



The Impact of China's Active Engagement with Neo-Taliban on the Security of China

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(Received: Mar. 30, 2021 Revised: May. 14, 2021 Accepted: Jul. 16, 2021)

Abstract

China is actively engaged in Afghanistan, especially with the Neo-Taliban, which indicates significant changes in China's foreign policy. The Chinese government invited the Neo-Taliban delegations several times and tried to expand their role in their country. The present study examines the impact of China's active engagement with the Neo-Taliban, using Ibn Khaldun's Social Theory and Discourse Analysis. Questioning the nature of the active engagement of China with Neo-Taliban, we hypothesized an increase in insecurity overflow from Afghanistan to China, as well as an increase in insecurity complications in Afghanistan against China's interests. It became clear that the Neo-Taliban's increasing interaction with China was to the detriment of Taliban and ultimately China. The Doha Peace Agreement requested the control and restriction of foreign fighters residing in Afghanistan, which for the foreign fighters, including the Uighurs, were a reminder of the restrictions imposed on them before the fall of the Islamic Emirate. However, Mullah Omar did not openly engage with China. This will delegitimize the Afghan Neo-Taliban and ultimately create a disperse Neo-Taliban with a fragile legitimacy, whose fragility does not seem to collapse, but will not serve China's interests either.

Keywords: Afghanistan, China, Foreign Fighters, Ibn Khaldun Social Theory, Neo-Taliban

Journal of **World Sociopolitical Studies** | Vol. 5 | No. 4 | Autumn 2021 | pp. 771-801

Web Page: <https://wsps.ut.ac.ir/> Email: wsps@ut.ac.ir

eISSN: 2588-3127

PrintISSN: 2588-3119

DOI: 10.22059/WSPS.2022.335828.1257



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1. Introduction

China's approach to Afghanistan has always been affected by the defeats of the great powers in this country (Miao & Xue, 2021). Accordingly, in principle, despite transnational security threats, China has never accepted the risk of military intervention in Afghanistan and has tried to influence existing interactions and processes through the lens of diplomacy and economics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2003). The country has never recognized the communist government of Afghanistan for being a “puppet”, but has had extensive interactions with officials of all governments of Afghanistan since the fall of the Islamic Emirate and the military occupation of the country by the West. Perhaps the most important reason for this is China's common interests with the West and the governments in Afghanistan after 2001 on security and counter-terrorism issues, which provided the basis for dialogue and recognitions (Zhu & Cao, 2012; Zhu, 2018; Hong, 2013). Indeed, China is concerned about the overflow of insecurity from Afghanistan to China's Xinjiang (Zhao, 2012) and believes that a secure Afghanistan leads to a secure region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2014a). This determines Afghanistan's strategic importance to China in a way that convinces it to cooperate with the West despite China's concerns about Afghanistan, especially after the Western occupation. The most important of these are China's concern about US efforts to influence China's interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia and its efforts to confine China through Afghanistan and Central Asia (Zhang, 2013; Tishehyar & Tuyserkani, 2017, pp. 9-10), the security of a one-way belt project (One Belt One Road Initiative), the US effort to influence China's economic project by strengthening rival projects by focusing on Afghanistan as a transit route (Noorali & Ahmadi, 2022), and placing Afghanistan on the Middle East Shatter-belt (Niu & Huang,

2022). That is the reason for which China supported Afghanistan's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization so that it might be able to continue to secure its interest against terrorism under the organization and reduce the US influence on China's interests in Afghanistan, and thus, the region. These conditions have intensified in recent years, following the rise of the ISIS. Indeed, the impact of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on China's economic interests in Pakistan and the group's temporary alliance with the ISIS and the emergence of ISK (Islamic State of Khorasan) in the region focusing on Uyghurs participation, especially after their involvement in Syria, has increased China's concerns. With the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, the importance and the position of this country in China's security system has reached its highest level.

