

Afghanistan And Peace Talks: Are We Any Closer to Peace

Faran Jeffery



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاونٹر ٹیرورزم

After 17 years of a bloody conflict which started after the 9/11 attacks, the US and Taliban negotiators have agreed on a draft framework for a peace deal seeking to put an end to America's longest war, it was recently reported by media. US negotiators recently held six days of talks with the Taliban in Qatar while the Afghan president has made repeated calls for direct talks with the Taliban, who have so far refused, dismissing the regime in Kabul as "puppets". Perhaps what's surprising for the regime in Kabul is America's non-interest in convincing the Taliban to directly negotiate with the regime.

The Taliban has ruled the country from 1996-2001 and remain a top insurgent force today despite the rise of Islamic State. The Taliban rule ended when the US invaded Afghanistan after al-Qaeda - which had used the country as a base - carried out the 9/11 attacks in the US. Many analysts believe it could be years before a substantive peace deal is reached. One major reason why US is so keen to negotiate with the Taliban, even at the expense of the regime in Kabul, is that in the 17 years of war, the Taliban have come out stronger while the US has come out weaker. Before the war, Taliban's closest allies were Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Today Taliban are engaged in diplomacy with countries like Russia, Iran, Qatar, US and even India, a country that has never been very fond of the Islamist militants like Taliban even when US was supporting the Mujahideen against Soviets. US intelligence officials believe that Taliban's special commandos are being trained by the Russians while there is strong evidence that suggests that Iran may also be providing material help to the Taliban, as well as intelligence, in an attempt to use the Taliban against Islamic State militants in Afghanistan.

A careful analysis of the Taliban before 9/11 and the Taliban of 2019 shows that this group has also went through significant changes in regards to their training and tactics during this time.



Old school Taliban before 9/11.

Modern Taliban: Images from Taliban's Salahuddin Ayubi training camp, 2019



Taliban special commandos from Salahuddin Ayubi training camp, 2019



The peace negotiation from the American side is being led by Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, who has visited Afghanistan as well as Pakistan since his appointment to carry forward the negotiations. "We have a draft of the framework that has to be fleshed out before it becomes an agreement," he told The New York Times in a recent interview, adding that as part of the proposed deal the Taliban would vow to prevent Afghanistan being used as a hub for terrorism.

A senior Taliban official who attended the talks told the BBC that both sides had agreed to form two committees to draw up detailed plans on how to implement agreements in principle on two key issues:

- When will American-led forces be withdrawn from Afghanistan?
- A commitment from the Taliban that the group will not allow international jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda to use the country as a base in the future.

The Taliban official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the committees would "identify routes for the withdrawal, and how much time is needed. We suggested six months, but are flexible".

With drastic losses on the side of the Kabul regime mounting up, Taliban are negotiating from the position of strength while the US is desperate to find a decent face-saving to exit Afghanistan.

The Taliban say they will only begin direct negotiations with the regime in Kabul once a firm date for troop withdrawal has been agreed. Meanwhile, US is exploring a full withdrawal of its troops - in return for a ceasefire and a commitment by the Taliban to these direct talks.

The Kabul regime only controls or influences territory containing some two-thirds of the population and is losing credibility each passing day as it is unable to retain the areas it controls without US support.

In the New York Times interview, Mr Khalilzad said the Taliban had pledged not to give terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda safe haven - a key demand from Washington if it pulls out troops.

"The Taliban have committed, to our satisfaction, to do what is necessary that would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups or individuals," he said.

Despite Taliban's initial assurances about not letting Afghan soil to be used for terrorism – and distancing from Al-Qaeda in particular, many analysts and observers remain skeptical. Besides the fact that it will be very difficult to verify the Taliban's commitment to this demand after the troop withdrawal, even if US is able to verify it and finds Taliban in violation of the agreement, it will be even harder to convince them to comply after the troop withdrawal.

Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban still enjoy very close relations, which are even evident from their propaganda releases. Despite their operational closeness and ideological alignment, Al-Qaeda does not agree with Taliban's negotiations with the US. Indeed, in an [audio tape](#) released by AQIS chief Asim Umar in June 2018, he criticized Taliban's willingness to negotiate with the US and said that the Taliban should continue fighting because "the victory is near".



