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2 / The Transformation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border

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Since the Soviet invasion of 1979, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has been one of the most unstable and strategically important places in the world. Although certain uses of the border—such as providing sanctuary—have persisted over time, in other significant ways its political economy has changed dramatically. Over the last three decades, the war in Afghanistan and political transformations in Pakistan have prompted a reorganization of the border area in both scope and importance. The main players were the Pashtun tribes living on both sides of the international border.¹ In Pakistan, the British-inherited indirect rule has come to a de facto end with the penetration of the Pakistani army, while the Afghan state is mostly absent from the border area. Despite repeated military operations, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have lost control of a large part of the border area, where the dominant forces are now jihadist groups, opposed both to the state and to the tribal system. In addition, since the late 1970s the Pashtun tribes have lost their monopoly on smuggling. The level of contraband traded across the border has risen exponentially, with billions of dollars illegally exchanged every year.² Commercial

networks developed a wider geographic range due to the presence of refugees in the Arab Gulf. Pashtun refugees in Karachi began playing a major part in the transportation business. Finally, madrasas have played an active role in building networks on both sides of the border and have gained political influence in a way that amounts to a social revolution. In addition, Arab individuals and countries have heavily financed specific strains of Islam, mostly Salafist, in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

This chapter gives a framework to explain the sociological and political upheaval of the border that has occurred since the late 1970s through a redefinition of the “border” as a transnational space. First, I seek a reimagining of the Afghan-Pakistan border that moves away from envisioning it simply as a line on a map. At least in this part of the world, the international border doesn’t separate people and limit transactions. On the contrary, the border is often the main reason why people interact. The intensification of exchange comes from the fact that resources and capital have different values on each side of the border. Custom duties come easily to mind for material goods, but one can also consider the security of a sanctuary or the value of social capital like religious education or tribal affiliations as reasons people and goods are moving incessantly across the border.³

This approach tends to emphasize the importance of geography and space against a deterritorialized notion of “globalization” and the irrelevance of borders and territories.⁴ Contrary to popular belief, the lack of state control of the international border and the increase in exchanges (economic, cultural, and so on) is producing more-complex, more-differentiated territories. In particular, the areas along both sides of the border can be conceptualized as constituting a transnational space characterized by specific rules of interaction. It could then be seen as a modality of regionalization or local autonomy produced by an international border. The similarities with the Kurdish area between Iraq and Turkey are especially striking.

Last, I want to contribute to this debate by conceptualizing this transnational space as the result of the interplay of multiple fields.⁵ The goods and the resources reallocated on both sides of the border, as well as the actors involved, are different in nature. From an analytical point of view, the transnational space is therefore the result of the combination of three major fields: tribal, political, and religious. Each field has different stakes, rules of interaction, geographic scopes, timelines, and institutions, which do not always overlap.

1 Building on this conceptualization, I examine the changes in the Afghan-
2 istan-Pakistan borderland and their causes. These changes occurred along
3 several general lines: in the geographic scope of what constitutes this trans-
4 national space; in the intensity of exchanges across and along the border;
5 and in the rules of the game between players. Then I suggest the centrality
6 of three dynamics: the weakening of the old institutional framework, the
7 intensification of exchanges, and the nationalization *and* radicalization of
8 “border politics.”
9

- 10 1. The traditional political order of the border was defined by indirect
11 rule in Pakistan and, to a certain extent, in Afghanistan: tribes were
12 both autonomous and encapsulated. But the tribal system has been
13 weakened by the rise of the religious men and the emergence of
14 jihadist groups. The notables have lost their influence because they
15 are no more the main interlocutors of the state.
- 16 2. The rapid increase in exchanges (of goods, refugees, fighters, reli-
17 gious students, and, on another level, ideas) is more than a con-
18 sequence of “globalization”; it is directly linked to the weakening/
19 disappearance of the Afghan state and the consequences of Pakistani
20 policies. Characteristics generally associated with the borderland in
21 a narrow geographical sense (lawlessness, autonomy from the state)
22 are now pervasive in a much larger area.
- 23 3. The lack of state control facilitated the emergence of a transnational
24 political field of jihadist parties. But this phenomenon doesn’t imply
25 the end of the border. In fact, the nationalization of politics is the
26 central trend and reinforces the role of the border. There are no
27 transnational political actors (in terms of recruitment or agenda).
28 Only the madrasas have a real ability to go beyond citizenship, but
29 they play quite different roles in the two countries.