In general, China views foreign policy on a basis of economic, technological, and environmental relations, rather than military and political ones. It believes that security challenges in Asia, especially in Afghanistan as the "heart of Asia", are of a very complex nature and should be addressed with a comprehensive and innovative strategy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2014b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2021a). Accordingly, China and Afghanistan have been cooperating extensively in peace and capacity building since 2013, with the Joint Declaration Between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Deepening Strategic and Cooperative Partnership. After 2013, we witnessed the intensification of interactions between the two countries and the mutual support of each other on issues of mutual interests in the field of economics, One-China Policy, and the achievement of peace (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2014c; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2016). As a

result, China's policy towards the peace process in Afghanistan has always put an emphasis on political solutions and negotiations, emphasizing that any peace must be Afghan-led, inclusive and universal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2020). Following the fall of the Republic in Afghanistan by the advent of the Taliban, China has emphasized inclusiveness, the fight against terrorism, and achieving the development in Afghanistan, and has described true peace as Afghan-owned and Afghan-led (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2021b; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2021c). In this regard, China considers the West's withdrawal from Afghanistan as an example of real domination of the Afghan people over their destiny and future, and emphasizes the relevance of the relationship between China's economic and security interests under the fight against terrorism and the One Belt One Road Initiative project (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2021d; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2021e). These clearly indicate the importance of Afghanistan in China's foreign policy.

China's engagement with the developments in Afghanistan to secure its foreign policy interests dates back to the years of the struggle against the Soviet Union. In those years, China assisted the United States in equipping and training the Mujahedeen and is said to have not prevented Uighurs from traveling to Afghanistan. However, with China's increasing concerns about the Uighurs, contacts with the Taliban began in Kabul in 1998 to assure that Afghanistan would not become a haven against China; consequently, several agreements were reached with the Taliban. This was the beginning of China's relations with the Taliban. The next turning point was the meeting of the Chinese Ambassador in Pakistan, Mr. Lu Shulin, with Mullah Omar in Kabul in December 2000, after which interactions between the two countries increased. These connections were in a way that during the US air invasion of

Afghanistan in 2001, China provided assistance to the Taliban (Malik, 2002). There were even claims that China was equipping the Taliban with communication technologies at that time (Krishnadas, 2001). However, these contacts did not stop the Uighurs from fueling Chinese concerns, as the Taliban had allowed the Uighurs to be trained and operated under military camps as soon as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was formed, linking the Uighurs to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Turkistan Islamic Party (Kelemen, 2019).

The existing research about the present article's topic regarding the interaction between China and Taliban do not completely address the topic from legitimate perspectives. Further, it fails to provide a clear understanding about the dynamicity of China's interaction with Taliban and its effects on the legitimacy of Taliban, and as the result the interest of China in engaging with Taliban, specifically after US withdrawal from Afghanistan. These constitute the significance of the present study, which is based on an innovative approach and theoretical framework to evaluate the interactions between the two countries and to provide a reliable conclusion, and propose a new way to see legitimacy. For instance, in his research, Mehrdad (2021) only addressed the intelligence interest of China's engagement with Taliban as a principal player in containing Uighurs in Afghanistan but neglected to address the effect of these interacting and enjoyment on the interest of China and the legitimacy of Taliban interdependently. Other researchers, such as Gale, Wang & Norman, (2021) mainly focused the issue of post-US Afghanistan threats to China as the result of US strategies of increasing costs and expenses in Afghanistan for China, and actively ignored the possibility of China's active engagement with Taliban, and the challenges thereto.

In fact, US's malicious strategies for China in Afghanistan do exist. Through the continuation of uncertainty during the years 2001 to 2020, the Doha Peace Accord between the Afghan Taliban and the United States proved to be breakthrough. Developments in the region shifted the focus of the United States to competition with China (Gale et al., 2021), and resulted in the creation of challenges for countries in the region, especially China, by United States' rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan. Moreover, it shall not be ignored that in response to such a policy, China resumed active diplomacy with the Taliban after open meetings between 1998 and 2001, culminating in two key and overt meetings that marked the beginning of subsequent public meetings between China and the Taliban. However, the **question** remains that would any active engagement with Neo- Taliban by China contribute to China's interests and security?