Cover photo of the AQIS audio tape released in June 2018

In 2015, Al-Qaeda released an audio tape from Ayman al-Zawahiri in which he pledged allegiance to the then newly appointed emir of the Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour. The message was recorded by al-Zawahiri just two days after the Taliban confirmed Mullah Omar's death on July 30. Zawahiri describes Mansour as the "Emir of the Faithful," an honorific usually reserved for the head of an Islamic caliphate. In the tape, Zawahiri said that by swearing bayat (an oath of allegiance) to Mansour he is continuing in the path of Osama bin Laden.



Zawahiri pledge of allegiance to the Taliban

In a statement released in June 2015, Mansour described Al-Qaeda's leaders as the "heroes of the current jihadist era" and bin Laden as the "leader of mujahideen." Mansour's statement contained other parallels to Al-Qaeda's messaging as well. In addition, Siraj Haqqani was appointed one of Mansour's two chief deputies. Files recovered from Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan and other evidence show that Siraj has worked closely with Al-Qaeda for years.

Siraj has served as the operational commander of the Haqqani Network, as well as the leader of the Miramshah Regional Military Shura, one of the Afghan Taliban's four regional military commands. The Haqqani Network operates primarily in the Afghan provinces of Khost, Paktia, and Paktika, and also has a presence in several other provinces.

In October 2007, the US military identified Siraj as a growing threat when it issued a press release describing his importance to the Taliban. The US military offered a reward of \$200,000 for information leading to Siraj's capture. In March 2008, the US State Department listed him as a specially designated global terrorist. In March 2009, State Department upped the US military's ante and offered a bounty of \$5 million for information on Siraj's whereabouts.

Since Siraj's designation by the US government in 2008, 12 additional senior Haqqani Network leaders have been added to the list of global terrorists. All of them have ties to Al-Qaeda.

US intelligence officials believe that Siraj is a member of Al-Qaeda's Shura Majlis, and has actively recruited foreign terrorists to serve in the Haqqani Network. His "extended reach brings foreign fighters from places like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Chechnya, Turkey and Middle Eastern countries into Afghanistan," Major Chris Belcher, a spokesman for the US military, said in October 2007.

Taliban's influence within Al-Qaeda can be judged by the fact that following Mullah Omar's death, key Al-Qaeda branches like the Al Nusrat Front, AQAP, and AQIM released a joint statement eulogizing Mullah Omar.



Joint statement by Nusrah Front, AQAP, and AQIM



Page 2: Joint statement by Nusrah Front, AQAP, and AQIM

Zawahiri’s pledge was almost immediately accepted by the then Taliban chief Mullah Mansour, who thanked “all those respected brothers who have sympathized with us in this critical juncture of the Islamic Ummah, have sent messages of condolence about the passing away of Amir ul Mumineen [Mullah Omar] or have pledged allegiance with us as the new Amir (leader) of the Islamic Emirate and servant of the Muslims.”

“Among these respected brothers, I first and foremost accept the pledge of allegiance of the esteemed Dr. Ayman ad-Dhawahiri [al Zawahiri], the leader of international Jihadi organization (Qaedatul Jihad) and thank him for sending a message of condolence along with his pledge and pledge of all Mujahideen under him,” Mansour said.



Zawahiri's pledge of allegiance posted by Taliban on their website

“Similarly those Mujahideen protecting the Jihadi frontlines, Madaris (religious seminaries), teachers of universities and centers for learning, national figures and all Islamic and Jihadi personalities as well as Jihadi organizations spread throughout the globe who have sent messages of condolence or pledge allegiance with us as leader of Jihad, I reciprocally thank them and implore Allah Almighty to grant me and all our brothers success to properly serve Islam and Muslims,” he continued.

While the Taliban and Al-Qaeda have long been closely allied, Mansour’s official statement was a bold proclamation of the relationship between the groups.



