

**RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER OF
AFGHANISTAN FOR GLOBAL PEACE IN THE MODERN WORLD**

Dominic Obielosi C., PhD

&

Obi, Rowland Ijomah

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

chimeikeuwa@gmail.com

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Abstract

Afghanistan, one of the countries in the middle-east over the years has been known for incessant religious conflicts, extremism, and violence. It has also served as a home for different shades of Islamic movements like the Shiite and sunni Muslims. Some of these militant groups are founded with the belief that they are in solidarity with the people against all manner of oppression, impoverishment, and deprivation of sustainable development. But instead, their real motive appears to be an establishment of Islam as a state religion. To them, western influence and control through especially education and culture are sacrilegious as stipulated by Islamic teachings and belief system. And so this western dominance and lifestyle must be resisted at all cost. It is the opinion of this study that the Taliban Islamic fundamentalist group was established with this notion of putting to an end the perceived westernization of Afghanistan by the west. The study believes that this development with its attendant implications has unsettled the peace of the global community. This peace as revealed by this article has not only eluded the Afghan nation since the movement started as can be seen through mass executions without judicial trial, barring of women from schools and work places, but also the global community where there still exist religious intolerance, unrest, and tension. The study therefore recommends that in as much as no country can achieve sustainable development without peace, the international community has a duty to ensure systematic intelligence and provide guidelines toward appropriate action in some of these most entrenched conflict zones of the world.

Keywords: Taliban, Afghanistan, Peace, Fundamentalism, Islam

Introduction

Over the years, global peace especially in the modern world has been so threatened by diverse acts of terrorism, ethno-religious clashes, political conflicts, tensions and wars among citizens and by extension nations. This is coming as a result of economic interest, attempt at religious imposition and domination, ethnic or sectional ideology, poverty, hunger, oppression, religious fanaticism, extremism and fundamentalism, human right violations, corruption, injustice, inequality, failed leadership, severe unemployment among others. These sociopolitical and religious ills have without doubt given birth to the rise of several militant groups across the world and particularly in the Middle East, South Asia and West Africa. Some of these militant groups include the Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS, Islamic state for West Africa province (ISWAP), Alshabab, Boko Haram and others.

These militant groups however create the impression that they are fighting to liberate the citizens who they believe are being oppressed and subjected to all manner of abuse, poverty, hunger ranging from deprivation of sustainable development, good leadership to high moral standards; but underneath, they seem to be championing a total Islamic state with Islam recognized ultimately as a state religion which on its part will control, affect and influence the citizens' social, economic, political, cultural, tribal and ethnic life styles and actions. To them, everything about westernization including democracy, education, religion and culture are believed to be sacrilegious and must be decimated. Anyone as they appear to declare who identifies with them especially anything other than Islamic religion is labeled an infidel which when translated represents an unbeliever. Again to them, a supposed infidel must be summarily executed and most times openly and in an inhuman way to serve as a deterrent to others. These militants due to some of these unconstitutional and uncivilized posture on critical issues of governance and religion are oftentimes referred to as hardliners, fanatics, extremists and fundamentalists.

Indeed, this coupled with an unrelenting effort to foist their ideology on the people, they are usual involved in acts of terrorism, extra-judicial killings, maiming, raping, burning down of houses, police stations, military establishments and other government institutions, suicide bombings and the likes. They are fearless, courageous and are ever ready to die fighting to actualize this ideology. Again, with the birth of these islamic militant groups, the global insecurity situation seemed to have assumed a higher and more complex dimension. Apart from the frequency and intensity of deadly attacks and carnages carried out by these militants, peace appear to have eluded the global community with the likes of United States, Britain, Palestine, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Libya and even Nigeria among other nations contending to stem the tide.

It is in view of this that this paper among other submissions will attempt to examine critically the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, highlight the roles terrorism and insecurity have so far played in ensuring that peace among nations or political stability especially in the Middle East and South Asia appear to remain a mirage. The paper will also consider the negative impact of bad governance, corruption, injustice, inequality, poverty, hunger, oppression and even economic interest of nations within another nation among others contribute to becoming breeding grounds for Islamic fundamentalism, extremism and fanaticism which by extension gives rise to tensions, agitations, conflicts, chaos, crisis and ultimately war instead of peace. It will further examine the religious implications of the Taliban takeover of the state of Afghanistan for global peace in the modern world.

Definition of Key Terms

The research considers the definition of the terms which include religion, peace and takeover as being very key looking at the topic of the discourse as well as its overall context. This will enable the reader to have a clear view and understand what the paper is out to achieve.

