

Taliban 'maintaining a balancing act' in relationships with other local jihadi groups, study shows

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Taliban leaders have chosen to maintain a delicate balancing act in their relationships with other local violent jihadi groups since taking power in

Afghanistan, new research shows.

Relationships are now often based on economic links as well as old ties. Other groups are now more reliant on the Taliban's approval for operational activities within Afghanistan.

The study shows how the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan has directly facilitated the presence and activities of violent jihadi groups in the country, and has served as a source of inspiration for jihadists worldwide.

The Taliban's extensive economic ties with Al-Qaeda allow them entry into global illicit economic networks, extending their reach beyond Afghanistan and the Middle East. The newfound sanctuary under Taliban rule has also allowed Al-Qaeda to expand its jihadi military training programs, issue calls for new recruits and establish madrassas to propagate jihadi ideologies.

Experts say the Taliban's reluctance to confront other groups who share the same ideology, and their efforts to help them keep a presence in Afghanistan, indicates an ongoing tolerance and, in some cases, active facilitation of their presence. This has allowed the Taliban to avoid direct confrontations while benefiting from the strategic advantages of a broader jihadist network.

Dr. Weeda Mehran, from the University of Exeter, who led the [in-depth analysis](#), said, "These resilient relationships and networks have significant security implications for the region and beyond. The Taliban's provision of sanctuary to groups is allowing them to carry out lethal attacks in other countries.

"Cooperation takes various forms—ideological, logistical, and operational—and has led to long-term partnerships where groups share

resources, knowledge, and technology while maintaining autonomy. Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and TTP exemplify such cooperations. As the Taliban gained [political control](#), their reliance on cooperation with groups like TTP, IJU, and ETIM decreased. Arguably with Afghanistan's resources, the Taliban no longer depends on Al-Qaeda to the same extent as it used to."

Published in the journal *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, the study describes how the Taliban and jihadist groups such Al-Qaeda, TTP, and IJU remain interconnected through ideology. This transcends shifts in political and military circumstances.

Competition and destructive rivalry has been seen when tactical and strategic cooperation breaks down, and groups have competed to recruit members.

Dr. Mehran said, "While fighting NATO and Afghan government forces, the Taliban relied heavily on tactical and logistical support from other violent jihadi groups. Since August 2021, the Taliban has become less dependent on other groups for logistical and operational needs, while these groups now require the Taliban's approval to operate in Afghanistan and gain access to resources for their activities.

"But ideological cooperation has remained strong among the groups. While the Taliban is seeking to assert authority and control over these groups, it has been reluctant to engage in open competition or escalating competition.

"Since the Taliban has taken over control of the country, the logistic cooperation between the group and Al-Qaeda has further deepened, particularly in terms of financial ties. Al-Qaeda is reportedly generating tens of millions of dollars per week from [gold mines](#) in northern Afghanistan while sharing the profits with the Taliban administration.

"This income is not reflected in the Taliban's official budget. Smuggling networks, which previously financed the Taliban's war, are now being repurposed by Al-Qaeda for trafficking methamphetamine, weapons, cash, gold and other contraband."

The study says solidarity created by ideological and personal bonds allows the Taliban to benefit from Al-Qaeda's strategic and technical resources without triggering resistance or division among their Afghan ranks, maintaining a cooperation essential for sustaining their influence in the region.

The Taliban has created a safe environment in Afghanistan for TTP, and this has allowed it to regroup, recruit members, and launch cross-border attacks into tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. In return, TTP has leveraged its close ties with the Taliban to enhance its cross-border insurgency capabilities.

Personal ties are further reinforced through inter-marriages. A number of interviewees said fighters from various violent jihadi organizations are marrying Afghan women, obtaining Afghan identity cards, and even securing Afghan passports.

More information: Weeda Mehran et al, Old ties, new relations? Taliban's victory and violent jihadi groups in Afghanistan, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (2025). [DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2025.2523383](https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2025.2523383)

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