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Islamism and National Identity in Afghanistan: Are They Rivals or Friends?

After the capture of Kabul at the hands of the Taliban on the eve of 15 August 2021, the world was captivated for weeks at the events which unfolded, amongst them the sudden and complete collapse of the international community-backed Afghan government, the evacuation of thousands of foreign and Afghan nationals, and endless videos of Taliban fighters patrolling the streets and often giving interviews to Western journalists. In a matter of days, the Taliban had turned from a faceless vilified entity into the only viable political player in the war-torn country. At this junction, questions regarding the Taliban often focus on the contours of their Islamist identity, especially its perceived clash with national identity and interests. However, a closer look at the Taliban reveals a distinct political ideology rooted in the religious ideology of the Deobandi school. This also sets them apart from other extremist organisations such as ISIS and its affiliates in this region, such as the ISIS-K.

After the formation of Pakistan in 1947, many Deobandi scholars moved from India into the newly formed country and established numerous religious seminaries (madrassas). The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to an influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan, many of whom eventually benefited from the education services provided by these madrassas. Many of those who joined the Afghan mujahideen resistance to the Soviet invasion hailed from these religious seminaries. This was [also the case](#) for the Taliban, many of whose key leaders hailed from such Deoband-influenced madrassa institutions in border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, namely the Pashtun Belt. As such, Taliban politico-religious ideology may be understood to stem from a blend of strict Deobandi religious worldview and ethnic Pashtun tribal *asabiyya*, which one could daresay is akin to a blend of Islamism and ethnonational identity. Moreover, in defining the Taliban's "Islamism," it is important to note that while the Taliban fought all this time to regain control of Afghanistan, [they never had any interest](#) in helping Islamist groups outside the country. This sets them apart from rival Islamist groups such as ISIS, which have an ambitious global agenda. It is also why members of the international community have been finding common ground with the Taliban, which has also boosted the latter's legitimacy on the international scene.

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Turkey's Role in Afghanistan: Nation-building vs Neo-colonial Advancement

Turkey's role in Afghanistan is quite a precarious gamble. On the one hand, the fact that Turkish armed forces helped operate the Kabul airport in the far end of the US pull-out from Afghanistan appeared to have paid little dividends for Ankara; U.S.-Turkey relations have not improved meaningfully beyond US acknowledgement of Turkey as an important ally in the region. Thus one might construe that while Turkey [had perhaps betted](#) on its Afghanistan security role in a post-U.S. withdrawal period as a stepping stone for improved relations with the US, the fact that Afghanistan itself has become less of a priority for the US after its withdrawal has also decreased the importance of the Turkish role itself in Washington's eyes. On the other hand, there are real regional concerns at stake here - post-U.S. great power politics in the region between China and Russia, the threat of a mass Afghan refugee exodus towards Europe, and a test for Turkey's standing within the Muslim world, all of which means that even though Europe and the US are on the path of practically abandoning the issue of Afghanistan, Turkey cannot afford to do so.

Recent moves by Turkey, however, such as [Erdogan's firm statement](#) that Turkey would not act as EU 'warehouse' for Afghan refugees, and the [receiving of an Afghan delegation](#) by the Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara, and his subsequent statement calling for greater engagement with the Taliban administration and unfreezing of Afghan economic assets, suggest an independent, forward-looking approach by Turkey towards dealing with a growing regional crisis. This also suggests that Ankara may be [thinking beyond a role in Afghanistan](#) limited to military presence and airport parenthesis, and aiming to seize an opportunity politically, economically and diplomatically in the country as a stepping stone in Central Asia in a new period of great power competition.

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Tunisian democracy in peril amidst President's coup

President Kais Saied's decision to orchestrate a coup was hardly a surprise to anyone following the events surrounding the months of political deadlock in Tunisia. On 25 July, Saied invoked article 80 to [suspend the elected parliament](#), lifted the parliamentary immunity of its members, and dismissed the government of Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi. He also appointed himself as attorney general and imposed a curfew the following day. The President was able to make his move in the backdrop of the inability of successive political coalitions to revitalise the economy and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic effectively, coupled with the presidential rhetoric denouncing the 'corruption and incompetence' of the most prominent political party of Tunisia, Ennahda, and his refusal to work with the Tunisian parliament.

