

A Study of the Taliban Islamic Emirate System in Afghanistan

Afganistan'daki Taliban İslam Emirliği Sistemi Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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Abstract

The Taliban's Islamic Emirate system represents an unconventional political model in the contemporary era, characterized by a lack of clear definition regarding its type, nature, and organizational structure. This study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the Islamic Emirate system, especially its nature, structure, and features. The findings of this study show that the Taliban Islamic Emirate system has characteristics such as autocratic-totalitarian tendencies, personalized governance, systematic disregard for the rule of law, patriarchal tendencies, and a tendency to monopolize power. These identified features contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this enigmatic system.

Keywords: Political System, Islamic Emirate, Afghanistan, Totalitarianism, Rule of Law

Öz

Taliban'ın İslam Emirliği sistemi, türü, doğası ve örgütsel yapısına ilişkin net bir tanım eksikliğiyle karakterize edilen, çağdaş çağda alışılmadık bir siyasi modeli temsil etmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı Taliban'ın İslam Emirliği sisteminin, özellikle de temel özelliklerinin, yapısının ve doğasının daha net anlaşılmasını sağlamaktır. Bu araştırmanın bulguları, Taliban İslam Emirliği sisteminin otokratik-totaliter eğilimler, kişisel yönetim, hukukun üstünlüğünü sistematik olarak göz ardı etme, ataerkil eğilimler ve gücü tekelleştirme eğilimi gibi özelliklere sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Tanımlanan bu özellikler, bir yandan Taliban'ın siyasi çerçevesine ilişkin değerli bilgiler sağlarken, diğer yandan da bu esrarengiz sistemin daha kapsamlı anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasi Sistem, İslam Emirliği, Afganistan, Totalitarizm, Hukukun Üstünlüğü

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Introduction

Afghanistan has witnessed a tumultuous political history since gaining independence in 1919, marked by the emergence and subsequent collapse of eight distinct political systems. These include absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, socialist republic, republic, Islamic state, Islamic Republic, and Islamic Emirate. Notably, the constitutional monarchy, led by Zahir Shah, endured for forty years, contrasting starkly with the relatively short-lived tenure of other systems, which averaged less than a decade. Consequently, Afghanistan's recent history is characterized by a series of political upheavals and system failures, with the collapse of the republican regime on August 15, 2021, standing out as a poignant and tragic event etched into the collective memory of the Afghan populace.

Following the collapse of the republican system and the withdrawal of international forces, the Taliban swiftly seized control of Afghanistan's political landscape on August 15, 2021. Subsequently, they established the Islamic Emirate as the governing model, yet despite almost three years having elapsed since their ascension to power, the Taliban's Islamic Emirate remains unrecognized by the international community and lacks domestic legitimacy. The Taliban's Islamic Emirate system represents an unconventional political model in the contemporary era, characterized by a lack of clear definition regarding its type, nature, and organizational structure. The absence of a precise definition of the Emirate system within the realm of political science complicates efforts to conceptualize the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the Taliban's political structure. This renders the political system instituted by the Taliban relatively opaque, with scant clarity regarding its structure and operational mechanisms.

Moreover, the Taliban's governance is characterized by a notable absence of formal regulations and laws, aside from limited documentation such as Abdul Hakim Haqqani's "Islamic Emirate and Systems " and the Taliban's "Islamic Emirate Sharia Law," comprising a mere fifteen articles predominantly focused on moral conduct and rudimentary security measures. Notably, the Taliban exhibit a reluctance to formulate comprehensive legal frameworks, relying instead on a simplistic interpretation of religious texts to govern society and administer state affairs, consolidating power under the titular leadership of the Amirul Momineen.

Furthermore, elucidating the ideological underpinnings of the Taliban proves challenging, as the group's doctrine lacks coherence and is rooted in a blend of Ikhwani, Deobandi, Maududi, and Wahhabi influences. While the Taliban's ideological leanings demonstrate affinities with Deobandiyyah and the teachings of Shah Wali Handi and Abul Alai Maududi, their ideological stance remains fluid and elusive, complicating efforts to comprehend the nature and structure of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate system. In light of these complexities, this paper endeavors to offer a preliminary understanding of the Taliban's political system. However, it acknowledges the inherent limitations and calls for sustained, in-depth research to unravel the intricacies of the Taliban's governance model, laying the groundwork for future scholarly inquiry into the enigmatic political landscape of Afghanistan under the Islamic Emirate.