31 The Emergence of a Transnational Jihadist Field 32 and the Nationalization of Politics 33

34 In the 1980s the emergence of Pakistani and Afghan jihadist parties
35 operating on both sides of the border created a field of cooperation (and
36 sometimes competition) around security issues and a common political

discourse. But far from becoming irrelevant, the border's strategic and political value was enhanced. Significantly, no transnational parties emerged; the Afghan and Pakistani political spheres remain distinct to this day. First, the border (the sanctuary) is a key resource for players, which constrains their agenda vis-à-vis the host country. Second, politics is both more national (less parochial) and more radical. In an apparent paradox, the retreat of the state allows more participation in national politics. Therefore, the growing influence of armed groups in the border area is part of the nationalization of politics and, especially in Pakistan, a twisted "mainstreaming" of the periphery through radical groups. The national dimension of politics, which must be distinguished from the influence of the state, is reinforced because it is part of the disintegration of indirect rule. I will explain first the emergence of jihadist parties as a product of Pakistani policies, then their limited autonomy.

State policies, especially those of Pakistan, were indeed a key element in the formation of the transnational jihadist field. Pakistan has been a sanctuary for different Afghan parties since the 1970s; Afghanistan has been a sanctuary on a much more modest scale, mostly for Pashtun and Baloch nationalists. The continued support to some Afghan parties is fundamentally linked to Pakistani national interests as defined mostly by the military elites: competition with India and search for a "strategic depth."⁶ The Pakistani sanctuary is a key resource for Afghan political parties fighting in Afghanistan, and it allows the Pakistani military to shape the Afghan political field, eliminating the leftist nationalist or conservative Afghan parties and supporting the more Islam-oriented movements.

As early as the 1970s the Pakistani state supported Islamist movements in Afghanistan. In particular, the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) helped the failed Islamist coup in 1975 as a way to put pressure on then prime minister Daud, who—from the Pakistani perspective—appeared too close to Iran and the Soviets and unwilling to renounce Afghan claims on the Pashtun area on the Pakistani side of the border. On the other side of the border, the Afghan government supported Baloch training camps in 1978 in the south of Afghanistan. The chief of the Marri tribe, who was in overt conflict with the Pakistani state between 1973 and 1977, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the leader of the Khudai Khidmatgars, were frequently in Kabul. Khan was buried in Afghanistan in 1988.

1 In the 1980s, Afghan Sunni political parties were created in Pakistan,
2 and a Pakistani general was present at every meeting of the Afghan parties
3 in Peshawar. In the 1990s the emergence of the Taliban was linked to
4 Pakistani policy, notably the search for a proxy in Afghanistan. The initial
5 objective of the Pakistan government was to establish a land link to Turk-
6 menistan in order to open up Central Asia to Pakistan's economic and
7 political influence. In the spring of 1994 the Taliban movement crossed
8 the border and started its dramatic conquest of Afghanistan with the
9 direct involvement of the Pakistan military.

10 In addition, the Pakistani jihadist movements, largely born from the
11 Kashmir policy of Pakistan, had a sanctuary in the border areas, mostly
12 in Pakistan but also in some parts of Afghanistan during the 1990s. The
13 origin and the evolution of the fundamentalist movements in Pakistan
14 are then clearly autonomous from the Afghan crisis, and the sectarian
15 violence in Pakistan is neither an effect of the Afghan war nor a by-pro-
16 duct of the emergence of the Taliban. After the fall of the Kabul regime in
17 1992, the transfer to Afghanistan of jihadist groups fighting in Kashmir
18 supported by Islamabad was a way to avoid international pressure, espe-
19 cially from India and the United States. One of the consequences of this
20 transfer was the growing connection with fundamentalist Pashtun move-
21 ments on the border. The military wing of the Jama'at-e Islami, the Hizb
22 al-Mujahedin, the Harakat al-Ansar (also known as Harakat al-Mujahe-
23 din), and other transnational groups such as bin Laden's al-Qaida, are or
24 have been in Afghanistan. After 2001 these radical movements started a
25 frontal fight against the Pakistan army.