Despite such grave developments, the initial reaction amongst many observers was that this was a constitutional crisis that would be solved soon through early elections. Consecutive events, however, do not seem to be going in that direction, as several MP's have been put under house arrest, and President Saied has appointed [a woman prime minister](#), a first in the Arab world, who has since named a cabinet [loyal](#) to the presidency. Critics of Saied have blamed him for pink washing his power grab by pretending to play the progressive card while aiming to consolidate one-man rule in the face of [growing street protests](#).

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Islamists' Defeat in the National Elections in Morocco

After being in power for a decade, the Moroccan Islamist political party Justice and Development Party (PJD) suffered a crushing defeat at the ballot box. The PJD lost 90% of its seats, going from 125 seats in the 2016 parliament — out of a total of 395 — to a mere 12 in the latest elections held in September 2021. In its place, the National Rally of Independents (NRI) emerged as the party with the most seats in parliament, winning 97 of the 395 seats available. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, Morocco is a constitutional monarchy, and the strength of the parliament depends on the way the palace chooses to deal with the country's various political actors. Despite limits on the power of elected representatives, however, Morocco has set an example in the region in terms of the removal of Islamists in power. This has, in fact, been the first time Islamists have been democratically removed through the ballot box since the Arab Spring of 2011, and not by military force or other illegal means. The NRI is known to be a party of liberal politicians favoured by the palace.

While the PJD has alleged election irregularities, analysts say that the new PJD government led by outgoing PM Othmani, who had taken over from his predecessor in 2016-2017 at the intervention of the king, had alienated its voter base through its renunciation and subservience to political rule by the palace. Among actions that alienated the PJD from its voter base was the passing of a law raising the age of pension from 60 to 63 weeks before the election, its silence in the face of security operations to control widespread protests against government policies, and most importantly, the signing of the Abraham Accords to normalise relations with Israel. While some have construed this as a sign that Moroccans are rejecting political Islam, it may be closer to the truth to claim that it was precisely due to the abandonment of its Islamic political ideals, political opportunism and subservience to palace politics that voters have rejected the PJD.

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Major UN Climate Report Amidst Extreme Weather Events Worldwide

In a major shakeup for climate change concerns ahead of COP26, a key global climate summit slated to occur at Glasgow this November, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has released a landmark study that says that human activity is changing the climate in unprecedented and irreversible ways. The report is a work by a team of scientists who warn of increasingly extreme climate events such as heatwaves, droughts and flooding. The report predicted that global warming would pass the 1.5C mark before 2040 and the 2C mark within this century, which are tipping points or temperature limits that the global community agreed to remain below in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement by cutting down on carbon emissions. A tipping point refers to when part of the Earth's climate system undergoes an abrupt change in response to continued warming.

The increased need for meaningful action in tackling global warming and climate change has become clearer in the past few months in the form of devastating forest fires and extreme flooding. Not only did the world experience extreme weather conditions throughout July to August 2021, but it was the breadth and length of the impact of such extreme weather events that has alarmed many. Droughts and forest fires covered vast regions from Southern Europe, Russia and North America. Fires throughout the Mediterranean region, especially in Greece, Italy, Turkey and the Balkan region, were observed to have gone on for days and weeks as firefighting teams struggled to contain them. Meanwhile, forest fires in Russia have been contributing to the thawing of permafrost in the Arctic region and contributing to an accelerating rate of melting of ice and global warming. On the other hand, severe flooding was observed in parts of Western Europe, Africa, and Central and South Asia. For many, these events have been a wake-up call and have brought the reality of climate change to the fore and added to the increasing importance of decisive global action to deal with the grimness of the IPCC report.

