

"Understanding Taliban Resurgence: Ethno-Symbolism and Revolutionary Mobilization"

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Abstract

This article aims at transcending overly simplistic political economy approaches that assume that ongoing support for the Taliban lies solely in the realm of political and economic self-interest or wider state breakdown. It argues that the post-2001 Taliban resurgence was due to their capacity to act as resourceful ethnic entrepreneurs through their selective usage of dominant Pashtun and Islamic mythomoteurs in the process of symbolic cultivation. By employing an ethno-symbolist framework and through comparative historical analysis, this article will highlight the constitutive role of subjective symbolic resources in motivating ideologies and facilitating revolutionary mobilization. The resurgence of the Taliban during the post-September 11th period will be explained in terms of the two main identity determinants informing their behavior – Pashtun nationalism and Islamism. In accordance with Kaufmann's (2008: 449-451) 'optical metaphor', one could argue that light from Afghanistan as a 'territorial referent' has passed through the Taliban's 'Pashtun nationalist' and 'Islamist' ideological lenses to focus on certain symbolic resources in order to distil a positive national image among their respective audiences. In addition to those two salient ideological lenses, the Taliban's mostly rural background and their 'village identity' illustrate the 'situational lens' that has also shaped their worldview and facilitated their successful resistance.

Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism - 2014, January