The new round of meetings were held during 2021 and began with the meeting of Mullah Abdulghani Baradar in Tianjin with the Chinese Foreign Minister (Xinhua, 2021), and further with the meeting of Maulvi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Head of the Neo- Taliban Political Office, with the Chinese Ambassador in Kabul (NDTV, 2021). It seems that China has always considered the issue of extremism and concerns about the Uighurs when meeting with the Neo- Taliban. Although the exact content of China's first meeting with Mullah Omar is not publically available, the last two meetings of Chinese officials explicitly emphasized the issue of insecurity overflowing from Afghanistan to China. However, the important point, which is also the hypothesis of this study, is that China's active engagement with the Neo- Taliban paves the way for insecurity to overflow into China main land and contributes to further instability in Afghanistan, which is in conflict with China's regional and national interests.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this research, the combination of Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Theory with the Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Analysis has been employed. The Laclau and Mouffe's theory is one of the most practical theories in the field of discourse; what distinguishes the discourse analysis of these two thinkers from other discourse theories is the extension of discourse from culture and philosophy to society and politics (Hosseinizadeh, 2004, p. 193). Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse is a coherent theory that provides researchers with appropriate tools for the analysis of political and social phenomena at the macro level. This theory is known as a desirable model of cultural policy for the modern political sociology due to its emphasis on issues such as identity (Nash, 2000, p. 47); by presenting concepts such as ideology, identity, otherness, hegemony and alike, it seeks to explain the evolution of discourse. On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun's theory is important because it provides a framework for changing the approach of a society between the two Barbaric and Civic poles, and showing the dynamics of this evolution. Therefore, the combination of these two theories can, on the one hand, address the behavioral roots through discourse theory and, on the other hand, illustrate how the differences between these roots and the cause of such changes occur. The result of this combination provides the theoretical framework required for the present research. In this regard, the combination of the two theories provides the basis for another theory, which was proposed by the authors (Sajjadpour & Salimifar, 2019) in relation to the internal dynamics of the sub-discourses of a macro-discourse. The theory of discourses provides a good theoretical basis for showing Taliban's internal dynamism as a result of an external factor. The combination of these theories here mostly happen through considering the two poles of Ibn

Khaldun's Social Theory as two competitive discourses due to resemblance of each to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis. To make it clearer, each pole of the social theory (will be explained further), treats and emphasizes social features in a way in which discourse signifiers and signified have features and characteristics, as well as have specific manifestations that compete to become dominant, pushing aside the other rival pole. These rival poles do not destroy each other; they can only be pushed aside and then revived due to circumstances, similar to the nature of relationship between each discourse and its rivals at both general level and signifiers' level. Further, they both inherently address and emphasize the identity, culture and the philosophy of the society from various, but compatible, levels. These resemblances put the social theory of Ibn Khaldun completely compatible to be applied in close alienation with discourse theories, specifically the theory that belongs to the Laclau and Mouffe.

To apply the discourse analysis approach, it is necessary to first explain its concepts. These concepts are often interconnected in a chain; the understanding each concept leads to the understanding of the next concepts. In the discourse analysis approach, signifier and signified have a key and fundamental role that are gathered and articulated in a joint around the central signifier. The realization of such articulation is possible in a complex social, historical and cultural space known as context. Hence, similar textures lead to similar articulations and different textures to different articulations (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 112).

2. 1. Barbaric & Civic Discourses

The Afghan society, from discursive perspective, is located between two heterogeneous value systems. One is the values of

Barbarism, known as Kouchi, and the other is the values of Civic life; the first value is the legacy of Barbaric migration and forms the Barbaric discourse, and is the product of the centuries of history of this land. In contrast, there is the discourse of civilization, which is the result of urbanization and reform that took place in the land and was strengthened after 2001. Both values systems have enjoyed periods of hegemony over the other throughout history. As a result, it can be said that the society of this region suffers from a psychological and social challenge for successive generations and lacks normative stability. According to Ibn Khaldun, the discourse of Barbarians, provided that power is equal to the discourse of civilization, undoubtedly dominates the discourse of civilization, and Barbaric discourse itself creates civic signified by articulating the scattered signifiers of the civil discourse, and later becomes prone to defeat by another Barbaric discourse. This cycle is continually repeated in history. In fact, the discourse of civilization grows and eventually goes to the margins, but its scattered signifiers are articulated in the dominant Barbaric discourse, and eventually it transforms that Barbaric discourse into another civilized discourse based on the ruins of the previous discourse (Sadeghi Fasai, 1380 [2001 A.D.], pp. 79-80).

