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Introduction

On 15 August 2021, images of heavily armed bearded men behind and around a desk in the Citadel of Kabul were broadcast by media outlets all over the world. They were vividly illustrating the breaking news that the warriors of the *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* (*Də Afghānistān Islāmī Imārat*; henceforth IEA), colloquially known as "The Taliban", had taken the Afghan capital for the second time, while President Ashraf Ghanī (b. 1949), having precipitately fled his country to the safety of Tashkent, declared his resignation via Facebook. All of a sudden, it seemed, those who had confidently been declared defeated by a USA-led military invasion in late 2001 in reprisal for the infamous *al-Qāʿida* attacks on 11 September of that year were back in charge. Leading politicians in the Global North were simultaneously left the humiliating task of accounting for a whole decade of military engagement in Afghanistan that had caused over 46 000 civilian and more than 3 500 military casualties, with costs incurred amounting to around 840 billion US$ for the USA alone.[1]

Indeed, "The Taliban" had resurfaced to the attention of a wider international public only almost exactly one and a half years before their second takeover of Kabul, when the US-American top-diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad and then-IEA negotiator ʿAbd al-Ghanī Barādar signed an "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" in front of a high-profile international audience in Qatar's capital Doha, an agreement that stipulated the gradual withdrawal of the US contingent of troops from Afghanistan. However, the fact that the armed forces of the IEA advanced across the entire country almost in synchronicity with the incremental withdrawal is clear evidence that their ultimate defeat in December 2001 had been little more but wishful thinking. In fact, all that "Operation Enduring Freedom" had ended was the first central government of the IEA, forcing its leadership council to relocate from Kandahar to Quetta, only some 120 miles away and just on the other side of the national borderline with Pakistan, but firmly controlling and effectively governing numerous pockets of Afghanistan, some of them less than 100 miles away from Kabul. Meanwhile, with the USA-led military invasion of Iraq in

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[1] See, for example, SIGAR (2022), 44–6.

March 2003 under a similar pretext, the focus of media and, subsequently, public attention shifted there, putting Afghanistan back in its former place of rather marginal public and geopolitical interest. However, ending the thirty-five years of uninterrupted and increasingly oppressive rule of the *Arab Socialist Baʿth Party in Iraq* (*Ḥizb al-Baʿth al-ʿArabī al-Ishtirākī fiʾl-ʿIrāq*) plunged the country subsequently into a bloody civil war that ultimately gave rise to *al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya* (*fiʾl-ʿIrāq waʾl-Shām*) – often referred to by its Arabic acronym "DĀʿISH" (here, however, henceforth IS) – and its Islamic Caliphate in eastern Syria and north-western Iraq.

Under such circumstances, it seemed easy to forget about those who, under the leadership of the elusive Mullā Muḥammad ʿUmar ibn Ghulām Nabī (d. c. 1434/2013), had initially set out as the *Islamic Movement of the Taliban* (*Də Ṭālibānō Islāmī Taḥrīk*; ṬIT) and who, since October 1997, go formally by the name of its government, the IEA. Surprisingly, however, even the emergence of an IS chapter in the wider region of Afghanistan and adjacent territories, openly declaring itself in stark opposition to the IEA, did not prompt a significant revivification of serious academic investigations into the latter's religious and political underpinnings.[2] Still widely regarded as only one of many militant groups in and around Afghanistan, and, despite this, lacking sound legal foundations,[3] they were conveniently marked up as "unlawful combatants" and "insurgents" against the UN-approved governments of Afghanistan after 2001. Consequently, most scholarship devoted to them since then has belonged to the fields of geopolitics and security studies. As such, it has tacitly affirmed this label when considering "The Taliban", first and foremost, as a significant factor in security risk assessments for the national reconstruction programmes that the nation-states of the Global North were conducting in the aftermath of their military invasion of Afghanistan.[4]

Certainly, the sheer volume of widely noted publications on the matter carrying the word "Taliban" (with a capital initial) in their titles might lead us to assume that we are fairly well informed about what lies behind this label. Starting with investigative journalist Ahmed Rashid's best-selling and

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[2] Green (2017), 26, names Nagamine (2015) and Hartung (2016a) as the only two more recent relevant studies on the ideological set-up of the IEA after 2001.

