and expand. Somehow, there was money, there was materiel, there was moral encouragement – from sources only now becoming known. The groups that fused with the Taliban brought with them certain distinguishable features that their members shared to some degree. I examine the various groups and influences that shaped the Taliban movement in various stages, noting the changes in composition and socio-political ambiance that each

group contributed to it. I trace these developments more or less chronologically, in the effort to disentangle the strands of influence that have made the Taliban what they are. The examination will expose an enlarging mesh of connections and influences that produced a contemporary social entity that the “original” Taliban would never have imagined.

“Original” Taliban

By “original” Taliban I mean, of course, the small band that early in 1994 took up the cause against abusive commanders in Kandahar. They were acting to bring order in a time of anarchy. They knew each other and acted in response to the counsel and directives of their teacher, Mullah Muhammad Omar and his seasoned colleagues. Sickened by the internecine fighting and inhumanity of previous years, they and most of the Afghanistan peoples had turned away from the mujahedin leaders. Their perspective was local, their horizons limited, and their concerns were immediate. They had no grand pretensions. Most interesting now, in retrospect, is what was not on their minds: they had no interest in, and perhaps no knowledge of, the hardships of the Palestinians or Kashmiris, or Muslims elsewhere. And they had no particular concern with Western culture. They were preoccupied with local problems.

Other Taliban from Pakistan

To the original Taliban were soon added a body of young men from Pakistan madrassahs (religious schools) eager to bring stability to the society. There was a great hunger for order, after fourteen years of civil war, and they wanted to help. These young men, perhaps more than those in the original group, had had little family life. Trained in the Deobandi tradition in schools financed by Saudi Arabia, these young men were educated to think of their participation with the Taliban as a jihad – a struggle against evil in the world – even though their opponents were other Muslims. Like the original Taliban they would have been inspired by narratives of Muhammad’s struggle to bring good into the world. It was a moral cause with which devout Muslims could identify. Their horizons were presumably narrow in a different way than those of the “original Taliban”: they probably had heard about the Muslim cause in Kashmir, probably not much about problems in the Middle East, and they knew, Rashid says, little about Afghanistan’s past. They were, rather, better informed on the great exploits of Muslims in the first few centuries of Islam. *7

Pakistani military figures

If not along with this group, then soon after it came Pakistani officers. We know that Pakistanis were offering military advice quite early. Two factions of Pakistani military men were represented. General Naseerulalh Babar appeared in Kandahar at the behest of the recently elected Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and represented the interests of the Deobandi madrassahs where many Afghan Taliban had been educated (Rashid 2000:184 ff; Napoleoni 2003:92). Representatives of the Pakistan InterServices Intelligence Directorate (ISI), many of whom were informally associated with an anti-Deobandi Jama'at Islami (Pakistan) party, also made contact with the Taliban. Both groups of Pakistanis brought a new perspective to the Taliban. For them Afghanistan was never the only front: there was also Kashmir, and the endless struggle with India; and there were other fronts, in Punjab, Uzbekistan, and Chechnia (Napoleoni 2003: 88-92). Lieutenant General Hamed Gul, head of the ISI, soon after the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan put this perspective into words: "We are fighting a jihad and this is the first Islamic international brigade in the modern era. The communists have their own brigades, the West has NATO, why can't the Muslims unite and form a common front?" (Napoleoni 2003: 147; no original source provided). *8