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Vaccine and Global Inequality

While Western countries like the US and UK are now offering third shots to their own citizens, many global south countries have been unable to offer the majority of their population even a first shot. Although six billion doses have been administered globally, three-quarters have gone to just 10 countries. This is a grim reminder of global north-south inequality that has plagued global vaccine distribution; an inequality that keeps getting worse despite the increased production of vaccines. Despite promises by the global north to waive off patents that would allow others to produce the vaccine, negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have gone on for a year without any progress, mainly due to it being blocked by countries such as the UK and Germany.

For months now, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been calling on vaccine-producing pharmaceutical companies to share their licences, specifically by contributing their intellectual property to the Medicines Patent Pool. This United Nations-backed organisation aims to bring inexpensive drugs to developing or underdeveloped countries. However, the call has been largely met with disregard. Pharmaceutical company representatives have iterated concerns regarding quality assurance and control and the complexity involved in the drug production process, factors which say that many are underestimating in the process of technology sharing and transfer of know-how. Fed up with the vaccine inequality and refusal to share vaccine know-how, many countries of the global south, backed by the WHO, have come together to create the “mRNA hub” in South Africa, where researchers are sharing knowledge of cutting-edge vaccine technology in order to help countries jumpstart their own vaccine programs.

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SPECIAL REPORT OF THE ISSUE

Prospect of Fish Resources in Reinvigorating the Bangladesh Economy

Momin MOMIN¹

Bangladesh is one of the emerging countries in South Asia, with 165 million people. About 700 small and large rivers flow throughout the country, making it one of the largest river networks in the world, with a total length of 24140 km². The great Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna River Basin system made Bangladesh huge potential for tremendous fisheries fauna. Having 795 species of freshwater and marine native fish, Bangladesh is one of the most diversified fisheries faunae in the world³. Open water capture fisheries and Aquaculture are the two major sources of fish production in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is 5th in world aquaculture production, where it is 3rd in inland open water capture fisheries⁴. The inland water fisheries cover an area of 4.7 million hectares and produce more than 3.7 million metric tons of fish⁵. According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN), fish is one of the affordable economic protein sources which provides 16% of total animal protein throughout the world. Fisheries play a significant role in the socio-economy of Bangladesh providing fresh protein to least-income people. It also creates scope for many employment opportunities that boost the economy to cut poverty. The vast water resources of Bangladesh become the production house of fish. These potential water resources turn into a blessing that boost-up the country’s fisheries production of 4.3 million metric tons in the 2018-2019 statistical year⁴.