[3] Wolfrum and Philipp (2002), 578–86, demonstrate that this status, stipulated by International Humanitarian Law rooted in the Third Geneva Convention of 1949, is not straightforwardly applicable to a *de facto* political regime, regardless of whether or not it is recognized as such by the governments of other individual nations. Consequently, experts on international law have strongly questioned the legality of the endorsement of the combatant status by the Security Council of the UN in its Resolution 1373, adopted on 28 September 2001, which, in fact, served the US government as a mighty tool in its efforts to legitimize its course of action against the IEA: see Kirgis (2001).

[4] The lopsidedness of the current research landscape in this regard has been analysed in Hartung (2024), 21–7. In fact, the arguments presented there follow from the earlier epistemic criticisms of M. J. Hanifi (2011) and S. M. Hanifi (2016; 2018).

generally quite informative account of the political history of the ṬIT / IEA in 2000 (updated in 2008 and fully revised in 2010), such works range from the *Poetry of the Taliban* to *Decoding the New Taliban*, culminating in the more recent *Taliban Reader*.[5] After all, the textbook-like format of a reader on whatever topic insinuates that the contours of the object of study have been quite firmly established and that the gobbets selected for it are comprehensively representative.

Still, it is my contention here that this would actually be quite a fallacy, one that most probably contributed to the misinterpretation of the situation in Afghanistan in 2021 by so-called "experts" advising various governments in the Global North.[6] In fact, it shall be argued here that, although we know of certain names and public responsibilities within a particular military and governmental organization,[7] such data seem to fall seriously short of telling us more about those to whom the label "*taliban*" is attached either by themselves or from the outside, and what they represent in their distinct respective local contexts. In order to get closer to meaningful answers, we would be well advised to cast our view much wider, way beyond those cadres of the ṬIT / IEA of the past and present that we know by name and office. This, in fact, is what is attempted in this present book, and it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that what is understood as "*taliban*" here goes well beyond the confines of the ṬIT / IEA, and may perhaps not be what the esteemed reader might initially expect.

The "*Taliban*" of the Present Book

The first contention, therefore, is that the *taliban*, in this case deliberately with a lower-case initial letter and italics, have historically been more than the ṬIT-cum-IEA of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The lion's share of publications on the subject, however, is focused explicitly and exclusively on this contemporary and organizational facet, which, in fact, is what security analysts and policymakers – a major target audience of these works – are predominantly interested in.[8] While those works are still valuable and

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[5] See Giustozzi (2009); Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012; 2018); also, for example, Schetter and Klusmann (2011).

[6] This matter is well illustrated by the official statement of the then-Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, Heiko Maaß: see AA (2021).

[7] See, for example, Yunas (1998), ɪɪ: 771–5; Rashid (2010), 250–5.

[8] The deep and highly problematic entanglement of academic studies on contemporary Afghanistan and, more pointedly still, those which involve empirical social research, and the military and wider security establishments, especially of the USA, is indeed a matter of serious concern. As careful investigations have unveiled, the at times naïve, at others, deliberately top-down, approach to land and people, going back to the 1960s, has seldom had such a direct and devastating political impact as in the case of Afghanistan: see M. J. Hanifi (2004; 2011); S. M. Hanifi (2016; 2018); Rzehak (2018). In fact, the invasion of the country by USA-led armed forces against the then-central rule of the ṬIT / IEA over

generally useful, they reveal a structural problem: most of the works that bear the term "Taliban" in their title, as well as those that focus on its regional ancillaries, such as the so-called "Ḥaqqānī Network",[9] are greatly lacking in historical depth. As a result, even the ṬIT/IEA has so far, by and large, been presented to us as a solitary group with a definite objective – political rule over Afghanistan and possibly also at least over some parts of Pakistan – bound together by a comprehensible command structure and a singular, distinct ideology.