Pushtun Nationalists

Most of the Pushtun Islamists who joined the Taliban had participated in the war against the Soviets as members of the military organizations supported by Pakistan. As the Taliban happened to be Pushtun it is likely that some former mujahedin joined them because of their ethnic type. These would have been men formerly associated with the anti-Soviet Pushtun organizations led by such men as Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, or Younus Khaled, warriors left over from the Anti-Soviet war – left over in the sense that they were still unemployed, still available for hire. The alternatives for many former mujahedin were limited, and the Pushtuns with chauvinistic leanings had become alarmed that Kabul was under the control of non-Pushtuns (1992-1996), a circumstance scarcely known in Afghanistan history. So, in addition to the sense that this was a good religious cause, some Pushtuns were motivated by a kind of ethno-nationalism. Indeed, the trend toward the formation of ethno-nationalist military organizations was already established by other political parties: the Hizb-i Wahdat of the Hazaras, Jami'at-i Islami of the Tajiks, Jombesh-i-Milli-y Islami of the Uzbeks. As the original Taliban were Pushtun and those young men who raced

in from Pakistan were Pushtun, the movement grew as an essentially Pushtun movement.

I include in this group another kind of Pushtun about whom little is known: the former communists. We know that some communists, such as General Shahnawaz Tanai, had joined the mujahedin in March, 1990, well before the collapse of the communist regime, but many more former communists apparently joined later. *9 I have heard (from reputable sources) of formerly zealous communists who became Taliban, with no fanfare: They simply put on turbans, grew beards, and joined the cause. Certainly the communists, who had been so prominent in the 1980s, vanished from the scene. Those who were not executed or fled the country just blended in.

Pushtun clergy

In spring, 1996, twelve hundred Pushtun religious leaders converged on the city of Kandahar, “the biggest gathering of mullahs and ulema that had ever taken place in modern Afghan history” (Rashid 2000:41). They had been called together at a time when the leadership of the Taliban by Mullah Muhammad Omar and his colleagues was being questioned. Affairs had not gone well for some months: after advancing quickly in many localities in the south and west, the Taliban had been unable to take Kabul from the Tajiks commanded by Ahmad Shah Mas‘ud. Some of their members wanted to negotiate with the Taliks, some were questioning the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Omar. The movement was stalling. In this context the Pushtun religious leaders had been invited to help broaden and firm up support for the Taliban. The Kandahari establishment – the elders of the city and the local religious leaders -- was of course partial to their own, the founder of the Taliban. With their encouragement, in an act of spiritual daring, on April 4, 1996, Mullah Muhammad Omar entered the shrine housing the sacred cloak of Muhammad, brought it to the roof of the shrine where all could see, and ceremonially wrapped himself in it. His Kandahari supporters proclaimed him “Amir-ul Mumuneen” (Commander of the Faithful) and formally offered him their allegiance (bai‘at), setting the stage for the others also to offer allegiance (Rashid 2000:41 ff.). This public act was a claim to legitimacy, the right to lead the now powerful organization of the Taliban, but it also entailed a broader moral claim. If this was a religious cause for the Taliban, it was now declared a holy cause for Muslims generally, the leader being, of course, Mulla Muhammad Omar. This was the cause of God. That the Tajiks they opposed in Kabul were also Sunni Muslims was no

longer significant; they were the enemy, and for the Pushtun Muslim community this was now an explicitly religious war, no less than the ones before it.

Arab Afghans

In May, scarcely a month after this redefinition of the Taliban cause, Osama Ben Laden arrived with a planeload of “Arab-Afghans” (Rashid 2000:133). These were old hands at jihad, and they brought with them a cosmopolitan perspective on the situation of Muslims in the world. Osama and his colleagues had already been involved in what the CIA called “terrorist camps” in several countries: Somalia, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen as well as Afghanistan. Once ensconced in Afghanistan Osama Ben Laden began to cultivate Mullah Muhammad Omar, moving to Kandahar in 1997 (Rashid 2000: 133-134). It was a fateful bond.