The Historical Background of the Taliban

The term "Taliban" originates from the Arabic root "talaba," meaning to seek or request (Ahmadi, 2011: 40). In Arabic, "talebe" signifies a religious student, while in Persian, it is used to denote the same (Demirel, 2002: 58). Scholars define the Taliban as a group characterized by dogmatic religious beliefs, emerging notably as a militia group in 1994 (Beg, 2001: 205). On October 10, 1994, amidst the Afghan civil war, the "Tehrik Taliban Islami" emerged in Spin Boldak, Kandahar province, primarily comprising students from religious schools (Zahid, 2013). Notably, a significant portion of this group, led by Maulana Samiul Haq of Pakistani Pashtun descent, originated from Darul Uloom Haqqani. Many members hailed from Pashtun communities in southern Afghanistan and were the offspring of refugee families educated in Pakistani schools (Arefi, 1999: 194). Research suggests that the Pakistan Intelligence Service (ISI) played a pivotal role in supporting and guiding the Taliban, providing both military training and financial assistance (Kazemi, 2010: 29-30).

The Taliban swiftly seized control of Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city, on November 12, 1994, encountering minimal resistance. Initially, the Afghan populace harbored optimism, hoping that the Taliban could end the protracted civil strife. However, disillusionment followed as the Taliban enacted increasingly stringent laws, particularly after capturing Kabul in 1996 (Polat, 2006: 5). Subsequently, the Taliban engaged in a protracted conflict with the northern coalition (Mujahedin parties), ultimately securing control over approximately 90% of Afghanistan by 1996 (Ghufran, 2001: 468). During their initial reign, the Taliban received support from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, all of which recognized their government. The Taliban established the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan in 1996, grounded in Sharia law with a foundation rooted in Hanafi jurisprudence (Ahmadi, 2011: 41). However, their harboring of Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, strained relations with the United States, culminating in military intervention in October 2001 (Ahmadi, 2011: 43). After the 9/11 attacks, the United States, along with its NATO allies, launched a "war on terror" in Afghanistan with the aim of destroying the al-Qaeda network, changing the political regime, and promoting democratic values (Faheem and Majeed Khan, 2022: 87).

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States, with the support of the Northern Coalition, launched Operation Enduring Freedom, swiftly toppling the Taliban regime and forcing their retreat to Kandahar and subsequent flight to Pakistan. Despite setbacks, the Taliban began regrouping in 2004, engaging in insurgency and guerrilla warfare, with intensified activity post-2009 (Selim, 2003: 131). Concurrently, clandestine negotiations between the United States and the Taliban commenced, eventually leading to the Doha agreement in 2020, facilitating the withdrawal of U.S. forces in exchange for Taliban commitments (Abbas, 2023: 26). On August 15, 2021, the Taliban effortlessly retook Kabul, marking the collapse of the republican system as President Ashraf Ghani fled. This event marked the Taliban's return to power after two decades, symbolizing a significant shift in Afghanistan's political landscape.

The Nature of the Islamic Emirate

The Islamic Emirate system represents an unconventional political framework in the contemporary era, lacking a specific definition within the field of political science.

Despite this, scholars have identified characteristics of the Taliban government system, commonly categorizing it as totalitarian. Central to this classification is the system's reliance on a single leader, or Amir, as the focal point of authority, resulting in an inherently leader-centric structure where individual rights and participation are marginalized. Consequently, the role of citizens within the Islamic Emirate system is reduced to that of subordinates, predisposing the system to tendencies of tyranny and autocracy (Moheq, 2020).

