

Who Are the Taliban

this is mostly from a BBC report, but I have edited it a little.

The Taliban emerged in the early 1990s in northern Pakistan following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. A predominantly Pashtun movement, the Taliban came to prominence in Afghanistan in the autumn of 1994.

The Taliban's promise - in Pashtun areas straddling Pakistan and Afghanistan - was to restore peace and security and enforce their own austere version of Sharia, or Islamic law, once in power. In both countries they introduced or supported Islamic punishments - such as public executions of convicted murderers and adulterers and amputations of those found guilty of theft.

Men were required to grow beards and women had to wear the all-covering burka. The Taliban showed a similar disdain for television, music and cinema and disapproved of girls aged 10 and over from going to school.

The Taliban in Afghanistan are still believed to be led by Mullah Omar, a village clergyman who lost his right eye fighting the occupying forces of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Afghans, weary of the mujahideen's excesses and infighting after the Soviets were driven out, generally welcomed the Taliban when they first appeared on the scene.

Their early popularity was largely due to their success in stamping out corruption, curbing lawlessness and making the roads and the areas under their control safe for commerce to flourish. Despite ever higher numbers of foreign troops, the Taliban have steadily extended their influence, rendering vast tracts of Afghanistan insecure, and violence in the country has returned to levels not seen since 2001.

Their retreat earlier this decade enabled them to limit their human and material losses and return with a vengeance.

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