The Arabs were Wahhabis with an agenda of their own, that is, to overturn the Saudi government, to reestablish Wahhabi dominance in the Middle East, and eventually to re-establish the caliphate. This outlook, this new definition of the situation, markedly changed the nature of the Taliban. Historically, before the Soviet-Mujahedin War, among the Afghanistan peoples there was no tradition of strident anti-westernism (a century-old distrust of the British excepted) -- nothing like the well articulated resentments that had long moldered in the Middle East and South Asia. Of course the war with the Soviets intensified their loyalty to customs they regarded as Islamic but it seems to have been later, under the influence of their Arab and Pakistani colleagues, that the Taliban turned against the West. “Until [Ben Laden’s] arrival the Taliban leadership had not been particularly antagonistic to the USA or the West ...,” says Rashid (2000: 139), but they became “increasingly vociferous against Americans, the UN, the Saudis, and Muslim regimes around the world” as they came under the influence of the Arabs. “Their statements increasingly reflected the language of defiance Bin Laden has adopted and which was not an original Taliban trait.” Not Taliban, not Afghan of any sort. It is true that in the 1980s an antipathy against the non-Muslim world was taking root in the public discourse as the Afghanistan mujahedin fought the Afghan communists, but it was the Arabs who gave it a strident anti-Westernism. Now, in the 1990s, the Taliban were mouthing Islamist critiques formulated elsewhere (in Egypt by Sayyed Qutb and in South Asia by Abul-Ala Maududi) to explain the frustrations of the Afghanistan peoples. Islamism was now the meaningful vocabulary of fraternity, power, and

time for the Taliban. *10

This was the beginning of Arab dominance in Afghanistan. Now the views of the more moderate Taliban were suppressed.

*11 The Taliban became more zealous for what they considered Islamic practice, enforcing it by their newly established Ministry of Vice and Virtue, which had been modeled after the Wahhabi Mutawwin of Saudi Arabia. Taliban leaders began to present themselves to outsiders as more “official” by flourishing personal business cards. *12 “The Arab-Afghans had come full circle. From being mere appendages to the Afghan jihad and the Cold War in the 1980s they had taken center stage for the Afghans, neighboring countries and the West in the 1990s” (Rashid 2000:140). They formalized their cause in February, 1998, when they formed the “International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” and declared war against the United States. In his announcement Osama Ben Laden situated this organization on a world scene: “The people of Islam [have] suffered from aggression, iniquity, and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist Crusaders alliance and their collaborators... Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq,” he said, as well as in Lebanon, Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, the Philippines, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya, Bosnia-Herzegovnia and Indonesia (Napoleoni 2003:97).

Pakistan’s Military Establishment

This broadening of the Taliban’s imaginative world, however, was not only fostered by Osama Ben Laden and the other Arab Afghans, but also by the Pakistan military establishment, in particular the ISI. Certain Pakistanis in a number of ways favored Islamist groups like the Taliban. Early in the 1980s (if not before) some of Pakistan’s military leaders (no doubt under pressure from the United States) hatched a plan to promote Islam in the region for strategic reasons (Zahab and Roy 2004: 53). Osama Ben Laden’s International Islamic Front, formed in 1998, became an umbrella organization for various militant activities that were coordinated by Pakistan’s Lashkar-e-Toiba, an organization whose purpose, according to Zahab and Roy (2004:35), was “to Islamize Kashmir and India, then embark on global conquest with a goal of restoring the Caliphate” (see also Shahzad 2004, August 12). Napoleoni (2003:87-88) claims that some members of Pakistan’s InterServices Intelligence Directorate (ISI) were actively promoting Islamist causes from the early 1980s, and after the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan they simply redirected their Islamist activities elsewhere: “[t]he ISI continued to export

Islamist warriors from Pakistan to Central Asia and the Caucasus [A] stream of covert operations was launched in Central Asia. ...[where] the ISI played a pivotal role in supporting Islamist armed insurgencies” *13 In the 1980s the CIA entrusted to the ISI the management money and materiel being funneled to the anti-Soviet Afghan mujahedin, but, says Shahzad (2004, August 12), the ISI consistently favored “only those factions that were both anti-Western capitalism and anti-Soviet socialism.” When the ISI, with the concurrence of the CIA, recruited Muslim youths from Muslim societies all over the world for the holy war against the Soviets, the training they gave these recruits had “strong anti-US overtones” (Shahzad 2004; Zahab and Roy 2004:14). *14 Moreover, in the 1990s, after the Afghan-Soviet war was over, certain Arab Afghans were being sought by the United States government for their involvement in attacks against Americans elsewhere, but Pakistani officials protected them and helped them get fake passports so that they could return to their countries of origin (where many of them continued their jihadi activities).