- *Religion*

This is a popular term that has been given different definitions by scholars in different fields of human endeavour. Yet, it is an important feature of human history that cannot ordinarily be under played. In the view of Anyanwu (2004), religion is the “human interaction with the supernatural in order to cope with the crises of life”(p.34). Okereke (1983) submits that it is “a link between man and God and the sum total of man’s relationship with God and the transcendent”(p.44). In the words of Omoregbe (1999), it is essentially “a relationship, a link between two persons namely a human person and the divine believed to be in existence”(p.144). In other words, religion is man’s relationship with the supernatural.

It could be understood however that there is an obvious interaction between religion and the society within which it functions. Religion performs a variety of functions. The first is on the individual as it affects social behaviour. The second is that religion interacts and influences other facets or social institutions in the society such as the polity and economy. These institutions also influence the religious institutions, the effect of which affect in a fundamental way a people’s way of life. And so the Taliban appear to and have applied the negative functions of religion such as fanaticism and extremism which breeds terrorism, insecurity and the threat of war to takeover the government of Afghanistan.

- Peace

This is a term that is against war and the opposite of peace is war while the absence of peace is war. War depicts a situation of unrest, chaos, tension and violence such as terrorism, religious, sectarian or regional conflicts for political, economic and ethnic considerations. Peace is also defined as security, stability and harmony.

Moreso, Ofunleife (cited in Awolalu, 1970) affirms that peace is “a condition of tranquilized conflict which represents the sum total of all that man desires; an undisturbed harmonious life”(p.136). To him, it is a condition required for socio-political as well as economic development and administrative effectiveness.

Global peace on its own could be seen as global security which is a premise for economic growth and development among nations. This is because peaceful nations attract foreign investors while domestic investors freely operate the economy with little or no tensions, conflicts, crisis and apprehensions; and security as well as religious harmony seem to be the pillar upon which every meaningful development particularly global peace could be achieved and sustained.

- *Takeover*

This simply denotes an act of assuming control of leadership, governance and power. In the case of the Taliban, it was not a peaceful transition, constitutional or through the global acceptable democratic means but instead, it is a forceful overthrow of government through primarily the barrel of a gun, religious fundamentalism and acts of terrorism where the Afghan nation was rendered ungovernable and in a state of war.

A glimpse of the Taliban identity and Afghan nation

The Taliban were founded in southern Afghanistan by a man named Mullah Mohammed Umar a member of the Pashtun tribe who later became a mujahedeen commander that helped to push the soviets out of the country in 1989. In 1994, Mullah Omar formed the group in Kandahar with about fifty followers who rose up to challenge the instability, corruption, bad leadership and crime that seemed to have consumed the country during the post-soviet era civil war.

The Taliban whose name according to Abu-Nimer (2017) is translated “students”(p.163) which is a reference to the founding members having studied under Mullah Omar quickly captured Kandahar and seized the capital, Kabul in 1996 as Afghans grew disenchanted with the country’s political instability and insecurity. They swiftly imposed strict and harsh Islamic rules that banned television and music, barred girls from going to school and forced women to wear head to toe coverings called *burqas*. Above all, they provided

Bin Laden with sanctuary while he planned the September 11 2001 terror attacks in the United States.

When the Taliban refused the United States demands that they hand over Osama Bin laden, American forces invaded the country and quickly toppled Mullah Omars government. Omar and other Taliban leaders found sanctuary in neighboring Pakistan while they mounted an insurgent campaign to regain power in the country. This insurgency against the Afghan government, America, and their western allies lasted for close to 20 years. In February 2020, the United States and Taliban signed what appeared to be a historic deal that laid out a 14 month timetable for America to withdraw all of its forces from Afghanistan.

The Taliban's ideology

It is important to observe that during its earlier five years in power, the Taliban enforced a strict version of the sharia law. Women were predominantly barred from working or studying and were confined to their homes unless accompanied by a male guardian. No wonder hours before the eventual fall of the government, women were seen pleading that they do not want to go back to that horrible era again when the Taliban were in power some years back.

Public executions and floggings were common, western films and books were banned, and several cultural artifacts seen as blasphemous under Islam were instantly destroyed. Opponents and some western countries accuse the Taliban of wanting to return to this style of governance in the areas it already controls. A claim the group denies. The group however revealed that their primary aim of engaging in insurgency is to institute a genuine Islamic system for Afghanistan that would make provisions for women and minority rights in line with cultural traditions and religious rules.