In fact, all this has already been claimed by Rashid, and, to date, has not been challenged much, thus, equally impacting popular knowledge, political decision-making and academic perspectives. Not least because of its enormous ramifications, it is worth recalling what Rashid had to say on the issue of "The Taliban", or ṬIT/IEA, ideology: according to him, they 'did have an [i.e., a singular uniform] ideological base – *an extreme form of Deobandism*, which was being preached by Pakistani Islamic parties in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan'.[10] While the role of what, for a number of reasons provided elsewhere, is here preferentially called "Deobandiyyat"[11] is certainly a factor to be taken into account, Rashid's own understanding of "Deobandism", which he presented briefly in the following paragraph, is helpful only to a very limited extent:

> Semi-educated mullahs who were far removed from the original reformist agenda of the Deobandi school [and whose] interpretation of Sharia was heavily influenced by Pashtunwali, the tribal code of the Pashtuns, while funds from Saudi Arabia to *madrassas* [sic] and parties which were sympathetic to the Wahabbi [sic] creed, as the Deobandis were, helped these *madrassas* [sic] turn out young militants who were deeply cynical of those who had fought the jihad against the Soviets.[12]

To reiterate the salient points here: "Deobandism", according to the above, is a conglomeration of an 'original reformist agenda' of the Deoband school and

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Afghanistan after September 2001 has only intensified already prevalent tendencies to choose research areas and methodical approaches based on current geostrategic and security interests. Meanwhile, the focus on "the Taliban" so determined has been expanded to the IS in the region, with similar pitfalls regarding the scope, depth and direction of the analysis, as prominently represented by Giustozzi (2018).

[9] See Brown and Rassler (2013). Especially because this label has almost instantly been welcomed in the circles of foreign policy and security advisers across the Global North (see, e.g., Giustozzi [2018], 22) and has consequently informed geostrategic and security policy discourse there, it will benefit from a less partial reassessment: see Section 4.3.

[10] Rashid (2010), 88 (emphasis added).

[11] See Hartung (2016b), 351 and 361.

[12] Rashid (2010), 89f. At this point, we should only take note of Rashid's aligning of Deobandis with Wahhabi Islam, the official interpretation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, because this conjecture will be subjected to careful reassessment subsequently in this book.

a Pashtun tribal code, which is financially, if not ideologically, tied to Saudi Arabia. "Deobandism" comes in variant degrees of radicality. The one that, for Rashid, represents "The Taliban", is inseparably tied to only one of those 'madrassas', situated in Pakistan's former North-West Frontier Province (NWFP, officially renamed Khyber-Paktunkhwa in 2010), and characterized as an 'extremist breakaway faction' of "the" Deobandi tradition, which Rashid problematically conflated here with the *Jamʿiyyat al-ʿUlamāʾ-i Islām* (JUI).[13] More precarious still is Rashid's rather elitist denigration of local religious functionaries as 'semi-educated'. In fact, it will be argued in the present study that it was exactly such dismissive top-down judgements that have contributed over the centuries to the emergence of strong sentiments of suspicion among Borderland inhabitants against imperial narratives and their underlying agendas, sentiments which more often than not were expressed in a violent fashion.

In fact, a quite similar point had already been made in an article on the ideology of "The Taliban" by Pulitzer laureate Anand Gopal and then-researcher Alex Strick van Linschoten[14] in 2017, although not explicitly directed against some derogatory sentiments towards subaltern religiosity and its practitioners.[15] In this important contribution, the two authors succeeded in redirecting our view from Rashid's earlier narrative on the ideological underpinnings of "The Taliban" to a much more complex one that pivots predominantly on subaltern culture in the rural setting of southern Afghanistan.[16] More importantly still, the two authors place their emphasis on the more informal study circles in the public houses (*ḥujrē*; sg. *ḥujrah*) of the southern Pashtun villages, in contrast to the fixation on a more formal religious education in a *madrasah*, as a formative feature in the *taliban* universe.

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[13] This imbalance of the image, in fact, points to a methodological problem that occurs more often than not in empirical research on contemporary religio-political dynamics in this region, especially where the information is based mainly on accounts of interlocutors and has not been correlated with other and perhaps less personal archives. In the case at hand, Rashid appears to have bought perhaps all too willingly into the institutional narrative of the leadership of the Deobandi JUI in Pakistan regarding their affiliation to the ṬIT / IEA.