There appears to have been many Islamists in the military. In 1995 a clique of Pakistani officers attempted to overturn Benazir Bhutto’s government, aiming to install an Islamic caliphate in its place. The attempted coup failed and the leaders were put in prison, but the broad support for their agenda in high places is suggested by the way General Parviz Musharaf dealt with the leaders of this coup after he seized power in October, 1999: he released them and allowed one of them to go immediately to Kabul to become a close advisor to Mullah Omar. General Musharaf effectively duplicated this behavior in January, 2002, when (again under United States pressure) he “banned” several Islamist parties, but then he protected their leaders. The chiefs of Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Harkat ul Mujahideen (all of them Islamist organizations) “were whisked away to the safe houses of Pakistan’s intelligence service, ISI” where they were supported with sizeable stipends for most of the year. “Once freed in 2003 [says Arnaud de Borchgrave (2004, August 9), the terrorist leaders barnstormed around the country, recruiting volunteers for Jihad in Kashmir, Afghanistan and even Iraq. Some of the rallies were conducted in military property, addressing Pakistani troops,... Hafiz Saeed [leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba] was allowed to address a 150,000 strong rally, ...”

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Moreover, it has now been suggested that certain Pakistani

leaders were involved in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Bin Laden's principal Pakistani adviser in the period leading up to September 11, 2001, was retired Gen. Hamid Gul, a former ISI chief. Soon after the attack General Gul told Arnaud de Borchgrave (2004, Aug 3), editor at large for the Washington Times and United Press International, that in future an Islamist nuclear power would form "a greater Islamic state along with a fundamentalist Saudi Arabia after the monarchy falls." Could General Gul have been involved in the September 11 attacks? Some sources believe that some "former Pakistani intelligence officers knew beforehand all about the September 11 attacks. Indeed, they even advised Osama bin Laden and his cohorts on how to attack key targets in the United States with hijacked civilian aircraft" (Borchgrave 2004, August 3). And when the United States moved to retaliate for the September 11, 2001, attack, the ISI posted several thousand Pakistanis in Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban (Shahzad 2004). Even as late as summer, 2004, a military hospital in Peshawar was providing dialysis treatments to Osama Ben Laden. *16 General Gul was still active in 2004. In the summer he openly declared an intention to remove President Musharraf by coup d'état and replace him with Dr. A. Q. Khan, the engineer who sold nuclear secrets to America's self-avowed enemies. In February, 2004, there was a secret meeting on the occasion of the death of the wife of a prominent official at which the project was seriously discussed. Later, Gen. Gul stated publically that "he was assembling 'a strong team of faithful Muslims to take control of the country to serve the nation and the Muslim world with true Islamic spirit'" (Borchgrave 2004, Aug 3). *17

The activities of the ISI, of its former chief, Gen Hamed Gul, even of President Musharraf appear to substantiate the claim by Arnaud Borchgrave (UPI Aug 9, 2004) that there is an "organic and symbiotic nexus between al-Qaida and the Pakistani jihadist groups." Indeed, the Islamist sympathies are not limited to the military elite, for, as Stephen Cohen has said, Islamism "resonates closely to the sentiments of the Pakistani middle and upper classes, owing to the breakdown of the Pakistan state in the last twenty years." *18 Despite these sympathies, however, United States pressure on General Musharraf was forcing Pakistan to be more aggressive. The Pakistan government, at this writing, was aggressively pursuing a new policy, picking up and imprisoning a number of Islamist radicals. Even the Jamaat Islami, which has long had

strong representation in the ISI, was being accused of close affiliation with al Qaeda, which they have denied (Borchgrave 2004, Aug 9; Shahzad 2004, Aug 19))