26 The Pakistani policy facilitated the formation of a complex set of rela-
27 tionships between Afghan and Pakistani parties. The Afghan Islamist
28 parties were connected with the Pakistani Jama'at-e Islami since the
29 emergence of political parties in Afghanistan in the 1970s. Jama'at-e
30 Islami has been a model for the Afghan Sazman-e Jawan-e Musulman
31 (Organization of the Young Muslim), and its offshoot, the Hizb-e Islami.
32 Although the Hizb-e Islami took inspiration from the same organiza-
33 tional model, this does not mean that the two movements had the same
34 type of recruits, nor the same strategy. The Afghan students were look-
35 ing for a strong model of organization that could compensate for the
36 weakness of their social integration (most of them were from poor and

provincial families); the Jama'at-e Islami, on the other hand, is a party of the petite bourgeoisie and socially better integrated. During the Soviet occupation, the connections between Afghan jihadist parties in exile and their Pakistani counterparts grew closer, since most of the Afghan parties were in exile in Peshawar, Pakistan. The Pakistani religious movements served as a pro-jihad, pro-Afghan advocate on the Pakistani political scene, with ideological and personal affinities playing a role in the depth and duration of the complex connections. The relationship between the Hizb-e Islami and the Jama'at-e Islami were extremely strong during the 1980s, and in fact until 1994, when the Taliban marginalized the Hizb-e Islami. Later the Taliban had well-known connections with the Jam'iyat al-'Ulama-e Islam, which built up support among the Pashtun tribes in North West Frontier Province (NWFP; today Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Balochistan during the 1990s. The Jam'iyat al-'Ulama supported the government of Benazir Bhutto, and this connection facilitated the support of the military. Maulana Fazlur Rahman, the leader of this party and himself a Pashtun, is a former chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Parliament and was close to Benazir Bhutto.

Beyond organizational links, jihad and the Islamic state are common themes on both sides of the border. The Afghan jihad, on a par with Kashmir, is an important element in the discourse of the Pakistani parties, both the illegal jihadi and legal fundamentalist ones. The latter are known for their difficulty gaining significant support during the elections, and they try to mobilize individuals with highly emotional issues, especially in relation to the Kashmir and Afghan jihads. The Afghan jihad is still popular in Pakistan because it plays well with the strong anti-American feelings of the population. But despite a relatively common ideology and practical cooperation, there is no trend toward a fusion or even a close coordination between Afghan and Pakistani parties, for both strategic and sociological reasons. The limited exception is al-Qaida, the only movement without a national or territorial-based agenda. Even in North Waziristan, where the cooperation between Afghan and Pakistani militants is arguably the closest, the Haqqani network has objectives that are different from those of the Pakistani movements. Two elements explain this situation: the nationalization of politics in the border area and the strategic constraints.

1 Political parties tend to be organized on a national base. Contradictory
2 dynamics explain why one can see increasing national integration in Paki-
3 stan and at the same time the growing autonomy of the border area. In Pak-
4 istan, the integration of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (earlier North West Frontier
5 Province) in the Pakistani state has been growing since the 1950s with the
6 presence of Pathan officers in the army (generals Adam, Afridi, Khatak,
7 Nasrullah Babar). Under Zia al-Haq, a significant part of the military elite
8 was coming from the Army Belt (Peshawar, Attok, Rawalpindi, Jhelum).
9 This was not true for Balochistan Province, which is more deeply alienated
10 from the state. The war in Afghanistan has accelerated the integration of
11 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas)
12 in Pakistan. The Urdu language is becoming dominant, at least in the cit-
13 ies, where most of the newspapers are in Urdu. In comparison, the Pashto
14 language doesn't give access to modern culture. In madrasas, the language
15 of study is traditionally Pashto, but another language (Urdu or Arabic) is
16 generally compulsory. The presence of a large number of refugees was not
17 conducive to a renewal of Pathan nationalism and the emergence of an irre-
18 dentist movement. On the contrary, the difference between refugees and
19 Pakistani citizens is quite clear, and Pakistani parties have used anti-refugee
20 rhetoric since the 1980s. The war in Afghanistan and the presence of jihadist
21 movements on the border have directly challenged traditional institutions.
22 The army is penetrating the FATA, which is no longer dealt with by British-
23 style indirect governance. On the Afghan side of the border, the Taliban
24 are a national insurgency (as opposed to a local or Pashtun insurgency).
25 Even though the majority of their recruits are Pashtun, they also fight in
26 non-Pashtun areas of the north. Furthermore, the Taliban's objective of a
27 sharia-oriented state is clearly national, not internationalist. In addition,
28 Pashtun ethnicity cannot easily cement a new transnational movement,
29 because in both countries the recruitment is larger than the Pashtun com-
30 munity. The jihadist parties on the border are increasingly linked to radical
31 groups operating in Punjab, which tend to use the border area as a sanctu-
32 ary against the Pakistani state. The growing integration of these groups into
33 national politics is contentious and leads to more violence.