[14] According to his personal internet site, Strick van Linschoten appears to have left academia, at least for now, and joined the world of computer software development instead: see www.alexstrick.com/about-alex (accessed 20 April 2022).

[15] In the present study, the concept of "subalternity", with all its various grammatical derivatives, is understood as developed by Sardinian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (d. 1937), although without its original ideological implications: as correlational to "dominance", it applies to – economically determined – social groups who are 'always subject to the activity of ruling [or directive social] groups [*gruppi sociale dominante e dirigente*; which, according to Gramsci, are those underpinning the state], even when they rebel or rise up: only "permanent" victory breaks their subordination, [though] not immediately' (Gramsci [1977], III: 2 283, first insertion ibid., III: 1 589). For an application of this concept to the contemporary Pashtun context, see Hartung (2022a).

[16] See Gopal and Strick van Linschoten (2017), 9–15. In fact, the arguments presented in this article also challenge some of the views expressed not that long before by Semple (2014).

However, important as such contemporary observations undoubtedly are, they still call for at least two somewhat interrelated interventions. One is, once again, a lack of historical depth, the other, the fact that, here too, *taliban* are presented as a rather clear-cut entity, pivoting on the high command of the ṬIT / IEA, all of whom share the same regional background.

An interesting alternative is inherent in James Caron's critical remarks on the *Poetry of the Taliban*, a valuable edition of English translations of Pashto poems collected by Strick van Linschoten and his companion Felix Kuehn[17] during their three-year sojourn in Kandahar between 2006 and 2009, from where they were operating the then-nascent research and media-monitoring enterprise *AfghanWire*.[18] Unconvinced by the arguments presented to justify the portrayal of the poems as of ṬIT / IEA provenance, Caron, a profound expert on past and present Pashto literature, suggests viewing this collection more as one of subaltern poetic reflections of 'scattered provenance', dating from a specific period in Afghan history, the 1980s and 1990s.[19] However valid this assessment, the actual point which is intriguing to think further in this direction when considering "The Taliban" is another statement of Caron's in the same book review:

> Instead of documenting "The Taliban," it seems, many of these words simply resonated with individuals who interact with a piecemeal Taliban media infrastructure, and who decided to submit poems, whether their own or other people's, to a Taliban website, just as they might share something with a Facebook group.[20]

What this argument points to is that "*taliban*" frequently actually signifies something that goes well beyond the actual organization of the ṬIT / IEA with which the overwhelming bulk of works that carry the term in their respective titles are primarily concerned.[21] Instead, "*taliban*" appears to designate

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[17] See Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn (2012; 2018).

[18] The archive from which these poems have been taken constitutes what the two authors, alongside Anand Gopal and in conjunction with London-based research and advisory firm Thesigers, keep advertising as their *Taliban Sources Project*, currently hosted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University in New York (URL: http://incite.columbia.edu/taliban-sources-project; accessed 24 February 2024) and the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment FFI, in collaboration with the University of Oslo (URL: www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/resear ch/taliban-sources-repository; accessed 24 February 2024). The First Draft Publishing company (www.firstdraft-publishing.com), set up by Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn in 2014 in Berlin, whereby select items from their collection are published in English translation, is also related to this.

[19] Caron (2012b).

[20] Ibid. A similar point is suggested by Edwards (2017), 163–98, esp. 173–7 (section entitled "Talifans").

[21] *Editorial Note*: This is the rationale behind using the abbreviations ṬIT and IEA throughout for all those instances in which the focus is on the religious and political

a distinct discourse, shaped by widespread literary tropes[22] and selective historical references, all of which are prone to shift with time and space.

"Space", in turn, is a category of crucial importance for the case under review here, because it appears to be one, if not the, formative principle underlying the "*taliban* discourse": materially informed by a distinct topography and climate, it informed both the ethnically defined communal environs and the discursive practice of distinct geopolitical placement by larger imperial powers. Because such practices are ultimately tied to language regimes, such hegemonic actors commonly employ terms such as "tribal societies" to indicate territorially determined socio-political otherness and "frontier" to designate the geopolitical placement within the imperial imaginary, a fact that, consequently, will have to be looked at more closely in the conceptual considerations that make up the following chapter.

