

Observation no: 222

Country-year: 2000

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

The Taliban gained power in Afghanistan during the Civil War that occurred after the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

The military and the communist party forces within Afghanistan (with Soviet backing) initiated a coup in 1978. A subsequent coup was also conducted in 1990.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Mullah Mohammed Omar was a jihadi fighter against the Soviets in the Afghan-Soviet war.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

Yes.

The majority of senior leaders within the Afghani Taliban fighting corps were Pashtuns from the Kandahar, Helmand, and Urozgan provinces and in general the Taliban forces were Sunni.¹

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

¹ Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion, and the New Order in Afghanistan* (Oxford: Zed Books, 1998); Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, (New Haven: Yale, 2001), pg. 98.

All senior leaders within the Taliban forces were vetted and awarded for strict ideological loyalty to the precepts of the Taliban.²

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

While there are no senior officer corps in a traditional sense, the leaders within the Taliban force were all members of the Taliban.³

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

Religious education and loyalty to the Taliban are key elements of jihadi training.⁴

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The Taliban were in a near constant state of conflict with tribal groups throughout the country, especially during the mid-90s in which the Taliban was cementing its power over Afghanistan through battles in many key Afghani cities.⁵

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

The military in this case is so tightly linked to the regime and Mullah Omar that it is impossible to differentiate the Taliban as a political entity from the military forces it uses to exert its power.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion, and the New Order in Afghanistan* (Oxford: Zed Books, 1998).

⁵ Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil war, and the Future of the Region* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

No.

The Taliban operates more like a paramilitary optimized for regime security than a regular military.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

Yes.

The Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice was created to spy and inform on members of the community and the military. At its height it had 20,000 spies and 100,000 informants—including those embedded within the military.⁶

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

I could find no evidence of a purge of the senior military leaders, though there is very limited information about the make-up of the senior military members and the militia-style organization of the Taliban makes it very difficult to follow the movement of these senior leaders within the political and military apparatus during these years.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No.

Though a military shura technically existed to exchange information about military operations, most decision-making was conducted informally between Mullah Omar and key members of his inner circle.⁷

⁶ Ben Brandt, "The Taliban's Conduct of Intelligence and Counterintelligence," *CTC Sentinel*, June 11, 2001. Accessed May 26, 2015.

<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-taliban's-conduct-of-intelligence-and-counterintelligence>

⁷ Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, pg. 98.