Cover photo of a 2016 video released by the Taliban

In a 2016 video released by collaboration between Taliban’s Manba’ al-Jihad Media for Production and Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan’s Commission for Cultural Affairs, Afghan Taliban flaunted its ties with Al-Qaeda and vowed to continue the fight. The Manba’ al-Jihad Media has long been affiliated with the Haqqani Network and was merged into the Taliban’s media arm years ago.



Screenshot from the 2016 Taliban video

The production includes a translation of an Islamic text that is intended to underscore the bond between native Afghans and those who migrate for the sake of jihad. The Quranic verse is used to emphasize the Taliban’s relationship with Al-Qaeda. An image (see above) of Taliban figures, Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders, such as Nasir al Wuhayshi (the emir of AQAP until his death), is shown as the following text is scrolls across the screen:

“But those who have believed and emigrated and fought in the cause of Allah and those who gave shelter and aided — it is they who are the believers, truly. For them is forgiveness and noble provision. [Al-Anfal: 74]”

A clip from Sheikh Khalid Batarfi, a senior official in AQAP, is also included. Batarfi is an Al-Qaeda veteran who was trained and fought in Afghanistan during the 1990s. Some analysts believe he is part of Al-Qaeda’s global management team. Other AQAP leaders with similar dossiers served dual roles as both regional officials in Al-Qaeda’s network and as members of the organization’s senior management.



Screenshot from 2016 Taliban video shows Sheikh Khalid Batarfi

“Muslim brothers! Our beloved Afghan brothers who greatly supported [the] religion of Allah are indeed an excellent example for you,” Batarfi says. “The entire world saw how Amir-ul-Mumineen [“Emir of the Faithful”] Mullah Omar, [the] Taliban and all the Afghan people bravely stood and [are] still standing alongside their Mujahid brothers and Arab and non-Arab migrants.”

“Groups of Afghan Mujahideen have emerged from the land of Afghans that will destroy the biggest idol and head of kufr of our time, America,” Batarfi says. The “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was sacrificed and even vanished in support of our sacred religion, but they (the Taliban) did not trade off their religion.” Batarfi says that the jihadists can finally “see [the] light of victory,” as governance according to the “rule of Sharia” law is “even stronger in Afghanistan than before.”

In the video, one speaker says: “Islam is not the religion of the Taliban alone! Neither of Al-Qaeda! Rather, Islam is the religion of all the Muslims!”

And that one line captures the entire issue that many, including myself, see with Taliban’s assurances to distance from Al-Qaeda. It appears even more unlikely when we consider the rise of Islamic State in Afghanistan. Taliban have been consistently fighting against IS, just like their ally Al-Qaeda, and therefore it is very unlikely that Taliban would seek to alienate its ally Al-Qaeda while fighting IS, since both see IS as an enemy.

The US Army also underestimates the number of Taliban fighters present in Afghanistan, something that will prove to be a problem once US troops leave the country.

In 2018, the US Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A) approximated the Taliban’s strength as between 28,000 and 40,000 fighters in its quarterly report. This latest estimate of the Taliban’s strength was disclosed in the Department of Defense Inspector General’s quarterly report on Afghanistan, which covered July through September, 2018. USFOR-A estimated the Taliban to have 30,000 to 35,000 fighters, and the “Taliban Haqqani Network” another 3,000 to 5,000.

Table 2.
Estimated Size of Insurgent and Terrorist Groups

Group	Estimated Force Size
Taliban (full-time and part-time)	25,000-35,000
Taliban Haqqani Network	3,000-5,000
ISIS-K	<2,000
Al Qaeda (including al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent)	200

Source: USFOR-A

Chart shows the number of militants for various groups that US believe exist in Afghanistan. Source: Long War Journal.

The inspector general report noted that “these estimates have not changed significantly since the DoD OIG first began requesting this data in September 2017.”

“This may be attributed in part to the difficulty of estimating the size of insurgent and terrorist groups,” the report indicated. “It may also reflect the groups’ ability to recruit fighters to replace those killed or captured during Afghan and U.S. counterterrorism operations.”

The numbers estimated in the above chart are too low while the reality on the ground are very different, according to most Afghanistan watchers.