Now, because any discourse is highly contingent on ever-changing contexts, at times, the "*taliban* discourse" becomes manifest in organizational forms – the ṬIT / IEA and the slightly later *Taḥrīk-i Ṭālibān-i Pākistān* (TṬP) are just recent cases in point. At other times, however, "*taliban*" reflects rather a certain ethos carried by countless local actors with their individual stakes in it, who would unite in action for distinct and usually locally confined purposes, and would disintegrate again, only to form new temporary and purpose-bound entities, thus reflecting very much what in the present book shall be called "Borderland pragmatics".

Consequently, if we wish to understand the "*taliban* phenomenon" in such a broader and historically deeper manner – and we might be well advised to do so – we inevitably must depart from the trajectory of the current body of *taliban*-related research literature, including, by and large, all the studies named above, with their clear focus on the ṬIT / IEA as a matter of security analyses and geopolitical strategies. Instead, the present volume is inspired far more by the much earlier groundbreaking works of Asta Olesen and, if only to an certain extent, those of David B. Edwards on what he calls "Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier".[23] Both authors show that they are very conscious of the colourful fabric of texts of quite various provenance, as well as of the need for greater historical depth, and their writings thus allow one to understand the ideational background of the events and people which are at

organization of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The term "taliban", in turn, with a lower-case initial letter and italicized, is employed alternately for a distinct literary trope and as a label for an equally distinct discourse within the "Pashtun Borderland".

[22] A vivid example of this would be the very popular love story of Ṭālib Jān and Gul Bashrah: see Nūrī (1387sh/2008); for contextualized analyses, see Caron (2012a); Hartung (2019a), 322f.; (2024), 31.

[23] See Olesen (1995); Edwards (1996, 2002); albeit to a much lesser extent, Edwards (2017).

the core of most extant works on "The Taliban" – namely the ṬIT / IEA – from a much wider and deeper perspective.

Still, the angle taken in the present book differs from those of Olesen and Edwards in some significant regards. Olesen's expositions, for one thing, are entirely focused on the nation-state of Afghanistan, which appears, in itself, perfectly fair. The spatial reference in the present book, however, is owed to the acknowledgement that political borders are essentially discursive, as is demonstrated not least by the persistent refusal of successive Afghan governments to recognize the legality of the national border with Pakistan.[24]

Social anthropologist Edwards, in turn, remains confined to the more common methods of his discipline, which results almost inevitably in much less historical depth as well as the omission of a deeper engagement with indigenous literary production, especially that in Pashto.[25] The present book has attempted to close the gap in research that results from this, acknowledging that what one may call "Borderland literature" represents an important historical backdrop against which realities in the here and now are individually and collectively interpreted.

The work perhaps closest to what is attempted in this present work is that which Nile Green seems to have had in mind when quite recently putting together the edited volume *Afghanistan's Islam*.[26] Of course, as is the nature of an edited volume, argumentative coherence between the separate chapters written by different authors can be provided only to a certain degree, and obtaining such coherence remains obviously rather the prerogative of a monograph by a single author. And, while the same can be said regarding the spatial limitations of the content of Green's volume as in the case of Olesen above, the time frame "From Conversion to the Taliban" appears to be cast a little too wide to have sufficient analytical scope.

Already a decade earlier, Sana Haroon, one of the contributors to Green's volume, had, in her *Frontiers of Faith*, been following a somewhat similar idea. Yet, while highly relevant to the present study, there are two issues with this work that this research tries to redress: first of all, while the time frame of Green's volume seems a bit too ambitious, Haroon limited her investigation to the British colonial period, although with an outlook on the period between the early 1970s and the present in the epilogue.[27] This restriction of the period

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[24] Right from the inception of Pakistan, Afghan governments have, with one exception, continued to dispute the validity of the national border established in 1893 by a series of treaties between the British Empire and the Emirate of Afghanistan: see **Hayat Khan** (2000), 185–96; **Leake** (2017), 120–236. This position was maintained well into the present: see **Faizy** (2017).

[25] For a comprehensive, although to my taste in a few instances a little too unforgiving, critique of Edwards' work in this regard, see **Hanifi** (2004).