Pushtun tribesmen of Pakistan

It may seem incongruous at this point to note the connection of the Taliban to the Pushtun tribesment of Pakistan, but I do so to recognize the special relation the Tribes have to the Taliban and al Qaeda. I surmise that some of the tribal Pushtuns have been enlisted into the Taliban/al Qaeda movement under duress. Historically these people have resisted outside encroachments, not only the British in the nineteenth century but also the Pakistani government in the twentieth. The arrival of “Arab Afghans” and Taliban seeking refuge from American attacks in Afghanistan has no doubt stretched their famous hospitality. As a result of the fighting between Islamist militias and Pakistani and American forces, this region, notorious for its isolation and resistance to outside intrusion, has now become the epicenter of the real war on terror. The isolation and autonomy of the tribal peoples is forever compromised, for the Americans and the Pakistan army are committed to rooting out the Taliban and al Qaeda from their territories. Owing to their Pushtun customs and their cultivated isolation, these Pushtuns already shared many conventions with the Taliban; indeed, many of them, as already indicated, joined the Taliban early on.

But despite the strain on their hospitality many tribal Pushtuns seem to have identified with the Islamist cause as more visitors have crowded in. Pamela Constable (Washington Post April 7, 2004) points to one instance.

“The [militant] visitors [in the tribal zone] were said to include Naik Mohammed, a Waziri tribesman who was one of two men leading the fierce resistance to Pakistani troops in March. Now officially a fugitive, Mohammed is described as a brash young fighter who once commanded guerrillas supporting Taliban forces in Afghanistan. ... [T]he council members [in this tribal community] negotiated directly with Mohammed and other militant leaders and found them to be ‘very religious people’ who declared they had ‘taken up arms to support oppressed Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Chechnya and Afghanistan.’ ... ‘These are refugees who share our culture; they carry guns and wear beards, so no one can distinguish them. We consider them not foreigners but friends,’” said Mohammed Kabarkhel, a landowner in Wana. ‘The wanted men are few, but the resistance is high, because people are angry. The tribes were used by the government to fight in

Afghanistan, and now people feel they are being sold out to the United States in the name of al Qaeda.' ... Despite the council's promise to curb extremist activities among tribal ranks, several analysts said that ... the militants had gained prestige among tribal people, and would probably receive more protection, especially in Waziristan, where conservative Islamic parties enjoy strong support. ... 'People are upset, because these men are holy warriors and we respect them,' said Asad Khan, a beardless shopkeeper. He said the Islamic parties are popular because they fought for the Taliban and have promised to bring religious law to Pakistan. 'Everyone wants sharia to be implemented here. We have no problem with this so-called al Qaeda,' he added. 'We know America is against Islam, and we need someone to defend us.'"

(Nek Muhammad was killed in a Pakistan army raid, July 19, 2004, Asia Times Online, July 20, 2004).

The Islamist way of linking fraternity, power, and time

The Taliban, at first consisting of a few religious students and their teachers, gathered force for local reasons, but the engagement of other interests in their cause transformed the movement, broadening its horizons and connecting it into a network of similar movements elsewhere. The Taliban now consist of a loose alliance of several kinds of people: former anti-Soviet mujahedin, Pushtun clerics, Pushtun tribesmen, Arab and Pakistani Islamists, possibly even top officials of the Pakistan government. All of them now linked into an international Islamist network. From a strongly homogeneous group in 1994 the Taliban have become an assemblage of diverse social and ethnic types engaged in a larger cause. Moreover, their involvement with the Arab Afghans and the Pakistani military has transformed their rhetoric to reflect the more universal visions of Islamists elsewhere. The Taliban are as likely now as any Arab Muslim organization to voice the concerns of Muslims in Palestine or Chechnya or Kashmir or Uzbekistan. Like other Islamist organizations struggling against regimes that dominate them, the Taliban perceive their ultimate struggle to be against the Western world, especially the United States, which they hold responsible for the injustices they bear. Islamism, for many frustrated people in the Middle East and Central Asia, now provides the analysis of their modern predicament. We hear it in various forms. According to Napoleoni (2003: 112) Islamists in the Middle East say "The victory over communism was won with weapons under the leadership of God, Democracy, modernization à l'Americaine, had nothing to do with it." A Shi'a militiaman

