

Taliban - UPSC International Relations Notes

The Taliban (spelt alternatively as Taleban) is an Islamic fundamentalist political and military organisation operating in Afghanistan. They have dominated Afghan polity for quite some time and feature regularly in international affairs. Hence, they are an important organization for the [UPSC exam](#) IR segment.

In this article, you can read all about what is the Taliban, how it originated and the role it played and continues to play in the world, and especially Afghanistan. You can also read about its relations with India.

What is the Taliban?

The Taliban is a Sunni fundamentalist organisation that is involved in Afghan politics. It is also a military group that is involved in an insurgency against the currently elected government in Afghanistan.

- The Taliban controlled almost three-quarters of the country from 1996 to 2001 and was notorious for their strict implementation of the Sharia or Islamic law there.
- The period saw widespread abuse of human rights, especially targeted against women.
- The current head of the Taliban is **Hibatullah Akhundzada**.
- Mullah Omar is regarded as the founder of the Taliban. He died in 2013.
- The Taliban officially refers to itself as the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'.
- The word 'Taliban' in Pashto means 'students'.

Taliban - Origins

Background of the origins of the Taliban - Events that led to the rising in power of the Taliban

The [Saur Revolution in Afghanistan](#) in 1978 installed a communist party in power there.

- This government introduced many reforms for modernisation and hence was considered too radical by some.
- Rural areas and the traditional power structures were unhappy with the new scheme of things and this led to anti-government protests in many places.
- There were divisions even within the government.
- The USSR intervened in Afghanistan wanting to place a communist ally in government there.
- In December 1979, the Soviet Army was deployed in Kabul. They orchestrated a coup killing the ruling President Hafizullah Amin.
- The Soviets installed their ally, Babrak Karmal as the President of Afghanistan.
- The USA and other western countries saw this as Soviet invasion.
- A bitter war was fought between Soviet troops and the insurgent groups called Mujahideen. While the cities and towns were under Soviet control, the rural parts were under the control of the Mujahideen.
- The Mujahideen were persistent in their fight against the USSR and were also supported by the USA, China, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They were given training and weapons.
- The citizens of Afghanistan suffered the most in this protracted war. Many civilians lost their lives and homes. Afghan refugees poured into countries like Pakistan, Iran and even India.
- The Soviets withdrew troops in 1989 after nine long years and at the cost of the lives of 20 lakh Afghans civilians.
- Now, the government of Afghanistan had to fight the Mujahideen alone.
- The insurgents took control of Kabul in 1992. There was a bloody civil war as the Mujahideen themselves were divided into various factions all vying for power.
- In 1994, a group of students seized control of the city of Kandahar and started a battle for power to

control the entire country. They were called the Taliban. They were Islamic fundamentalists. In fact, many of them were trained in camps in Pakistan where they were refugees.

- In 1995, the Taliban captured the province of Herat and in 1996, Kabul.
- By 1998, almost the entire country was under the control of the Taliban.
- Some of the Mujahideen warlords fled to the north of the country and joined the Northern Alliance who were fighting the Taliban.

Afghanistan under the Taliban regime

Initially, when they came to power, the people of Afghanistan generally welcomed the Taliban. This is because they seemed to offer stability in a country wracked by long and bloody civil wars.

- The Taliban's promise was to restore peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and enforce Sharia in the country.
- Afghans were tired of the fighting between the Soviets and the Mujahideen and welcomed the Taliban, who were successful initially in weeding out corruption and removing lawlessness.
- The Taliban introduced their interpretation of Islamic law, which meant that several rights were suspended for people, especially women and children.
- They endorsed Sharia mixed with the Pashtun tribal code.
- Women were required to wear burqas covering their whole bodies including faces; men had to grow beards.
- Women could not go out of the house without a male family member accompanying them. They could not work outside.
- The Taliban discouraged girls from going to school, and at one point, banned girls above the age of eight to go to school.
- Public executions were held for those accused of murder and adultery. Amputations were also done for those accused of stealing.
- They banned television, music, kite-flying, cinema, photography, painting, etc. Women were barred from attending sports events or playing them.
- People, especially women faced public floggings for any perceived wrongs.
- The Taliban is also accused of carrying out massacres against civilians, especially ethnic or religious minority groups. Thousands were killed, women raped and people are still unaccounted for.
- Needless to say, they did not believe in democracy.
- The Taliban was much criticised for blowing up the 1500-year old Buddha statues of Bamiyan because they were idols.

Taliban - International Relations

- Only three countries recognised the Taliban while they were in power namely, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. They are believed to have been receiving funds from both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.
- After the 9/11 attacks on the US, the Taliban drew focus from all over the globe.
- It was accused of sheltering Osama Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda, who were blamed for the 9/11 attacks.
- In fact, the US intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 to deny Al Qaeda a safe haven and a base to operate in the country.
- Pakistan officially broke off diplomatic ties with the organisation after 9/11. However, many top leaders of the Taliban are said to have escaped to Quetta in Pakistan, from where they were controlling the organisation.
- The Taliban were removed from power in October 2001 by a coalition of forces led by the USA and several other countries (including NATO nations).
- In December 2001, a new interim government was placed in Afghanistan headed by Hamid Karzai.

- The country gradually started reconstruction work after long years of bitter battles and underdevelopment.
- However, the Taliban was reorganised by its leader Mullah Omar after its defeat, who launched an insurgency against the Afghan government.
- It wages war in the form of suicide attacks, ambushes and guerilla raids and turncoat killings against the coalition forces.
- Slowly through the second half of the 2000s, civilian killings rose in number.

Currently, the Taliban are in talks with the USA, who are eager to withdraw from the country. For more on this, please check [CNA dated March 2nd, 2020](#).

India's Relations with the Taliban

India has never recognised the Taliban while they were in power. In 1999, an Indian Airlines flight was hijacked and landed in Kandahar, and it was suspected that the Taliban supported the hijackers. India also supported a key anti-Taliban group, the Northern Alliance.