Regarding the character and norms of the Barbaric discourse, it should be known that they have signifiers of presidency and domination, which are in conflict with the signifiers of obedience. The signifier of presidency in the Barbaric discourse has the meaning of superiority and dominance over others, and the signifiers of obedience have signified as weakness. In this discourse, even the mere obedience to the chief of the tribe is not correct, and is subject to the articulation or consolidation of signifiers of relief and warfare in time of need. However, if the chief of the tribe treats people through the directorate manner, they

will oppose and fight him (Al-Wardi, 2017, p. 78). The tribes that are forced to surrender to the power of the head of another tribe do not take long to revolt at an opportune moment and fight for their supremacy. As long as the chief of the tribe wants the presidency, the members also want freedom and supremacy, and this is where a tribe is divided into different groups and sub-tribes that result from the war for power (O'Leary, 1927, pp. 20-22). Accordingly, in the Barbaric discourse, due to the inherent and institutional importance of power for articulating as central signifier, we see other Barbarians obeying the powerful leader, as a signified. This is while, as long as this articulation of this central sign appears in another person, we see the transfer of the presidency to him.

In Afghanistan, there has always been a rivalry between Barbaric and Civic discourses. Traditionally, Barbaric social life is the opposite of Civic life; Two obvious aspects of the difference between the two are the position of government and employment in these discourses. Due to the nature and structure of their articulation, Barbaric discourse is in conflict with both of the above aspects, because in principle, Barbaric discourses does not recognize the state and state institutions or pays less attention to them. In the Barbaric discourse, the signifier of obedience to the state and submission to governments is signified only by humiliation, thus, tribal affiliations replace government organizations (Binesh, 2014, p. 157). In the Barbaric discourse, the articulation of the ethnic and tribal signifiers signifies pride and arrogance, and the individual, accordingly, considers the tribe as the guarantor of its survival and preservation of its dignity, while the state is merely an authoritarian system and the symbol of Civic discourse that has signified as a counter tribal Presidency, sovereignty, independence and freedom, and are signified with taxes and conscription. Therefore, it is very shameful for a Barbaric person to pay a ransom to the government,

because paying a ransom is a confession of servitude and having lower level, while according to the Barbaric discourse, he is the one who should take ransom from others, and he considers this his honor.

The implications of the Barbaric discourse and its influence on the Civic discourse with discourse changes and the marginalization of the central signifier of the Barbaric discourse, and finally the articulation of the scattered signified notions of this discourse in the Civic discourse have always existed throughout history. In the meantime, it is necessary to mention that the description of the Barbaric discourse should not be considered as a prelude to the evolution of the Civic discourse. This discourse itself is worth studying because it is formed only in barbaric regions (context) and its signified is closed or static civilization. As long as this discourse remains in these areas far from the city, it does not undergo any evolution, but if it leaves its conditions and is placed in another context, gradual changes will appear in it and one can witness the emergence of Civic discourse signifiers (O'leary, 1927, pp. 20-22), which is achieved by the weakness of the Civic discourse and the hegemony of the Barbaric discourse, and finally, the articulation of its scattered signifiers, and itself creates a new Civic discourse whose central signifier changes from mere power to the formation of the state. On the other hand, according to Ibn Khaldun's Social Theory, societies have an identity that is created from birth and organizes them in the form of tribes. Defending the values of the tribe is always a priority and is institutionalized within every member of the tribe (Binesh, 2014, p. 157). When a tribe moves towards the establishment of a state, it needs to achieve some form of social stability and convergence so that it can establish governmental relations with other tribes, and thereupon, establish a state (Sadegh Fasai, 2000, p. 98, 134). This is achieved through a

departure from tribal values, but this departure never destroys the tribal identity. It is evidenced by the tendency and revival of tribal identity in times of unrest and lawlessness due to the weakness of the state, which allows tribes to survive and maintain their identity. This provides them a shelter to once again take refuge in their last resort, or tribal values, in order to follow the same path of establishing the government again at a more appropriate time (Ibn Khaldun, 2012, p. 337). Such a pendulum move is entirely based on political consciousness.

The Barbaric discourse is a good pretext for religious extremism; with the dominance of this discourse over more signified notions in people's lives, we see more zeal in religion, which stubbornly defends its religious discourse and does not tolerate rival discourses. They are less involved in the new complexities of life than others and are therefore very prone to accepting Salafi discourses because they feel closeness of the cultural and social context of the Salaf and the current features of their life, which makes the conditions for accepting Salafism easier; The worship of the Barbarians, at its extreme forms, is limited to believing in God, the Prophet, performing the five daily prayers and the duties of fasting and Hajj, and it does not go beyond the original rites of the beginning of Islam performed by their ancestors. However, in the practical part of life, they are no different from their Barbaric ancestors in norms such as ethnic zeal and alike; Due to the overlap of the Salafi discourse with the Barbaric discourse, they have undergone a kind of maximum generalization and do not see any contradiction between the two.