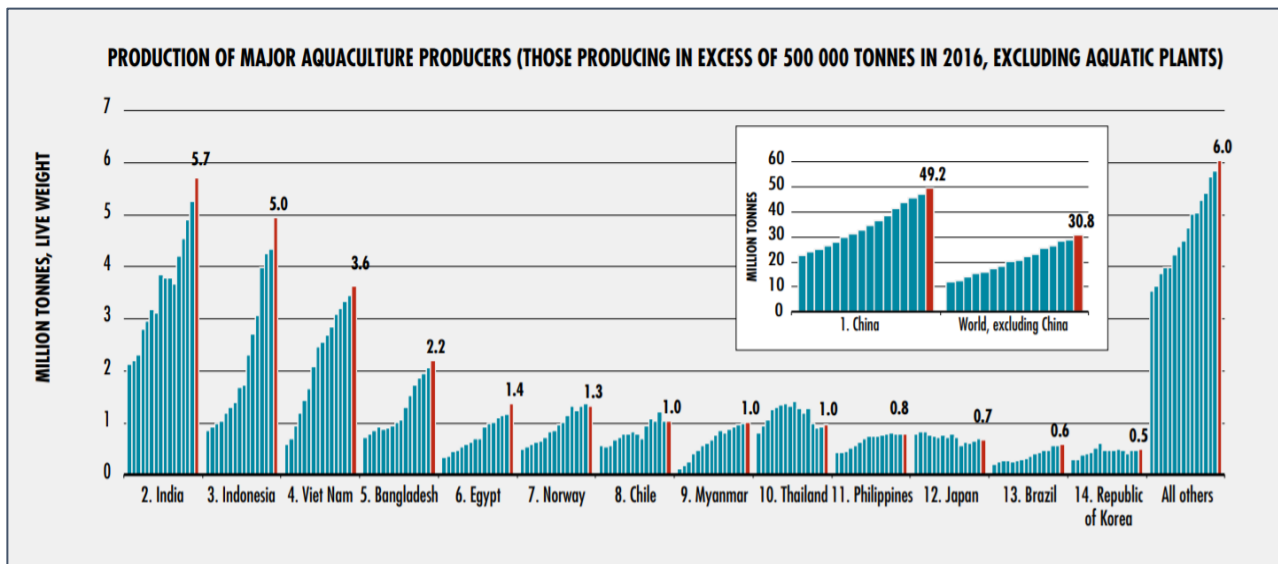


Figure 1. Aquaculture Production of Major Producing regions (FAO, 2018)

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² <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/River>

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Natural calamities, i.e., floods, heavy rain, etc., are always a threat to Bangladesh, a flood-prone country, due to its geographical position starting at the lower part of the Himalayas and ending at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal. Due to excessive water, it is nearly impossible to produce crops in many floodplains almost year-round. Therefore, these floodplains can only use for fisheries practices. However, this can be used effectively as an opportunity for the country's dynamic fish production.

Bangladesh is one of the self-sufficient fish-producing countries globally, where aquaculture plays a vital role by producing 56.76% of the country's total fish production. Bangladesh exports finfish, shellfish, and other fishery products, which earn handsome foreign currency every year. Bangladeshi fish and fishery products are exported to different countries like European Unions, USA, China, Japan, Russia, etc. Bangladesh exports more than 73 thousand metric tons of fishery products worth nearly 512 million USD in 2018-2019 FY (Fiscal Year). Shrimp and prawn are the most demandable fisheries items which have huge interest to many countries, i.e., EU, USA, Japan, etc. In 2018-2019 FY, the growth rate of shrimp and prawn production is 1.44%. In addition, this sector is expanding each year which opens new windows of employment opportunities. Hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*), the national fish of Bangladesh, is exclusively ranked as the top production species by contributing 12.15% alone in total fish production in 2018-2019 FY. It is also the brand species (declared as Geographical Indication species) of Bangladesh which is so delicious and beautiful silvery colour. Bangladesh alone produces 86% of total global hilsa production.



Figure 2. Hilsa fish from a local market

Top culturable fish species in Bangladesh are Pangas, Tilapia, Rui, Silver carp, Mrigal, Catla, and Koi etc. Among them, Tilapia production is booming nowadays, ranked 4th in the world and 3rd in Asia⁴. In Bangladesh, more than 12% of its population is somehow dependent on fisheries for their livelihood, contributing near about 3.5% of the National GDP.



Figure 3. Local Fishmarket in Chittagong

Natural fish stock is not limitless; therefore, the country needs to focus on cultural fisheries than capturing from nature. However, the Fisheries industries booming in recent decades by using modern technologies. Aquaculture industries produce 2.4 million metric tons of fish which is more than double in 2018-2019 compared to 2008-2009 in Bangladesh. If this growth graph sustains positively, Bangladesh can earn more and more foreign currencies from this sector in the coming days. This dynamic sector has many prospects, but it also has some challenges. Sea level rise, climate change, over-exploitation from natural stock, water pollution, salinity rising in coastal areas are the main challenges for the future of Bangladesh fisheries. Many fish species become extinct from the nature stock due to over-exploitation. Industrialisation near the bank of the rivers also damages the water environment devastatingly. Immediate actions need to apply to minimise these challenges. Thus, it will help us to strengthen our fisheries sector in every aspect. Exclusively, it will help to eradicate poverty from the country.

Bangladesh is a suitable country for fish production. In addition, fisheries have adequate scope to strengthen the economy of Bangladesh. Therefore, the government must make policies involving the rural farmers to support them in improving production. NGOs, researchers, and other stakeholders must come forward to support the hatcheries and farmers with recent discoveries and technologies. Hence this potential sector will expand and grow sustainably to fulfil the country's demand more suitably.

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