favorable to Mukteda al-Sadr put it this way to John R. Burns of the New York Times (April 7, 2004): “It was God who finished Saddam, not the Americans. The Americans broke all their promises to us, and they have brought their infidel beliefs to Iraq. We hate them, and they are worse than Saddam.”

Localized struggles have become internationalized through the rhetoric of radical Islamism. This has been manifest in Afghanistan, for instance, in the broadening interest, at least among the religious elements, in the Middle Eastern conflict. The Islamic authorities heading the Koran Memorization School in Herat, for instance, claimed solidarity with the global cause when they condemned the murders of Hamas leaders Shaykh Ahmad Yasin and Dr. Abd-al-Aziz al-Rantisi on April 18, 2004. What was unusual about this announcement was that, given in Dari, it expressed a concern for Middle Eastern affairs to which the Afghans had hitherto been indifferent: “We urge all countries and international foundations to ... fight against terrorism and to portray the racist regime of Israel as a symbol of government terrorism in the world” (Anonymous 2004). Even so, as various groups within Afghanistan engage with the Islamist movement, they betray their local concerns. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the Hizb-i Islami mujahedin party, expressed his sympathy for the global Islamic struggle on April 11, 2004 – that is, at a time when in Iraq supporters of the Shiite cleric, Muqtada al- Sadr, were clashing with American forces. He called for Afghans to rise up against the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan. But his speech was made in Pushtu: it was an appeal to a local audience *19.

A Vision for the Future?

In suggesting that in the late High Middle Ages the demise of old “certainties” would lead to a “search” for “a new way of linking fraternity, power and time” Anderson implies that human beings crave a grand moral frame of reference within which to imaginatively situate themselves. His wording indicates a conjunction of cultural features by which individual experience – human suffering – is given significance: by a sense of community (“fraternity”); by a recognition of authority through which dominance may be exercised (“power”); and by a cosmology situating people’s past, present and future in a meaningful frame (“time”).

The concept of the “nation,” as it took form in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteen centuries, satisfied this need as a new class, a bourgeoisie, was gaining influence. Now a new “search” for “certainties” of this sort has been going on as a new social body has gained prominence in Greater Central

Asia – an assemblage of frustrated, unemployed, culturally unfit, socially alienated young men. True, there have always been such in this area. But its scale is new: Approximately half of the population in Greater Central Asia are under the age of 25 and the proportion is growing. And their predicament is ever more urgent; their demands are likely to become more strident. The rise of interest in Islam in recent times, especially among the young people of the Muslim world, reflects the failure of other moral idioms to provide hope, a way to respond; Islamism is, for them, a creative way to link fraternity, power, and time.

There was a time when I thought the search for a firm way to link fraternity, power, and time was still on, still alive among Muslims of the Middle East and Central Asia. In fact, for many young Muslims the search seems to be over. Political Islam – political and military action justified in Islamic terms and aimed toward Islamic ends -- has filled the void. The Islamist reaction is the answer. It provides the moral critique that enables many to share a common conception of the problem and to envision a solution. It is now, for them, the articulate voice by which to escape their constraints and to oppose the ultimate source of their problems, the West, especially the one great power. So the cause is international. *20 These Islamists share a sense of fraternity as Muslims, in fact, in this case as Sunni Muslims, who desire a more just world in which Muslims have more leverage, more dignity, more hope. They share a common conception of power in that they grant leadership to individuals who speak in the name of God and can muster a force by which to actively confront the cultural juggernaut of the West, some of them even supposing that their martyrdom for this cause would be honorable and spiritually rewarded. They share a common sense of time in the sense of a cosmology and an eschatology that situates their present dilemmas in a trajectory of history. I speculate that many of them, like many Christians, suppose that this world is in its last throes – it is a notion that appeals as more people lose hope. Pierre Bourdieu, writing about the Algerian war of the 1950s (1962: 187) said, “To express the present state of affairs the old Algerians often say: ‘We are now in the fourteenth century.’ To them the fourteenth century is the century of the end of the world, at which time everything that was the rule will become the exception, when all that was forbidden will be now permitted, ...” It is now several decades after the Algerian War but the sense that this conflicted world is advancing toward a cataclysmic demise seems still to resonate