Furthermore, the Taliban's governance model exhibits a flagrant disregard for fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, assembly, and self-determination. The regime imposes its authority through violence, coercion, and the suppression of dissent, under the guise of religious legitimacy (Fasihi, 2021). Any opposition to the Taliban is construed as an affront to Islamic values, thereby justifying the elimination of dissent through intimidation and terror. This method of governance mirrors characteristics of totalitarianism, as delineated by Hannah Arendt in her seminal work "Totalitarianism." Arendt posits that the creation of fear and terror serves as a primary mechanism for enforcing totalitarian rule, aiming to mold a new type of humanity subservient to the ruling leader's ideology (Arendt: 313). Consequently, the Taliban regime seeks to isolate individuals from societal interactions, fostering an environment of fear and paranoia where dissent is quashed and social cohesion deteriorates (Habibzadeh, 2022).

Moreover, the Taliban's regime exhibits parallels with historical totalitarian regimes, such as Italian fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, despite differences in the source of legitimacy. While the Taliban's legitimacy derives from a fusion of terrestrial and heavenly mandates, its governance methods and nature bear striking resemblance to those of past totalitarian regimes (Taheri, 2022: 81). Thus, the Taliban's Islamic Emirate can be unequivocally classified as a totalitarian regime, characterized by its authoritarian grip on power and systematic suppression of dissent (Karimi, 2021). In conclusion, the Taliban's regime epitomizes the hallmarks of totalitarianism, characterized by a leader-centric structure, suppression of individual rights, and reliance on fear and intimidation to maintain control. While its source of legitimacy may differ from historical totalitarian regimes, its governance methods and nature align closely with the totalitarian paradigm. Therefore, the Taliban's Islamic Emirate constitutes a full-fledged totalitarian regime, posing profound challenges to the rights and freedoms of the Afghan populace.

The Foundations of the Islamic Emirate

Although the foundations of the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban are unclear and uncertain. But from the statements of prominent Taliban officials, it can be inferred that "Afghanism" and "Islamism" form the foundation of the Islamic Emirate system. As an example, we can mention the statements of Anas Haqqani, one of the leading figures of the Haqqani network and an important member of the Taliban leadership. Anas Haqqani has emphasized many times in his speeches and statements that: "The Islamic Emirate is based on "Islamism" and "Afghanism" (Afghanistan International Report, 2021). To better understand these two foundations (Afghanism and Islamism) of the Emirate system, it is necessary to address them.

Afghanism (Afghanit)

"Afghanit" is one of the main foundations of the Islamic Emirate system. By relying on "Afghanism", the Taliban seeks to assimilate and integrate the identities of other ethnic groups under the ethnic identity of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan. Therefore, for the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban, "Afghanit" is both the basis for exercising power and also the basis of the legitimacy of their political order. The insistence on "Afghanit" is based on the belief that Pashtuns (Afghans) are the majority. The Taliban is a Pashtunist ethnic movement that follows the Pashtun majority based on the principle of "Afghanit" like other Pashtunist movements. Therefore, calling everyone "Afghan" is actually an attempt to simulate or integrate other ethnic identities into the Pashtun (Afghan) identity. The foundation of this attitude was laid by Mahmoud Tarzi in Afghanistan and until today Pashtun rulers follow it at different times despite the ideological differences (Sadiqi, 2022). Emphasizing being "Afghan" and "Afghanit" is actually continuing the process of cultural-identity simulation and denying the pluralism and multi-descent of the Afghanistan society, which is a great injustice to the non-Pashtun peoples of Afghanistan.

Islamism (Islamit)