Bill Roggio of FDD writes in the Long War Journal:

The lowball estimate of Taliban strength may reflect a fundamental problem that the US military and intelligence community have had in attempting to estimate the strength of insurgent and terrorist groups throughout the world. To find an example of this inherent problem, look no further than Afghanistan and the US military's faulty estimate of Al-Qaeda's strength. Between 2010 and 2015, the US military and intelligence agencies claimed that Al-Qaeda maintained 50 to 100 fighters in the country. FDD's Long War Journal, using the US military's own press releases that documented raids against Al-Qaeda, disputed this static estimate. That delusory estimate of Al-Qaeda strength was used by the Obama administration to claim that Al-Qaeda was "decimated" and rendered ineffective. The military's estimate of Al-Qaeda manpower did not change for six years, up until the US military raided two Al-Qaeda camps in Shorabak district in Kandahar. More than 150 Al-Qaeda fighters were killed during that raid alone. This forced the US military to revise its estimate of Al-Qaeda strength from 50-100 to 100-300. LWJ has maintained that the revised number is still far too low.

Ironically, the US military's current estimate of Al-Qaeda strength of 200 fighters is the average of the revised estimate from 2015.

The US military and intelligence community have failed spectacularly in estimating the strength of terrorist groups in other theaters. For instance, the strength of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in 2013 was first estimated to be about 10,000 fighters. Then it was revised upward to between 20,000 to 32,000. The US military has since claimed to have killed that many ISIS fighters since then. In Yemen, the number of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was estimated at several hundred when the group overran large areas of the south. Today, the number is said to be 6,000 to 7,000.

If the US military's claim that the Taliban has 28,000 to 40,000 fighters in its rank and file are to be believed, then it reflects quite badly on the Afghan security forces. Additionally, it does not explain how the Taliban has had the initiative throughout the country and magically regenerates its battlefield losses.

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) "numbered 312,328 personnel in July 2018, including 194,017 ANA [Afghan National Army] personnel and 118,311 ANP [Afghan National Police] personnel," according to the Inspector General's report. Additionally, there are more than 16,000 NATO troops operating under Resolute Support's mission, and another 8,000 US troops operating under the command of USFOR-A.

If USFOR-A's current estimate is correct, then the coalition is getting hammered by a force one-tenth its size.

The Taliban, despite US Department of Defense claims to the contrary, has the initiative in Afghanistan. It is fighting in nearly all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. If the Taliban evenly distributed its forces through the 34 provinces (it does not), it would have an estimated 1,100 fighters in each.

Of course, the Taliban does not operate this way, instead it distributes its fighters based on need. Provinces such as Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, and Ghazni draw a large number of Taliban fighters. In these provinces, the Taliban controls and contests large numbers of districts. To accomplish this, logic dictates that the Taliban must deploy tens of thousands to these five provinces alone.

But the Taliban's strength nationwide is significant. It is a powerful force in the eastern provinces of Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Logar, Wardak, and Laghman. In the northeast, it controls or contests a significant amount of terrain in Kunar, Nuristan, and Badakhshan. The same is true in the north in the provinces of Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar, Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul, and Faryab, and the western provinces of Herat, Farah, Badghis, and Nimruz. Even in the central provinces of Bayman, Ghor, and Daykundi, the Taliban has made significant inroads.

Given these facts, the Taliban's strength is likely to number well over 100,000 fighters. US military and intelligence officials who track the Taliban agree. One official told LWJ that the Taliban likely has more than 70,000 fighters and tens of thousands of support personnel and supporters. Another said that the Taliban "could not possibly do what it has done with merely 40,000 fighters; double or more realistically triple that number, and you are closer to the truth."

Another problem in Afghanistan are foreign fighters, who Taliban initially admitted exist along their ranks but later denied it, fearing increased pressure from the international community.

In a 2018 interview, an unnamed Taliban official told *NBC News* that there are thousands of foreign fighters in the ranks of the Afghan Taliban. The NBC report stated:

A senior Afghan Taliban commander who is also a member of the group's leadership council told NBC News that there were around 2,000 to 3,000 non-Afghan fighters in their midst, mostly from China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Chechnya, Tunisia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

"We are Muslims and according to our religion ... we cannot deny shelter to someone if he or she comes to trouble," said the commander, who recently attended three days of talks with Khalilzad in Qatar. "None of the foreign militants would be allowed to take up arms and use this soil against any country in the world."