Taliban and the mounting challenges ahead

Winning the war might just turn out to be the easy part as maintaining peace and governing the conflict reeked and impoverished country will certainly be a tough nut to crack. Therefore, this situation depicts mounting challenges ahead. This section takes a look at six challenges facing the armed group as it prepares to rule the country of thirty eight million people for the second time since 2001.

i. Acceptance

The government of president Ashraf Ghani failed to meet the aspirations of the citizens as their standard of living barely improved with poor basic services such as health and

education. The government was marred by corruption while the security situation remained precarious forcing thousands of Afghans to leave the country. Many notorious militia leaders and their henchmen were rehabilitated despite their atrocious human rights record and corruption. Many citizens were frustrated and ready for a change, but that does not mean that they welcome the return of the Taliban.

ii. Stretched forces

The armed group in a span of weeks captured most of the provincial capitals including the capital Kabul in a virtually unopposed lightning military sweep that brought back memories of the American trained Iraqi troops fleeing battle fields in the face of the marauding ISIS fighters in 2014. The group launched its military offensive as the American led foreign forces began to withdraw from the country as part of an agreement it signed with the United States on February 29, 2020 in the Qatari capital.

The group found it easy to seize a large number of districts but holding on to major cities is another proposition with one requiring significant amount of manpower; and with almost all of Afghanistan under their control and fewer than one hundred thousand active combatants, the group appear to have been stretched.

iii. Governance

The group has been good at one thing which is fighting, but governing a country so diverse like Afghanistan with almost negligible modern infrastructure poses a great challenge. They have at times been credited with being good only at maintaining security albeit through very heavy handed means as well as providing efficient forms of traditional justice, but they have little or no technocratic understanding of how to perform the other functions of government.

They will likely struggle to provide effective governance to the people as the government does not have much revenue to spend on public services. This is the essence of its problems presently.

iv. Controlling its forces

The war against a foreign occupation united the Taliban's rank. Now, when these fighters become governors and mayors and have access to incoming revenues and authority, the challenge here is resisting going down the same route previous governments followed and faced so as not to be accused of corruption and abuse of power. The mujahedeen struggled with this in the wake of the soviet withdrawal when they no longer had the unifying cry of defeating the godless communists and instead turned their weapons on each other.

v. *The past*

The Taliban's last stint in power between 1996 and 2001 was marred by abuse against ethnic minorities and curbs on women's rights, while the country was isolated internationally. Since retaking power on August 15, 2021, the militants talking points include respecting women's role in the public sphere, human right and the rights of the minorities.

They face a huge challenge to ensure an acceptable level of human rights as well as gender rights policies, media and civil society laws, ethnic and minority rights. Also to visibly sever ties with other militant and terror groups. It is only time will tell if any of these lessons have been learnt.

vi. *Economy and reliance on foreign aid*

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and more than 20 percent of its gross income comes from foreign aid. The United States has frozen some of the country's central bank's financial assets in the wake of the Taliban takeover while the international monetary fund has also suspended access to its funds.

Many other western donors might follow suit thereby making it extremely difficult for the group to run the economy in a country where 75 percent of public spending comes from grants. Significant mineral wealth remains underground as instability has prevented major exploration and international investment. Although the Taliban have been talking to countries like Russia and China about possible economic co-operation projects, it remains to be seen how that will materialize.

Religious implications for global peace

Religious fundamentalism has remained one of the major causes of many conflicts around the world. Persecution, forced conversion and violent conflict have equally been advanced under the cloak of religion. Boer(1976). Religious induced violence is almost becoming a regular occurrence particularly in the Middle East, South Asia, some parts of Europe and America including Africa. It oftentimes degenerate to wanton destruction of lives and property and ultimately full blown war as it is in the case of Afghanistan and some northern states in Nigeria. As a result of these conflicts and tensions which happens due to religious extremism, global peace has been largely on the receiving end. This section will attempt to highlight some of the religious implications which either way may affect global peace at the long run.

- ***Islamic expansionism***

It took the militants close to 20 years of intense fighting to reclaim the state of Afghanistan. This to some extent could be viewed as a push to expand the frontiers of radical islamism as well as sending a signal of intent to the international community that it is not about the time but most importantly about their perceived determination to champion, promote and above all achieve their islamic ideology. To them, peace could be sacrificed so as to achieve and as well expand islamic faith, values and practices.

- ***Safe haven for extremists***

The primary reason for the United States led invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks was the Taliban refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden considered by Washington to be an international fugitive. With this development, it is argued that there is no guarantee that the country wouldn't once again become a safe haven for terrorists like Al-Qaeda, ISIS and for terrorism in general with the intent on doing harm particularly to western nations. And this constitutes threat to global peace and national security.

- ***Possible destabilization of Pakistan***

The Pakistan's intelligence services is widely believed to have helped foster the Taliban prior to the religious movement's 1996 takeover in Afghanistan. Again, Pakistan's military has long viewed an ideologically and religiously like-minded Afghanistan as a necessary bulwark against its traditional rival, India. But the country's long and porous border with Afghanistan has brought it as much trouble as brotherhood. Over the years, the country has housed tens of thousands of Afghan refugees in border camps thereby placing a financial and political strain on a succession of shaky governments in Islamabad.