with some. That sense was alive in summer, 2004, in Iraq, for instance, where Muqtada al-Sadr, leading an insurgency of Shi'ites against the United States in Iraq, announced that the Mahdi (who many Muslims believe will appear at the end of the age) "would arrive any day now." In fact, according to al-Sadr, the reason the Americans attacked Iraq was because they knew that the Mahdi's arrival was imminent and they wanted to capture and kill him (Baram 2004). *21 It was alive in Afghanistan in the 1990s. When Zoya, a young woman trapped in Kabul as the mujahedin occupied the city in 1992, told her grandmother about the terrifying acts of the mujahedin, the old woman's "eyes filled with tears, and she started praying aloud. ... She told me [says Zoya] 'It means that we are close to the Day of Judgment'" (Zoya 2002:76). I don't know how broadly this view of the times is among the rising tide of Islamists in Greater Central Asia, but I hope that, for some of them at least, the search is still "on" for another way to link fraternity, power, and time meaningfully together.

End notes

*1. "Through the Serbian Mind's Eye," John Kifner, New YorkTimes, April 10, 1994.

*2. Radio Free Europe /RL Caucasus Report vol 7, no 29, July 23, 2004.

*3. Eurasia Insight, July 17, 2000. "Where Is Juma Namangani?," Vicken Cheterian.

*4. Admittedly, in many cases the leaders of these movements were urbanites and essentially secular in their orientation; Franjo Tudjman in Croatia and Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia were notable examples. Also, the leaders of the radical Islamist movements in Central Asia were something other than they appeared. Social movements are in fact complex in their moral inspiration.

*5. Verdery 1999: 104 ff. Each "people" should have a place, a land of their own. It was, for instance, Richard Wagner's vision for the German people of Europe: In his diary he wrote: "... the incomparable magic of my works, ...it is German. But what is this German? It must be something wonderful, mustn't it, for it is humanly finer than all else? - Oh heavens! It should have a soil, this German! I should be able to find my people! What a glorious people it ought to become. ..." (Wagner 1980:73)

*6. In some places the religious associations of ethnic types were hardly concealed: in the Balkans generally Catholics called themselves Croats and members of the Eastern Orthodox church called themselves Serbs.

*7. In 1989 I visited the book store of a madarassah in Peshawar. There, prominently displayed in a window facing the street, was a large map, in Persian, of the early Muslim conquests in the first two centuries of Islam. It was a vivid portrayal of the imaginative world in

which the students were trained.

*8 Nojumi (p 15 in his first draft) points out that Pakistani military officers not only controlled the Taliban forces but also provided air support for the assault on Kabul.

*9. Robert Crews [p 10 of his first draft] notes that “former communists of Khalq and the secret services, KHAD, assumed more technical posts ... [such as] piloting MIG fighter jets.”

*10. Barfield, in his oral presentation at the conference noted that the Taliban who invaded in Mazar-I Sharif the second time included many new non-Afghans.

*11. According to Nojumi [p 6 of the first draft].

*12. See Nojumi, [p. 6 of the first draft]; Crews, [p 8 of first draft].