34 Finally, strategic constraints limit the level of cooperation, at least in
35 the short term. There is no military solidarity now between the Afghan
36 and Pakistani Taliban; the Pakistan army is careful to focus its offensive

on the local militants, such as those in South Waziristan. The Pakistan army is able to launch large-scale offensives against the Pakistani Tehrik-e Taliban and still supports the Afghan Taliban. Even in the absence of day-to-day control by the state, the border is quite real in the political order, because the political agenda and the necessities of recruitment make it impossible to build a common base.

The Rise of the Madrasa

In both countries the madrasas have become more influential and deeply involved in politics in the last decades as a consequence of the civil war in Afghanistan and Pakistani state policies. Due to the long-term weakness of the educational system in Afghanistan, Afghan students are crossing the border to be trained in Pakistani madrasas. Some of them return to Afghanistan after a few years with a strong impact on social norms and Islamic teachings.⁷ This transnational network of madrasas extends far beyond the border area: from Karachi to Peshawar and, in Afghanistan, beyond the Pashtun belt, even if the majority of the students are Pashtun.

The increase in the number of madrasas since the 1980s has had a tremendous impact at a political and societal level. In Afghanistan, the rise of fundamentalism, which is not limited to the Taliban movement, had revolutionary consequences. Indeed, the emergence of a clerical state goes against the entire political history of Afghanistan, where religious leaders were relatively marginal, except in a few circumstances like the revolt in 1929.⁸ In Pakistan the jihadist movement is not predominantly controlled by ulama, and the Jam'iyat al-'Ulama (with its religious leadership) is relatively marginal. Still, the Taliban are offering a revolutionary model, more appropriate than Iran because they are Sunnis, to the jihadist movements in Pakistan. The "talibanization" of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, with the diminishing cultural freedom and a severe drop in the demand for female education, is at least partially a consequence of the growing influence of the madrasa.

The rise of fundamentalist madrasas in the border regions is a long-term process linked both to the preaching of the fundamentalist movement Tablighi Jama'at and to Pakistani state policies. Since the 1950s, the Tabligh has penetrated these areas, and local values such as honor

1 and revenge have been reinterpreted and reinforced to respond to larger
2 changes in Pakistani society that are seen as a threat to the social order.
3 In the 1980s, Pakistan saw a spectacular development of its network of
4 madrasas. This situation is largely due to Zia al-Haq's policy of Islam-
5 ization (1977–1988). Universities' recognition of diplomas received from
6 madrasas and the compulsory tax (*zakat*), part of which goes to the
7 madrasas, have been the main factors underpinning this phenomenon.
8 Furthermore, Zia al-Haq encouraged the building of madrasas in the
9 NWFP to help the Afghan jihad, which is why the number of madrasas
10 there is growing more rapidly than in the rest of the country.

11 In addition, those madrasas belong to different religious schools: Deo-
12 bandi, Barelwi, Ahl-e Hadith. Some of those madrasas have a national
13 influence, notably the Jam'iyat al-'Ulum al-Islamiyah, created by Allama
14 Yusuf Binari in Binari Town (near Karachi), educating eight thousand
15 students (with its twelve affiliated madrasa). The Dar al-'Ulum Haqqan-
16 iyya madrasa in Akora Khattak (Peshawar district), created in 1947, has
17 educated one-third of the Deobandi ulama in Pakistan, even if today it
18 has less influence, or at least a smaller proportion of students. In addition,
19 Saudi Arabia has financed the new Jam'iyat Imam Bukhari madrasa in
20 Peshawar, officially opened in June 1999 in the presence of Muhammad
21 Abdul Rahman from the Saudi ministry of religious affairs. The director
22 of this madrasa is close to the Ahl-e Hadith movement and belongs to
23 the Jama'at al-da'wa al-Quran wa al-sunna, a movement active in Kunar
24 Province of Afghanistan in the 1990s.