Moreover, the Taliban in Afghanistan as Asad (2016) observed "helped inspire the deadly Pakistani Taliban"(p.146) and the leaders of the two groups are reportedly at odds. Even so, if there is a Taliban government in Afghanistan, certainly that is going to embolden the Pakistani Taliban and ultimately endanger peace in the country.

- ***Encourage Islamic extremism***

Islamic extremism presently has divided the global community along sectarian, ethnic and tribal lines and the ascendance of Afghan Islamists, Berdal (2021) posited "certainly will embolden other militants and radicals across the world"(p.47). It is argued that in a situation where some middle east nations such as Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and others appear to be supporting the Taliban while also making effort to maintain good relations especially in the area of sustainable peace among nations is to say

the least playing a risky game and that is never going to prove sustainable in the long run. It is important to also observe that a country like Pakistan which has managed to somehow kick the can down the road for a long time now will soon reach the end of the road.

- ***Quest for domination and control***

In a situation where a particular Islamic militant group is advancing their religious values and practices through forced conversion and without an option on sharia law is an indication of making a statement of intent to domination as well as control of governance, it paves the way for an imminent violence, tension and war, for peace depicts an absence of war. As it is presently in Afghanistan, these fundamentalists cannot retreat despite social, political and economic entreaties until their ultimate goal is achieved. They appear to be ever ready to make the supreme prize, infiltrate countries, provided they secure domination and control, and by so doing threaten global peace.

- ***Increased conflicts and violence***

The Afghan Taliban conquest no doubt will embolden other militant groups across the world with the possibility of victory despite several years of fighting, conflict, violence and acts of terrorism in places where they appear to have strongholds. As a result of this determination anchored on religion, several countries of the world will witness increased attacks and religious violence as could be seen presently in the case of Nigeria where peace is no more guaranteed but instead religious violence and killings by the Boko Haram militant group.

- ***Advancing religious indoctrination***

These militants oftentimes take advantage of corruption, pervasive unemployment, poverty, hunger, oppression, bad governance, failed leadership and other social ills among different nations to promote indoctrination of radical and extreme islamism. It is argued that where these factors exist, some citizens seem easily influenced as well as become prey to these militants and their radical teachings on islam.

- ***Criminality and insecurity***

No nation thrives or succeeds where criminality and insecurity are seen to be the order of the day. And there is no peace in an environment of criminality and insecurity. As part of their plan to take control of political power and by extension institute radical islamic laws, customs and practices, these militants oftentimes are believed to engage in criminal

activities such as armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping among others with the intention of raising funds for purchase of dangerous weapons.

- ***Foreign aid***

It is believed that the group will require humanitarian agencies to provide urgent aid to Afghans displaced by the war. Ally (2021) affirmed that “over five million Afghans are estimated to have been internally displaced”(p.173) since the onslaught began. But with the aid agencies including the United Nations pulling their staff out of the country, things will be difficult for citizens’ dependent on foreign aid. In order to unlock international funding, the global community’s recognition of a Taliban government will be key as the group is still blacklisted by the United Nations.

The Taliban however seem to have shrugged off the idea of reliance on foreign aid stating that as Katzen stein (2020) observed “its fighters survived on bread and water while fighting the war”(p.83). The challenge is for them to seek for means to convince millions of Afghan citizens to live without the foreign help they have relied on for years. It is also an opportunity for foreign donors and aid agencies to persuade the group to accept their terms in return for aid.

- ***Influx of refugees***

The international community will have to contend with the mass movement of people from the war ravaged country to countries where they will find shelter and other benefits that will enable them to stand again. For instance, the group claim that they are committed to upholding the rights of women under Islam, but the reality on ground tells an entirely different story in that women and girls have been turned away from schools and universities, ordered not to leave their homes without a male guardian, and flogged mercilessly for breaching the imposed rules. There have also been incidences of forced marriages and targeted attacks against women and girls. These portends danger that even some western countries like America, Britain and others have a responsibility to ensure that asylum is offered to these people and their rights protected. It is important to also observe that refugees influx if not properly checked and managed will give rise to poverty and hunger which will also result to insecurity and affect the peace of any country.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that no society functions in an environment that is without peace. Any country that experiences ethno-religious crisis, tensions, conflicts, violence and war through the activities of various militant groups like Afghanistan will encounter no meaningful development or progress. Crime and lawlessness abound in such a country.

The second coming of the Taliban in the government of Afghanistan through largely the barrel of gun poses a great security threat and instability within the country and the global community. It has also become a safe haven to trans-border criminals and a threat to international peace.

The international community in order to ensure global peace should encourage systematic intelligence, scientific surveillance, investigations and inquiry so as to unravel the root cause of various religious fundamentalism, agitations, conflicts and tensions which gives rise to the emergence of different militant groups and open up a platform or forum for debates, discussions, conversations and dialogue to enable the warring parties embrace harmony, tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

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