Ibn Khaldun's social theory is in line with the current social conditions in Afghanistan. Tribal Pashtuns can be called Barbaric

because they fully correspond to Ibn Khaldun's definition of Barbarism; they equate the laws of Islam and Pashtunwali (Abbas, 2014, p. 28), consider themselves superior to the citizens, and ridicule or criticize the urban lifestyle and ethics (Shams-ur-Rehman, 2015). After all, the Pashtuns have never migrated for jihad, and their jihad from the triple jihad against Britain in the mid-19th century to the so-called Taliban jihad has always taken place within the territory of Afghanistan. Finally, they have always resorted to Pashtunwali in times of social insecurity and turmoil, such as during the civil war, and established the Taliban through a Barbaric social contract (Fasihi-Dolatshahi, 2016, p. 253). The Neo-Taliban also reveal themselves completely according to the framework of Ibn Khaldun's theory. This group has always introduced itself as the so-called true and sincere Mujahids (Peters, 2010, p. 22), whose tribal identity has led to the formation of the group as a response to the immoral and un-Islamic culture of urban communities. However, they believe that this group has the highest Islamic morals and character (Clifford, 1989, p. 84). Moreover, the rest of the characteristics of Barbarism, such as not adhering to what they consider to be un-Islamic laws, are entirely consistent with the position of this group and the Pashtuns under the definition of Barbarism.

2. 2. Taliban's Discourse

According to research, Taliban's discourse cannot be overgeneralized, since it is rooted in several other discourses (Sajjadpour & Salimifar, 1399 [2020 A.D.]). Accordingly, using the results of a preliminary research by the author (Salimifar, 1398 [2019 A.D.]) in which the signifiers and signified notions of the general discourse of the Taliban—consisting of these sub-

discourses—were identified and explained, the present study has laid its foundations on an investigation of Taliban's discourse. The Taliban's discourse lacked a solid organizational mindset, which seemed to be the result of a discursive confusion. It should be noted that in principle, no phenomenon can occur without being affected by the events around it. Therefore, if the effect of a phenomenon is not intentional, the cause of the involuntary effects must be considered. In other words, the Taliban have willingly or unwillingly obtained implications from other phenomena over the past decades, and are therefore their involuntary outcome, since they have common and sometimes contradictory implications for many discourses. For example, visiting graves and respecting holy shrines has never been mentioned in Salafism, but we see that the Taliban have never systematically disrespected the graves of religious leaders and figures, and have always respected the beliefs of the people. In another example, some members of the Taliban, including high ranking officials or commanders, contrary to their official fatwa on the sanctity of music and human photos, secretly listened to music and went to photo studios (Anderson, 2002). Such diversity may be the result of individuals who have previously fought in the ranks of various jihadist groups, with different tendencies, and then joined the Taliban, which ultimately has led to the fact that not all its commanders are the same.

The roots of the Taliban discourse can be traced to tribal discourses, nationalism, some scattered social signifiers, religious discourses such as Deobandi, combination of the Muslim Brotherhood Maududi's thoughts, the effects of the Arab Afghans' discourse, Wahhabism and the Jalalabad school (Sajjadpour & Salimifar, 1399 [2020 A.D.]). In fact, the Taliban's discourse stemmed from the articulation of signifiers of remaining previous discourses from the unique history and geography of Afghanistan's.

This group, in fact, inherits the socio-historical developments of the land, in the form of groups, movements and governments, and acquires its identity in some way from them. Their discourses were not exclusively confined to the mentioned geography and were mainly derived from the geographies of neighboring countries or as a response to rival discourses in neighboring countries that were re-articulated around the central signifier, namely the Emirate, willingly or unwillingly, based on Taliban's interests. The religious origins of the discourses seen among the Taliban naturally have similarities due to their Islamic nature, and differences due to different geographical distances and territorial histories. The central signifier of their discourse lies in a world without a Caliph to achieve a kind of limited and regional caliphate.