Thousands of Pakistanis are also thought to be fighting as members of the Taliban.

This was a very rare admission since Al-Qaeda has been trying to discredit reports that stated exactly that. Indeed, almost immediately after the *NBC News* report went live, Afghan Taliban released an official statement denying that there are any foreign fighters in their ranks.



Screenshot from Taliban's official website

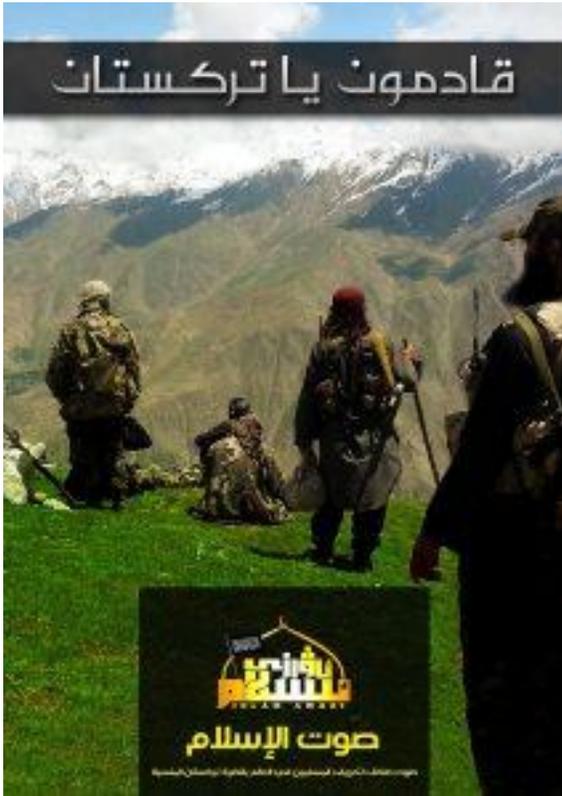
In the statement, the Taliban described the *NBC News* report (which was reproduced by *TOLO News*) as part of a “series of devilish conspiracies.”

“We categorically reject this report as well as any such unfounded allegation against any leader of Islamic Emirate,” the statement, which was attributed to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, said. “Islamic Emirate assures all sides that no foreigners exist in Afghanistan,” it continued. “After the American invasion, citizens of all countries who came to Afghanistan for jihad against Soviet Union returned to their countries due to war and other problems. After that no one came to our country and no one is allowed to misuse our soil.”

The Taliban’s denial would sound absurd to any Afghanistan watcher but it also makes sense since the unnamed Taliban official who spoke to *NBC News* was likely unauthorized to make such statements about the presence of foreign fighters in Afghanistan. We also know that the Taliban denial is false because the Afghan Taliban in the past have made calls for foreigners to join the Jihad in Afghanistan.

Many Al-Qaeda operatives fled the country after the US invasion but many others decided to stay in Afghanistan while some others continued to operate in Afghanistan after settling in neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran. These long-distance Al-Qaeda operatives, as I like to call them, facilitate the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan through various ways, such as by acting as financiers, trainers, advisors, etc. We know this because of the US designations of some of these Al-Qaeda operatives. Additionally, as stated above in this article, Al-Qaeda and Taliban’s propaganda releases also indicate their close relationship. For instance, Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), an Al-Qaeda allied group primarily consisting of Uyghur militants from China and which mainly operates in Syria, admitted in the 23rd edition of its *Turkistān al-Islāmīyyah* magazine that its fighters are also fighting in

Afghanistan embedded with the Taliban. TIP backed up this claim by publishing photos of its fighters in Afghanistan.



Screenshot from the TIP magazine shows TIP fighters somewhere in Afghanistan

In March 2018, TIP released a video which showed its militants in Afghanistan carrying out joint raids with the Taliban. It is unclear where the video was filmed, but the locales featured appear to be in northern Afghanistan. The video, dated for December 2017, primarily highlights the TIP's combat operations, with parts dedicated to showing attacks targeting several Afghan military outposts. TIP and Taliban fighters are shown killing or capturing at least two dozen Afghan troops. Additionally, the two groups seized large amounts of weapons and ammunition and several US-made Humvee vehicles. In some scenes, the jihadists are seen using captured Humvees in the assaults.