Although the Taliban's ideology is confused and opaque. However, in the ideology of the Taliban, a mixture of Ikhwani, Deobandi, Maududi, and Wahhabi ideas can be found. Of course, the religious and political thought of the Taliban is most closely related to Deobandiyya and the opinions of Shah Wali Handi, Abul Kalam Azad, and Abul Alai Maududi. Apart from the intelligence nature of the Taliban, which mostly acts as a tool of Pakistan's foreign policy and the intelligence organization of that country's army in line with the depth of that country's strategy, this group has an extremist nature and dogmatic beliefs (Ahmadi, 2023). In fact, from the point of view of the flow of Islamic fundamentalist groups, the Taliban is a downgraded version of the fundamentalism of the Indian subcontinent, especially Pakistan. In a way, it can be said that the Taliban is an updated version of the fundamentalism of the Indian subcontinent, from the point of view of violence and dogmatism. The religious reading of the Taliban group is rooted in the intellectual model of Shah Waliullah Dehlavi and Abul Kalam Azad (Arafi, 1999: 201-202). Shah Waliullah was the founder of the Islamic awakening movement in the Indian subcontinent, and the Deobandi School of Fundamentalism is influenced by his thoughts. The religious school of Deoband established the "Hadith-oriented Hanafism" paradigm, which has distanced itself from the main intellectual tradition of the Hanafi religion. In this new paradigm, the narrative prevails over the intellect (Salehi, 2024: 7). The important consequence of the implementation of the "Hadith-oriented Hanafism" paradigm was the marginalization of intellectual sciences in Deobandi religious schools (Lohlker, 2022:205). According to Shah Wali Dehlawi, the revival of the Islamic caliphate is a fundamental pillar in the Islamization of the society, and he summarizes the creation of the Islamic caliphate in four cases: allegiance, council, installation, and domination. The central point is that Shah Waliullah considered relative and ethnic honor to be one of the ruling characteristics of the Islamic system, which is completely compatible with the current thinking of the Taliban, which considers itself a superior ethnic group (Pashtun). Based on this basis, the Taliban considers the rule of Rani worthy (exclusive) of the Pashtun people, and among the Pashtuns, they consider only the "Durrani" tribe as the chosen people and worthy of this position (Arafi, 1999: 202-203). In terms of its structural

model, the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban is rooted in the caliphate model influenced by the thought of Abul Kalam Azad, the theorist of the Indian Ulama Jamiat. In fact, the Taliban are implementing the "Islamic Emirate" political system in Afghanistan by following the model of Abul Kalam Azad. Therefore, the Islamic Emirate system of the Taliban is intellectually influenced by the thought of Shah Wali Dehlavi and in terms of the structural model, it is influenced by the view of Abul Kalam Azad of India (Arafi, 1999: 203). In fact, the Taliban, with its tribalist and regressive interpretation of Islam, seeks to establish a religious and ethnic totalitarian system in Afghanistan. Taliban's Islam does not have specific standards and characteristics, but has "anti-characteristics". Anti-innovation, anti-modern institutions, anti-democracy, anti-urbanism, anti-pluralism and tolerance, anti-rationalism, anti-women, and the like form the foundation of Islamism desired by the Taliban (Fasihi, 2021).

Indicators of Islamic Emirate System

Based on the intellectual foundations and performance of the Taliban in the last three years in Afghanistan, the indicators of the political emirate system can be recognized. The most important indicators can be listed as follows:

Totalitarianism and Autocracy

The most important features of the Taliban Islamic Emirate system are totalitarianism and autocracy. Because the Taliban, like any other totalitarian system, operates based on violence and discrimination. The Taliban completely ignores religious and ethnic minorities. Taliban opposes any kind of cultural and ethnic diversity. In the same way, it does not hesitate to impose severe restrictions on the freedoms and fundamental rights of citizens. Especially, he brutally suppresses his political opponents. The scope of the Taliban's control and supervision over all aspects of the public and private life of Afghan people is so wide that it includes the appearance (growing a beard) to the prohibition of using medicine to prevent pregnancy (the most private area of life) (UNAMA Report, 2023). In addition, severe acts of repression, torture, arbitrary detention, humiliation, and killing by the Taliban as a method of exercising power and sovereignty depict a real example of a totalitarian system (ACLEDA & APW Report, 2022). In fact, the induction of order based on fear and violence forms the foundation of the relationship between the Taliban Islamic Emirate system and the Afghan society, which is considered one of the distinctive features of a totalitarian system. People's daily life is full of fear and the Taliban's sword of violence and surveillance is possible in the private sphere of every person's life at any moment. In other words, in Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban, society literally does not exist because all aspects of life are under control and society has become an open prison. From home to work, from school to university, from real space to virtual space, from cell phones to cars, and from being alone to being in a group, everyone is inspected and controlled by the Taliban. In such an atmosphere, absolute fear reigns over the soul and spirit of each citizen and people, where not only citizens are deprived of human freedom, but at the same time, they also experience collective psychological torture. Therefore, the Taliban system is based on absolute fear, absolute violence, absolute deprivation, absolute torture absolute obedience, and the destruction of the private sphere (Dawalatyar, 2023).