The roots of social discourse are rather strong in Taliban's discourse. In other words, the Taliban actually identified themselves as a Pashtun Afghan before they identified themselves as an Emirate. For this reason, there is a similarity between Pashtunwali law and Sharia (Nagamine, 2015, p. 104). This is an exceptional phenomenon, the elaboration of which is rather rare in the discourse of a Salafi group, since in other Salafi discourses, local laws apply as long as they do not conflict with the Shari'a. This signifier is, in fact, the result of historical events in Afghanistan and implies the mixing of Pashtunwali law with Sharia law. Nevertheless, the history of the developments in India subcontinent and Afghanistan has caused the roots of the Taliban's religious thought to be similar to those of other Islamists, including the Jalalabad school.

These developments and roots have led to the development of two different identities within the Taliban, one of which overwhelms the other, as the supporters of each move to the core of

the group's management. The important point in this conflict is the strength of an Afghan identity, which does not allow fundamental changes in the group and, in a way, modifies the religious identity of the group. A clear example of this is the group's commitment to limiting jihad on Afghanistan's borders. The balance between the roots of such religious and social discourse in Taliban's discourse should be sought in the type of articulation of these signifiers at the macro level of discourse and their articulations. As mentioned, Taliban's religious discourse is a combination of the Muslim Brotherhood and Maududi's discourses, Deobandi discourse, and the Arab-Afghans' fragmented discourse, each of which has provided a kind of articulation that has sometimes confused the group's discourse and sometimes led to contradictions. Thus, the significance of a signifier in such a disturbing discourse is entirely related to the background of those who, as local Taliban commanders, contribute to how it articulates. Moreover, by gaining power over each of these roots at the macro level of leadership, one can expect changes in the group's behavior, character, and performance, albeit in part. Such discourse dynamics, just as it can unite the roots of different and sometimes fragmented discourses, can also lead to internal differences based on differences in signified notions.

2. 3. Neo- Taliban and Discursive Circles

Neo-Taliban consist of pro-al-Qaeda fighters (with ideological motives), Pakistani students (with ideological motives), young job seekers under the name of mercenaries (with financial motives), drug mafia (with financial motives), tribes (with nationalist motives), freedom fighters (with militant motives) and religious militant (with ideological motives). Accordingly, there are three

types of fighters among the Taliban who are involved in the war, and each of them has other divisions within itself. For example, under ideological motives, there are several groups that do not have the same origins. Deobandi has roots among Muslim Brotherhood and Arab-Afghan supporters, leading to differing interpretations of the cause of jihad and how it is carried out by the Taliban. Each of these branches, when the hegemon branch is diminished as a result of the arrests and deaths of important personalities, is raised at the core level of the neo-Taliban group, as a result of which influencing opportunities arise (Sajjadpour & Salimifar, 2019). This phenomenon, for example, changes the group's position on peace and changes the methods of warfare and interaction with religious and social minorities. In fact, the neo-Taliban's internal rivalries affect the stability of the group's decisions.

In other words, the type of the formation of these circles and the change of fronts between small groups in the battlefield are the cause of significant instabilities in decisions among the Taliban. These changes may be due to securing the interests of one person or group, jihad, circumstances, or even gaining power by joining rival groups. This change can occur for a number of reasons, including financial interests, political ambitions, and various material, spiritual, and abstract goals, such as the desire for continuation of jihad or the lack of any tangible progress in securing freedom after years of war and conflict in Afghanistan. It should be noted that spiritual goals and interests have far greater effects than material interests in delegitimizing a group or circle.

Changes in Taliban resulting from the change of circles can lead to explosion and various violent behavior among the group. New appointments in the group and in the Taliban body change the

approach and provoke a different approach among the operational phase of the group. The performance of the group at any time is directly due to the reorganization of these circles for various reasons. Peace developments, suicide bombings, etc. have usually occurred as a result of the arrest or death of key individuals and the replacement of another person. For example, after the Doha Peace Accords, the group was forced to allocate suitable positions to extremists and anti-peace individuals in the group to maintain internal cohesion during negotiation. These trade-offs are inherently rather fragile; as a result, they worked hard to get the peace talks settled quickly, as any delay in gaining power could further undermine the foundations of the current alliance between the Emir and his commanders, especially the rivals (Sajjadpour & Salimifar, 2019). The period between 2002 and 2008 was the highest suicide operation period, which declined sharply after 2008 (Stenersen, 2010, pp. 27-28). There are two interpretations. The first is that from the perspective of discursive circles, it is possible to examine those who were in decision-making positions, who believed in suicide bombing but were replaced since then, which showed that it can still be affected by replacement.