25 With the current war, the proportion of Afghan students in Pakistani
26 madrasas has noticeably increased. In 1982 approximately 9 percent of
27 the Taliban in the NWFP were Afghans, and this proportion has rapidly
28 increased. Between 1960 and 1983, the number of Taliban increased from
29 7,897 to 78,439 in the NWFP. For example, the majority of the 750 stu-
30 dents of the Jam'iyat Imam Bukhari madrasa that we mentioned earlier
31 are Afghans. Likewise, 15 percent of the students of the Dar al-'Ulum
32 Haqqaniyya madrasa were Afghans in 1960, while in 1985, 60 percent
33 were Afghans. The Afghan students have generally joined the Deobandi
34 madrasas because of the historical links between the Afghan ulama and
35 the Dar al-'Ulum Deoband madrasa in India, even if today the relation-
36 ship between this madrasa and the Pakistani Deobandi movement is

limited. But under the generic term *Deobandi*, one finds in fact different kinds of discourses, and one should not overestimate the education of those ulama and the coherence of their ideology.

The madrasas' deep ties to political parties is a new phenomenon that will have a long-term impact on the role of religious leaders in the area. For example, the leader of the Dar al-'Ulum Haqqaniyya madrasa, Maulana Sami al-Haq, is the secretary-general of the Jam'iyat al-'Ulama. Other madrasas, belonging to the Ahl-e Adith current or linked to Jama'at-e Islami, are more open to modernity, at least in a technological sense (there are English-language and computer skills classes). The Jama'at-e Islami has opened a lot of madrasas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (forty-one madrasas, a third of the new ones in the province, and nineteen after the Soviet invasion), even if the Deobandi are still the majority in the province. Besides the presence of Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani madrasas are directly linked to the Afghan war because participation in the jihad is seen as the natural extension of schooling. Most of the volunteers are Afghans, but some Pakistani citizens are also participating in the jihad, generally originating from the NWFP and Balochistan, and less often from Sindh or Punjab. The Dar al-'Ulum Haqqaniyya madrasa, led by Maulana Sami al-Haq (leader of a splinter faction of the Jam'iyat al-'Ulama-e Islami after 1986), has provided thousands of recruits for the Afghan jihad.

Most of the Taliban ulama have been educated in the ex-NWFP and Balochistan during the war. In particular, the Dar al-'Ulum Haqqaniyya in Akora Khattak has trained some of the most important cadres of the movement.⁹ There are strong links of solidarity between the ulama trained in the same madrasa and their students. The ulama, who are part of the Taliban movement, have a strong group consciousness, even if, as in any other organization, they also have conflicts. The key experience shared by the group was the education of its members in the Pakistani madrasas in the 1980s. From the Dar al-'Ulum Haqqaniyya madrasa at Akora Khattak came Hajji Ahmad Jan, minister of mines; Mawlawi Qalamuddin, head of the religious police; and Mawlawi Arifullah Arif, deputy minister of finance. One of the few former commanders to become a leader of the movement, Mawlawi Haqqani, a former commander from Hizb-e Islami (Khales), also spent several years at the madrasa Dar al-'Ulum Haqqaniyya, first as a student and then as a teacher.

The Weakening of the Tribes

The tribes are part of a dual system of interaction: with the state and with other tribes on both sides of the border. The border defines the place of the tribes as specific in the administrative system, in the form of indirect rule. Historically the FATA in Pakistan, or to a lesser extent the special status of border tribes in Afghanistan, created a distinct political and social organization in the two countries. There is a striking parallel with the Ottoman Empire and the use of the Kurdish tribes against internal and external (perceived) threats. In both cases the very existence or survival of a tribal organization is directly linked to its geographical position and state policies. In addition, the different tribes on both sides of the border constitute a field with complex rules of competition and collaboration (contraband, family relationship, solidarity in case of exile, and so forth). Here the border is a key resource, because the tribes are able to exploit economic opportunities and gain protection from their national governments by crossing the border. The tribal system initially had a strong territorial component and was relatively limited in its scope, but massive migrations since the 1980s have extended that scope.

The tribal system and norms are less relevant in a region now dominated by radical groups and fundamentalist madrasas. The tribes are no longer the central players and natural interlocutors of the state. In particular, the traditional model of uprising against the state—the uneasy alliance between the tribes and the mullah (the “mad mullah,” as described by British sources) has disappeared. The causes of the marginalization of the tribes are somewhat different on the two sides of the border, but the role of the state and the emergence of religious political leaders are the key factors.