[26] See **Green** (2017).

[27] See **Haroon** (2007), 197–216.

under investigation is reflected consistently in the body of textual references, which is dominated by colonial archives that, in turn, shape the author's own perspective of the period under study and of the actors and events therein. In addition, though, a larger stock of Urdu materials was employed, including, as recognized by Caron, 'well-known *tazkiras*, or biographical dictionaries, some containing primary material by the subjects themselves'.[28] Works in other relevant idioms, however, appear to have been used only sparsely.

In contrast, British colonial archives play a much more subordinate role in the present volume, and, where they do, it has been attempted to deconstruct them as constituents of imperial discursive formations. Very much the same effort is made with materials in the many other relevant languages, predominantly Pashto, Urdu and Farsi, owing to the above insight that both language and literature constitute powerful discursive tools, and that any proposition is directed by individual interests and transindividual paradigms.[29] Moreover, what is attempted in this book, both in contrast to and in conversation with core publications on the matter, such as those critically appraised above, is to analytically identify various threads of religious thought and practice that have emerged in response to particular socio-political circumstances, reaching way back in time, but have survived – sometimes only as faint traces – to impact the "*taliban* discourse". This discourse, in turn, emerges less as a set of the kind of fault lines that Edwards is interested in, but more as something like a braid, plaited from all these various threads of different volume and density, in a rather makeshift fashion. Moreover, it is argued here that these processes coincide with those of Pashtun ethnogenesis, mutually shaping each other well into the present, both within each of the communities concerned and across them, and strongly informed by wider geopolitical constellations.

Consequently, the present book contains two larger main sections. The first (Chapter 3) deals with the historical antecedents of the various ideational, or religious, threads that have informed the "*taliban* discourse". These threads are subsequently investigated in the second main section (Chapter 4). Regarding the first part, a *longue durée* perspective[30] has been adopted for the reconstruction of the diverse religious currents that shape the "*taliban* discourse" at the time when Pashtuns themselves had emerged as imperial competitors to their mighty neighbours to the east, west and north, developing their own imperial aspirations in the course of time. While initially buying into external imperial ascriptions of a homogeneous national identity to Pashtuns, this attitude,

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[28] Caron (2016b), 331 (italics in the original).

[29] The understanding of "paradigm" here follows largely that of Kuhn (1962), insofar as it represents the convention within a certain epistemic framework that informs all practices within a given community by claiming universal validity. The significance of power to enforce such a claimed validity was ultimately highlighted only a few years later by Foucault (1966), 13, who used the term "épistémè" to mark this significant difference.

[30] Braudel (1958), esp. 733f., was foundational for this approach.

which had formerly been the privilege of the larger political entities against which the Borderland residents positioned themselves – the Mughals, the Safavids and the Afsharids as their immediate successors, and the various Uzbek Khanates – was embraced by Pashtun Borderland communities themselves. The pivot of this development had been the polity established by the tribal confederation of the Durrani (*də Durrāniyānō ṱōlvākmanī*) in the middle of the eighteenth century, starting out in and around Kandahar, but soon making Kabul their capital, with the other few larger cities under their rule as important imperial nodes.

Yet, not every Pashto-speaking tribal community in the Durrani territories was content with being governed by a single dominant tribal confederation, especially not those in the mountainous areas further to the north and east. It will be argued that, in those places, a critical mass remained highly suspicious of any form of imperial outreach, a fact that made them highly receptive to all kinds of anti-imperialist activism brought to them from outside the Borderland, even more so if those forms of activism were sustained by religious precepts. In Sections 3.2 and 3.3, these historical developments are traced, up to the point when the British parted from their Indian crown colony, highlighting how these waves of originally external religio-political activism resulted in a continuous presence of their underlying ideas and personnel in the Pashtun Borderland. During the period of 150 years that brackets these developments, the inhabitants of the Borderland also had their first exposure to the nation-state ideology, and subsequently appropriated its arguments, leaving them in constant negotiation with the nation-states that Pashtuns found themselves in from the middle of the twentieth century.[31]