This existence of discursive circles has manifested itself in the different dimensions of the group. For example, a study of audiences for Taliban's cultural products has revealed that there are generally three distinct genres in Taliban songs: religious in two understandable local languages, Persian and Pashto, and in Arabic, nationalist (purely in Pashto and Persian) and religious praise. Praise style is one of the most common styles in Taliban songs, which focuses on praising "Taliban martyrs". The description of the moral and jihadist characteristics and the way in which these people were killed constitute the dominant aspect of this genre, in which there is no mention of the high concepts of jihad or nation

and religion, and it is all a repetition of praise. Interestingly, this style is often rather personal, meaning that a martyr who is not known to all Taliban is mentioned in such a way that it can be claimed that perhaps these songs are published for certain circles because of the variety of personal and insignificant names in the different dialects at different times (Salimifar, 1400 [2021 A.D.]).

3. Discussion

According to Ibn Khaldun's Social Theory, a Barbaric State with its barbaric legitimacy dominates a declining Civic State in order to establish a new Civic State based on the legacy and debris of the old declining Civic State. This domination has three phases: Barbaric State domination over Civic State, legitimation of Barbaric State, and the emergence of a new Civic State. In the first phase, the Barbaric State has full legitimacy from its barbaric nature and, relying on its power and solidarity, which includes honesty, religiosity, courage, and other positive components, dominates the stack of corruption remaining from the decline of the previous Civic State.

In the second phase, in order to maintain its dominance, it goes through a transitional process, which renounces its traditional barbaric legitimacy based on tribes, barbarism and everything that has helped it achieve its current dominant position, and gradually acquires the foundations of civic legitimacy. In this way, one can see significant representations of the heritages and debris of the overthrown Civic State in the new and emerging Civic State. This process is not one-sided and is formed from time to time according to the conditions between the sources of legitimacy of Barbaric and Civic States.

In the third phase, the new Civic State seeks to stabilize its legitimacy. At this stage, the legitimacy level of Barbaric State is minimized and the newly established Civic State is forced to hire mercenaries to address the social forces that constitute the sources of civic legitimacy in order to avoid collapse. In such circumstances, as these sources of new legitimacy become more and more dominant, we witness the penetration of more corruption, and the components that previously contributed to the decline of the overthrown Civic State find their way in the newly established Civic State. According to Ibn Khaldun, Barbaric and Civic States are the dynamic nature of social societies, and all societies bounce between these two poles with different varieties and intensities. This process resembles that of day and night, in which as the day light become more and more visible, the intensity of darkness decreases, and vice versa, but one never completely and forever dominates the other. According to Ibn Khaldun, every Civic State goes through an average of seven periods until complete overthrown; in the first period, we witness the peak of barbaric legitimacy, while in the seventh period we witness the peak of civic legitimacy. This is an overgeneralization of the two poles, and it is possible for a Civic State to experience only one period and show the manifestations of corruption and decline in itself. In terms of discourse, the discourse of the Neo- Taliban consists of signifiers that are in solidarity with the discourses of other Salafist movements. In other words, the origin of these signifiers are the same, but due to the type of articulation, they may express different signified manifestations, and that type of manifestations can and may become the point of conflict with other Salafist movements, for example, the most important of these signifiers are nationalism and the Muslim Ummah (i.e. community).

These signifiers may become important only when the Neo-

Taliban steps-up for the establishment of the promised Civic State; only that time the signified manifestations of the aforementioned signifiers can provide the ground for dispute. Moreover, the type of articulation of the signifiers has already caused the emergence of discursive circles within the main discourse of the Neo-Taliban. Not to be mistaken with sub-discourses, these circles are articulated around one or more signifiers, which are of the utmost importance to those who believe in them, for example, we can refer to economic, ideological, national and ethnic discursive circles within the main discourse of the Neo-Taliban. Neo-Taliban is rapidly trying to build a Civic State. However, the explicit interaction with China implied that the group performed in an inexperienced, excited, and rushed, but at the same time smart manner when moving from the first phase to the second phase. The hastiness of this group to consolidate the sources of its barbaric legitimacy and to gain the sources of civic legitimacy is the result of its former bitter experience of not been internationally recognized during its first Emirate. The unbridled field violence is also due to the group's need for the revival of barbaric legitimacy and balancing the gap created in the path to civic legitimacy.