Screenshot from the TIP video shows TIP fighters in custody of a US Army Humvee

The TIP fighters are shown fighting under the Taliban's white standard flag and appear to be taking battlefield direction from Taliban field commanders. In separate scenes, some of the top TIP leaders are seen giving speeches. This includes Abdullah Mansour, who is the global deputy emir of TIP.

We also know about the significant presence of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan due to some other incidents. In Nov 2018, a US soldier was killed while battling Al-Qaeda in the southwestern province of Nimruz. Foreign fighters were said to be present during the fighting. As recently as Oct. 2015, the US raided two Al-Qaeda training camps in Kandahar province and killed 150 Al-Qaeda fighters.

Here is a short list of some of Al-Qaeda's leaders known to be involved in the Afghanistan war:

Abd al Hadi al Iraq: Commanded Al-Qaeda's military in Afghanistan. Captured by the US in 2007 and currently in detention at Guantanamo Bay.

Abu Laith al Libi: Commanded Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. Killed in a US drone strike in Pakistan in Jan. 2008.

Abu Ubaidah al Masri: Commanded Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. Died of natural causes in 2008.

Khalid Habib: Commander of Al-Qaeda's Shadow Army or Lashkar al Zil, Al-Qaeda's elite paramilitary army that operates in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Killed in a US drone strike in Oct. 2008.

Abdullah Said al Libi: Head of the Shadow Army In a statement, Al-Qaeda described him as the as the leader of the Qaidat al-Jihad fi Khorasan, or the Base of the Jihad in the Khorasan (Afghanistan-Pakistan region). However, he would have served under Mustafa Abu Yazid. He is thought to have been killed in a US airstrike in Dec. 2009.

Mustafa Abu Yazid: Al-Qaeda's leader in Afghanistan, member of Al-Qaeda's top shura, and the organization's "chief financial manager." Killed in a US drone strike in May 2010.

Sheikh Fateh al Masri: Al-Qaeda's leader in Afghanistan. Killed in a US drone strike in Sept. 2010.

Badr Mansoor: The commander of Al-Qaeda's Shadow Army. Killed in a US drone strike in Feb. 2012.

Farman Shinwari: The commander of Al-Qaeda's Shadow Army. Shinwari is thought to have been killed sometime in 2013.

Sufyan al Maghrebi: The commander of Al-Qaeda's Shadow Army. Killed in a US air strike in September 2014.

Qari 'Imran: Al-Qaeda's military commander for Afghanistan and the deputy emir of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent. Killed in a US drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan in January 2015.

Mansur al Harbi: Al-Qaeda's military commander for Afghanistan. Killed in a US airstrike in Afghanistan June 2015.

On 29th Jan 2019 Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) released a new assessment for worldwide threats as of 2018. The assessment includes a map that shows Al-Qaeda presence around the world. The assessment confirms that Al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL) is also based in Iran and Pakistan-Afghanistan region.