On the Pakistani side of the border, tribal leaders have lost their position in the political system, and jihadist parties have waged a war against such traditional elites, sometimes with the support of the Pakistani state. The indirect rule of the tribal area through political agents in the FATA has de facto disappeared. The army is occupying part of the tribal areas, notably South Waziristan and Bajaur, and is under pressure from the United States to extend its operations. Current Pakistani military operations in the border area have forced hundreds of thousands of tribesmen to relocate. Pashtun tribesmen are now living in Karachi or even in the

Gulf, extending considerably the tribe's economic and political tribal network. The tribal field is now more transnational, but also less territorial.

On the Afghan side of the border, the Taliban have marginalized the tribes in the east. The tribes still play a role in commercial networks and migrations, but they are no longer a central political player on both sides of the border. The tribal system is weak in most parts of Afghanistan: the Pashtun generally have a tribal identity, but it is not the most frequent base of mobilization. One should not confuse tribal identity, a rather flexible and open notion, and tribal institutions that place enforceable obligations on the members of a tribe. The concept of "tribe" is often misunderstood, because it covers two different situations. The tribes in the south were dominated by aristocratic families and large landowners connected to the state since its origin. Political entrepreneurs, especially in Kandahar, can use tribal identity as a way to build patronage, but tribal institutions are generally not functioning. In the east the tribes were more protected from the penetration of state administration, but functioned in practice as a means to relay state action. Paradoxically, the more institutionalized the tribes are (as in the east), the more local and enmeshed they are in state structures. In both cases, far from being exterior to state structures, the tribes were a relay and part of the political system. This is why the tribes were not an alternative to the state, as demonstrated after 1979 in the countryside, where the commanders, and not the tribes, became the basic political structures.

The rise of the Taliban is one of the causes of the political marginalization of the tribes. The Taliban movement is ideologically opposed to tribal politics or Pashtun nationalism as a matter of principle. Within the movement, local solidarities were a stronger mobilizing force than affiliation to a Pashtun ethnicity as such. For example, Mullah Omar is from Tarin Kot, in the province of Oruzgan, and Mullah Omar's countrymen, such as Mullah Abbas, held positions of authority. In addition, Mullah Omar is a Ghilzai Pashtun Hotak, a group that was overrepresented in the Taliban government. There were other solidarity networks, such as networks of mujahedin who had previously served under the same commander, such as Mawlawi Jalaluddin Haqqani, formerly of Hizb-e Islami (Khales). The Taliban managed to build transtribal groups (even between tribes that are normally opposed). In some cases they have killed or frightened

1 elders who opposed them. The tribes who try to resist have seen their abil-
2 ity to move outside their territory significantly limited. The Taliban let
3 the tribes get money from Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), but
4 these tribes do not oppose Taliban groups that cross their territory, and
5 members of the tribes are individually joining the Taliban. In addition,
6 the Taliban are trying, with a fair amount of success, to build transtribal
7 groups of fighters, particularly in the eastern provinces. The process is
8 close to what happened during the last few years in Waziristan, where
9 the jihadist parties were able to marginalize elders and built a movement
10 strong enough to supersede the tribal system. In a few places the local
11 tribe favors the government but is not in a position to actively oppose
12 the Taliban (Popolzai in Kandahar, Karokhel in Sarobi and Khaki-Jabar
13 districts southeast of Kabul, Jaji in Khost).

14 The new leaders in the tribal areas have a specific profile, quite differ-
15 ent from the old elites. First, most of the aristocratic families in the south
16 have lost their influence. After 2001 a few pro-American families gained
17 a central role in local politics (the Karzai family in Kandahar), but they
18 are in no way representative of the old elites and they are acting basically
19 as jihadist commanders, very different from the prewar notables. Second,
20 the tribal war, as a way of fighting centered on individual prowess with
21 limited casualties, has disappeared. The new military elites are using their
22 ability to get resources from abroad and their connections to larger net-
23 works to reinforce their local strength.¹⁰

24 Finally, the mullahs, who before 1979 had a limited place in the tribal
25 universe, have seen their prestige and their power increase because of the
26 civil war. The mullahs were able to give a credible narrative, the jihad, to
27 insurgents. In addition, they were able to provide a relatively straightfor-
28 ward judicial system to people in the countryside after the disappearance
29 of the state. The increasing power of the mullahs is in no way traditional.
30 The emergence of religious leaders to mediate between tribes in time of
31 crisis is not a new phenomenon in the border area. The “mad mullahs” of
32 the British literature were in fact charismatic figures able for some time
33 to coordinate tribes in the name of the jihad. The current situation is
34 radically different. The mullahs are not short-term figures but are part of
35 strong institutions, madrasas, and political parties, able to mobilize much
36 more resources than any tribes.