Balancing these sources of legitimacy is the most important challenge for the Neo-Taliban the day after the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate for the second time; public rejection of supporting the Uighurs, even in words, reflects the group's hastiness, excitement and inexperience in making the transition from barbaric to civic sources of legitimacies. The hastiness of this group in its expressions, especially during departing from barbaric legitimacy, would manifest itself in the eyes of field or rank forces as the deviation of the group from its "exalted values of the movement and tradition".

Every step of the Neo-Taliban in gaining civic legitimacy encourages a discursive circle to disassociate and to join rival, yet matching discourses like those of the ISIL to meet their interests and agenda. The outnumbering Neo-Taliban may have considered the small rank of Uighurs in Afghanistan as dispersed and insignificant, so that the group may conclude explicit interactions with China on security issues, or at least communications as risk free. The interaction and communication would definitely affect the terms of the second phase, and the skeptical or disagreed discursive circles of the Neo-Taliban about the explicit approach or any interaction of the group with China gradually or suddenly disperse from the group and join rival discourses that match their interests, including religious interest. The most important of these isolated circles should be sought in those articulations that believe in the universality of jihad and support for the Uighurs; the signified manifestation of the Muslim Ummah (i.e. community) signifier. As the result, there will eventually be an internal de-legitimization of the neo-Taliban and the emergence of disassociating circles, which, although do not lead to the disintegration of the Neo-Taliban, will not benefit China as well.

The Chinese interest in engaging with Taliban is clearly to contain or preferably eliminate the risk of Uighurs and prevention of Afghanistan from being a safe haven for extraterritorial overflow of insecurity to China main land. However, the point here is that the continuation of clear, implicit and loud engagement with Taliban practically delegitimizes the pillar on which China is planning to build its security investments. There is a probability of a different approach from China, which seeks a broader agendum of not completely investing on Taliban, and instead, facilitating, encouraging or inducing any type of government, regardless of nature and definitions, that can work in interests of China.

However, until that time, the field reality demonstrates otherwise. In fact, by the withdrawal of US from Afghanistan and the collapse of republic system in the country, only two affirmative rivals exist in the country: Taliban and ISK, among which China would not favor the latter option. In such sense, the only remaining option is Taliban and any interactions with the group now requires a more prudent approach and foreign policy that serve the interests of China and at the same time do not delegitimize the only option in Afghanistan, namely Taliban.

4. Conclusion

In this article, by reviewing the historical background of China's relationship with the Taliban and examining the process of their interactions after the fall of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, an analysis of the current Taliban's state based on Ibn Khaldun's social and theory and discourse analysis was presented. According to the above-mentioned discussions, as a result of the changes endured by Taliban after the fall of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, we are witnessing structural changes that are rooted in the changes that took place during the era of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Accordingly, the result of an independent and detailed study was the identification of several discourses, each of which has somehow influenced the formation of the Taliban discourse and has resulted in a non- uniform and disintegrated Taliban today. The dynamics between these discourses were explained through the theory of discursive circles, and it was found that with the power of each of those who believe in discourses, we see the aggregation of followers and the creation of circles that somehow influence group decisions. It is in this context that the Taliban succeed in gaining control of Afghanistan as a result of Doha's peace talks with the

United States. After the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan, we witnessed another turning point in Sino-Taliban relations, which was welcomed by the Taliban. Using a combination of Ibn Khaldun's discourse and social theory, the study demonstrated that China's behavior to engage more with the Taliban in order to prevent the Uighurs from growing and expanding, and subsequently welcoming the Taliban, could actually pose serious risks to both sides. As these ties expand, we will see more divergence between Taliban forces that oppose expanding ties with China and see their aspirations extending to Xinjiang. The Uighurs are the most important group experiencing this divergence, and in this sense not only is this expansion of relations between the Taliban and China not constructive and not in the interests of both sides, but it can also turn into a legitimate challenge for the Taliban and a security challenge for China. China needs more prudent approach and foreign policy for engaging with Taliban that serve the interests of China and at the same time do not delegitimize the only option in Afghanistan, namely Taliban.

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