Al-Qa'ida and ISIS as of 2018

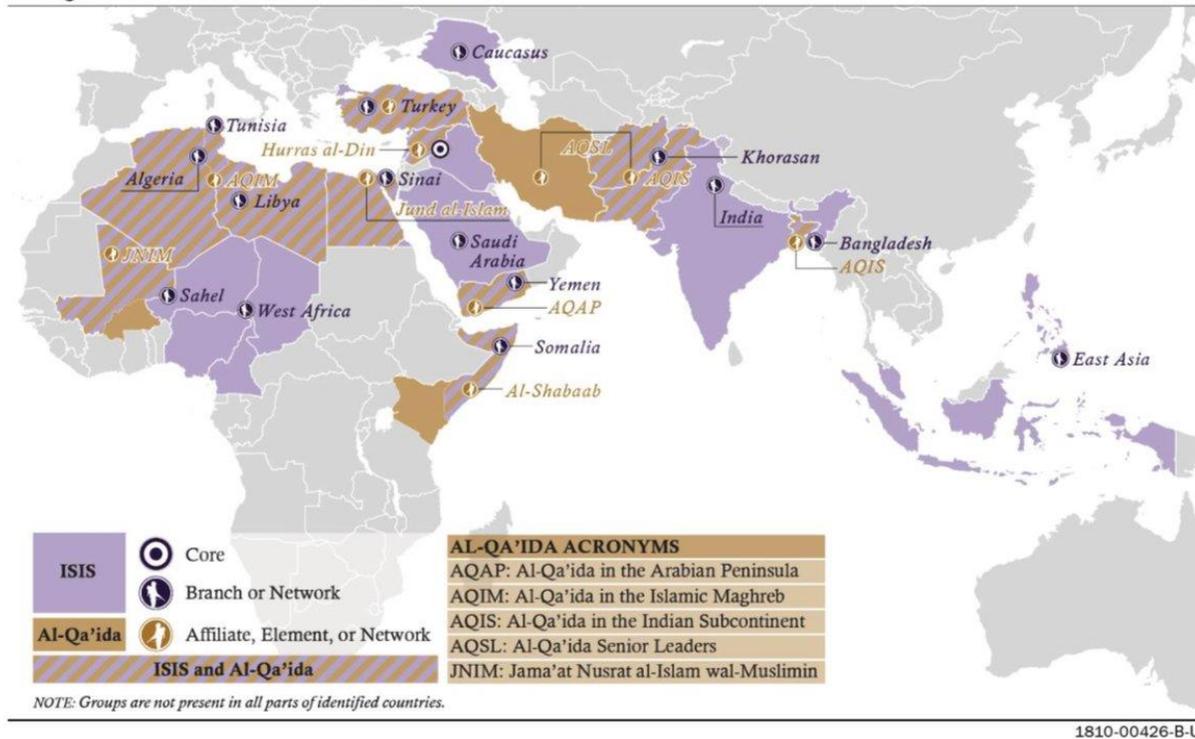


PHOTO CAPTION: Source: ODNI

Besides Al-Qaeda operatives and TIP militants, many other foreign groups also operate in Afghanistan, most of them with tacit approval of the Afghan Taliban. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi are just some of those groups. This still doesn't count the foreign fighters embedded within the Islamic State Khorasan (ISKAP) group, which is Taliban's rival. However, Taliban has recently said that it won't allow Baloch militants, who were initially given safe haven by elements in the Kabul regime, to use Afghan soil against Pakistan, which has of course made Pakistani security establishment very happy since Pakistan has been seeking to use Taliban to safeguard itself from Afghanistan-based militancy waged by groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Hizbul Ahrar and multiple Baloch militant groups.

The Taliban think it is necessary to deny any reports of foreign fighters operating in the country because doing so allows it to claim that it is merely waging a local war to regain control of the country from a foreign occupation, which in turn allows the US and other countries, eager to exit from Afghanistan, to negotiate with the Taliban.

The discussions clearly remain at a provisional stage - and a long way from agreement on the broader issues required for lasting peace in Afghanistan, but it is more important to focus on convincing Taliban to renounce their extremist ideology and publicly condemn and denounce Al-Qaeda. It is very easy for the Taliban to denounce Al-Qaeda if it really wanted to, but it is something that it hasn't done so far and probably won't after the US withdrawal.

Taliban are already fighting the ISKP group and will continue to after the US withdrawal because besides there being significant differences between ideologies of both groups, Taliban also see ISKP as a foreign invading rival and Taliban propaganda channels actually blame US for the “creation” of ISKP. Therefore, it is pointless to include fighting ISKP as one of the conditions of the peace agreement because that’s something Taliban will continue to do regardless. What Taliban is very unlikely to do is to distance from, let alone denounce, Al-Qaeda, its closest ally. And so that is where the US and its allies must focus, because if Taliban continue their alliance with Al-Qaeda after the US withdrawal, it will be only a matter of time before Afghanistan once again becomes the preferred playground of Al-Qaeda.

And that will not bring peace but only more war to Afghanistan.