The events which unfolded in the early age of the nation-state heightened the tensions between the state's claim of a monopoly on all administrative matters within the now meticulously established and formally documented territorial confines. It consequently set, as will be argued here, the tone for those political and, moreover, ideational developments that would ultimately culminate in the various socio-political manifestations of the "*taliban* discourse" since the 1990s on either side of the intricate national borderline between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Subsequently, in the second main part of the book (i.e., Chapter 4), four ideational currents at play in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries are traced in a somewhat ideal-typical fashion. In reality, of course, they frequently overlapped in manifold ways, depending very much on the Borderland

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[31] As such, Pashtun communities share a common fate with peoples in similar topographical and geopolitical constellations, for example, with Kurdish ones mainly located between the nation-states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, Tyrolese ones between Austria and Italy, and Basque ones between France and Spain, to mention but a few. Indeed, an in-depth comparison would be worthwhile, as indicated, for instance, by Hartung (2017a).

pragmatics mentioned above, which, at times, commended collaboration between tendencies that were otherwise ideologically opposite, while, at others, the ideological divide appeared rather rigid, resulting in the respective advocates on either side standing somewhat apart from each other. Indeed, it is argued here that the world-view of the various socio-political manifestations of the "*taliban* discourse", including prominently the ṬIT / IEA, was strongly informed by sometimes even antagonistic positions on Islamic doctrine and practice, some of which have themselves emerged only from their creative interplay.

In this regard, "Salafism" and what is labelled here "Frontier Deobandiyyat" are the two ideational currents that stand out prominently. Yet, either one of them is the result of complex processes of intellectual cross-fertilization and an eventual synthesis of other, earlier, such threads: while "Salafism" represents the synthesis of "Salafi Islam" and "Islamism",[32] "Frontier Deobandiyyat" refers, first of all, to a distinctly local variety of the Sunni endeavours towards religious "reformulation"[33] associated with the *Dār al-ʿUlūm* seminary in northwest-Indian Deoband, but has, moreover, been burgeoning into a plethora of alternative and also conflicting interpretations, including explicitly militant ones. In keeping with the imaginary of a "*taliban* world-view" as a braid plaited from these currents, each one of them also represents an evolutionary step and is, therefore, investigated individually. Lastly, these analyses are rounded off by looking carefully into the dynamics of discourse caused by the emergence of what we may call "International Muslim Militancy" in the Pashtun Borderland, spearheaded by organizations such as *al-Qāʿida* in its various manifestations and, eventually, also the IS (Section 4.5). In contrast to a lot of the *al-Qāʿida*-centric literature, the focus here is much more on the rather ambiguous interactions of these various non-Pashtun outfits with the space-bound contemporary socio-political manifestations of the "*taliban* discourse", most prominently, although certainly not exclusively, the ṬIT / IEA and TṬP. Ultimately, the discussions of the separate ideational currents are brought together in the conclusion (Chapter 5), presented as the braid that makes up substantial parts, if not the entirety, of the world-view of "The Taliban".

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[32] For robust working definitions of each one of these academically and popularly contested categories, especially those that carry an "Ism", see the respective sections in the second part of the book.

[33] This term, adopted from the title of the ESRC-funded research project "Islamic Reformulations: Belief, Violence, Governance" at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter (2013–16, Principal Investigator Robert Gleave), is employed here and throughout the book, instead of "reform" and its derivatives, such as "reformation" and "reformism", all of which come with a rather heavy baggage of historical semantics.

From a *longue durée* vantage point, the pivotal argument made here is that the "*taliban* discourse" is very much informed by the topographical and geopolitical setting of the "Pashtun Borderland". This entity, of course, initially needs to be conceptualized, at least tentatively, in order for one to attach to it auxiliary conceptual terms, such as the already-mentioned "Borderland pragmatics". Moreover, this argument also accounts for the fact that, despite the division of the world along the lines of nation-states, we still have large communities, usually at the fringes of nation-state territories, which subscribe to such alternative forms of social and political organization that were regarded as somewhat primordial and archaic in the imperial narratives, which were increasingly informed by Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas of civilizational progress. In the following, therefore, it is shown that a tribally structured society is by no means an anachronism, but rather a quite generic feature in the age of the nation-state, more often than not coinciding with particular topographies and geopolitical placement.