The second element that explains the transformation of the tribal universe is the decline of its institutions. In the east of Afghanistan, the fighters are often from the same tribe, but this doesn't imply that their ideology or their organization is tribal. One cannot confuse the logic of recruitment and the modality of organization. For example, the Haqqani network is recruiting at least initially on a tribal base. But its extension of the network to other tribes (and beyond to individuals not belonging to a tribe) cannot be explained without taking into account the ideological drive of the insurgents. In addition, the war has changed the fighters and the tribes. The commanders leading the fighters were dependent on external resources from political parties (based in Pakistan or in Iran). The influx of money and resources made them more professional and distinct from the tribal population in general. In consequence, the commanders were largely outside the normal functioning of a tribal system. The Pashtunwali and even the sharia were largely ignored by the most powerful leaders. The local conflicts were not settled by negotiations in a traditional way, notably because they had political implications and because the state was not there to limit the intensity of the fights. In addition, the mullahs were able to impose sharia against tribal norms more often. Islam has always been a central element of the tribal identity, although with some ambiguity because a large part of tribal norms run directly counter to the sharia as interpreted by the mullahs.

Finally, the Karzai administration and the United States have tried to use the tribes against the Taliban, but what could have been an empowerment of the tribal institutions is in fact a further step toward their disintegration. For example, the decision to pay *arbaki* (the tribal militia, which normally recruits unpaid volunteers) has destroyed their legitimacy. Experience shows that the tribal militias were accepted locally insofar as they were seen to be independent from the state and limited to the intratribal (nonpolitical) conflicts. Conflicts between tribes or political parties (like the Taliban) necessitate bigger mediators (such as the state).

Conclusions

State policies are at the root of the transformation of the border area and the changed relationship between the center and the periphery. The growing importance of madrasas since the 1980s and the new institutional

1 order on the Pakistani side of the border are direct products of decisions
2 made in Islamabad and in Kabul. For example, the Sipah-e Sahaba (Anju-
3 man Sipah-e Sahaba), created in 1989 under the leadership of Maulana
4 Azam Tariq and pushing the Pakistani state to declare the Shia to be non-
5 Muslim, is most probably a consequence of the instrumentalization of
6 Islam by the Pakistani government under Zia al-Haq. Its militants have
7 fought in Afghanistan, especially at the battle in Mazar-e Sharif, where in
8 1998 they massacred hundreds of Shiite Hazaras and some Iranian dip-
9 lomats. In Afghanistan, the revolution started with the ill-directed effort
10 by the communists to redefine the relationship between the state elites
11 and the population. But the idea that the states can undo the result of its
12 policies is misleading. In both Islamabad and Kabul, the limited power
13 of the center is the most striking feature of the current political situation.

14 The facts that state control has lessened and the transmission of contra-
15 band goods has risen should not be seen as endangering the existence of
16 the border. In the current international order, the failure of a state doesn't
17 threaten its territorial integrity, contrary to the realist (unrealistic) the-
18 ory; borders are more stable than states. There is no disappearance of the
19 border, because its existence is still fundamental in the exchanges, but
20 there is an extension of the transnational space affected by it and a grow-
21 ing autonomy vis-à-vis the states. But a redrawing of the border could
22 be envisioned if Afghanistan were to be partitioned between Pashtun-
23 dominated areas and the rest of the country, as has been suggested.¹¹

24 In the long run, there is the possibility of a reconstruction of an Afghan
25 state with the Taliban, as shown in the 1990s. If it happens through nego-
26 tiations or military victory, the border on the Afghan side will be again
27 under state control, at least partially. The situation in Pakistan is funda-
28 mentally different: there is no clear prospect of a return of the state in the
29 border areas, despite the current military operations. The stabilization of
30 Afghanistan could help, at least if Afghanistan does not become a sanctu-
31 ary for jihadist groups targeting the Pakistani state, but the weakening
32 of state institutions in Pakistan in general is a more profound problem,
33 reflecting the corruption of the elites and a worldview (competition with
34 India through proxies) that endangers the very survival of the country.
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