*13. The funding and perhaps the motive of these operations could have been the narcotics trade the ISI controlled. Napoleoni (2003:83) says that “... the narcotics-based economy took over the traditional agrarian economy of Afghanistan [during the Soviet-Mujahedin War] and, with the help of the ISI, the Mujahedin opened hundreds of heroin laboratories. Within two years the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland had become the biggest center for the production of heroin in the world ... [no date but presumably late 1980s] ... By 1991, yearly production from the tribal area under the control of the Mujahedin had risen to an astonishing 70 metric tons per premium quality heroin, up 35 percent from the previous year.”

*14. See Zahab and Roy (2004) for extensive information on the Islamist organizations in Pakistan. A topic I have chosen to ignore here is another kind of person that has been involved in Islamist organizations, namely, Western educated aliens. Several scholars have noted (for example, Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, 2003a, 2003b) that “terrorists” are usually more highly educated than the rest of the population. The rank and file Taliban are of course essentially educated in the memorization of the Quran. But associated with the broader movement of al Qaeda are Islamist Muslims educated in Western subjects. The most notorious of them, perhaps, is Sheikh Omar, who was instrumental in the murder of Daniel Pearl. Omar is a British citizen, educated in Britain, a matriculant of LSE, a former student of Anthony Giddens – certainly not the kind of person we would expect to mastermind the entrapment, murder, and dismemberment of a Wall Street Journal reporter (Lévy 2003). There are no doubt others like him who despite a Western education have embraced the broad ideals of the Islamist movement. It is well known that some of leaders of the movement are more highly educated, notably, of course, Osama Ben Laden and Zawahiri than most of the rank and file al Qaeda.

*15. de Borchgrave (Aug 9, 2004) cites the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan report, 2003 for some of these details.

*16. The ISI is said still be issuing “money and directions to militant groups...” (Borchgrave 2004, Aug 3). See also Center for Defense information, Thursday, August 05, 2004 - 2:15:03 AM EST. “Afghanistan on the brink.” “The Afghan government this week introduced reporters to a 17-year-old Pakistani it captured fighting with

the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. His story backed Afghan claims that Pakistan is either supporting or tolerating supporters of the religious fascist regime ousted by American power two years ago.”

*17. At the Deobandi school in Karachi there is a large image of the now deceased leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Juma Namangani (Lévy 2003). That this Uzbek Islamic leader is portrayed as a hero reveals, again, that their moral horizon, the range of Islamic causes and leaders that interests them, is international.

*18. Lt. General (Retd) Asad Durrani has proposed that “We should Accept Al-Qaeda as Superpower.” “When one of the poles, the Soviet Union, broke apart, leaving the US alone to rule the global roost, the so-called unipolar world lost its balance, The good news is that there is another superpower lurking in the background. The odds that it would restore the old equilibrium are, however, not very good. The rather odd nature of the new emerging pole seems to be the reason. Superpowers, we once learnt, had global interests and worldwide reach. And if some of what America tells us about Al-Qaeda were true, the latter too could claim to be a superpower. It may not be in control of any territory or have any tangible entity, and most of us may only have heard the name after 9/11; but the power is primarily a function of perceptions. And since we do believe that it is the Al-Qaeda that can do damage far and wide, it seems reasonable to admit it as a superpower: amorphous, elusive, almost ethereal; but a superpower all the same. There is also so much common that it has with the United States. Only these two seem to have a universal agenda. Only they can act unilaterally on the world stage. Both are making us do U-turns. Between them they have changed regimes and are rearing to change some more. Both threaten the rest of us to be with them or else!

*18. Stephen Cohen, in remarks on The Newshour with Jim Lehrer, PBS August 9, 2004.

*19. Mamdani (2004) argues that groups like al-Qaeda are generally motivated by legitimate political grievances with U.S. foreign policy. He discusses in detail the failures of United States policy in respect to Afghanistan.

*20. Note Nojoumi’s description of a teacher , p 8 of the first draft, who claims that a nationalist cannot be a Muslim.

*21. Cooper (2004) has an extended discussion based on secondary sources of the apocalyptic views of Islamist leaders.

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