Single Gender System (Male Patriarchy)

In terms of gender composition, the regime of the Islamic Emirate is a male regime. In the Taliban regime, women and girls are systematically oppressed and discriminated against. For this reason, the Afghan women's movement considers the Taliban to be a sexual apartheid regime, and they ask international institutions to recognize the apartheid against Afghan women. The regime of the Islamic Emirate strongly implements and promotes gender segregation and physical and social segregation between women and men with the legal and institutional framework of the Emirate, with unequal treatment based on gender and cruel discrimination against women (Farhan, 2013). This separation from education to the workplace, from home to recreation has led to the domination of men and the severe deprivation of women. In the Taliban regime, all fields are closed to women, any movement of women is suppressed, and mandatory dress codes are imposed on Afghan women. Afghan women and girls are completely deprived from decision-making and education to economic opportunities (Dawalatyar, 2023). The Taliban regime encourages violence and gender discrimination in the media, schools, universities, mosques, and other public places and considers political representation basically impossible for women. In addition, the Taliban promotes dangerous stigmas and labels, such as women being weak, and mentally deficient, and women's ability to reproduce is limited. The single-gender regime of the Taliban has completely marginalized women through the policy of violence and discrimination, and Afghan women do not enjoy the most basic human rights in the Emirate regime. In the meantime, domestic violence, forced marriages, and other forms of sexual abuse have become normal in the Taliban regime, and any lawsuit to improve women's rights in this regime is impossible.

Lack of Rule of Law

The Islamic Emirate system of the Taliban is completely alien to concepts such as rule of law, constitution, separation of powers, standards of fair trial, and provision of human rights of citizens, and these issues are on the sidelines. After returning to power, the Taliban abolished all legal structures and previous laws dismissed all the employees of the legal system of the previous system, and appointed their own people in their place. In the "Islamic Emirate" system, there is no version and procedure based on the rule of law. The Taliban generally refers to the authority of "Sharia", a term that is sometimes translated as "Islamic law", which is not defined and formulated. In other words, in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban regime, there is no real legal system in its strict and principled sense, and as a result, there is certainly no "law" either. It is worth remembering that opposition to modern laws in Afghanistan has a long history. The opposition to modern laws first appeared in Afghanistan when Shah Amanullah Khan took the initiative to modernize the legal system in Afghanistan. Shah Amanullah Khan implemented the program of modern reforms in all fields, including the legislative field. Before Shah Amanullah Khan, the legal system of Afghanistan was completely Sharia-based, fiqh and fatwa-based (Salehi, 2024: 34). Nevertheless, the legal order in the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban relies more on the order of the invisible leader of this group in the first step, and in the next step it is based on the speeches and statements of the Taliban officials, which are mostly confused, incomprehensible and ambiguous expressions (Maley, 2023). The lack of codified law and the lack of a legal mechanism based on a fair trial has made it difficult to achieve justice in the Taliban Islamic Emirate system and

has brought about a kind of legal anarchy. The findings of the Rawadari institution show that the standards of fair trial are widely violated in the judicial institutions of the Taliban, and especially women and religious minorities face serious challenges and problems in accessing justice. In dealing with criminal and legal cases, Taliban judges and courts use different traditional methods and procedures, which in most cases do not show justice and fairness (Rawadari Report, 2023).

Person-centered System (Amir-centered)

Contrary to the republican system, which is citizen-centered and the people have the right to determine their own destiny, the Islamic Emirate system of the Taliban is a person-centered (emir-centered) system. In the Taliban Emirate system, people are deprived of the right to participate in determining the ruler (the right to self-determination). In the Islamic emirate system, the ruler has undisputed power. It has been proven in practice that Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the leader of the Taliban in Kandahar, was the absolute factor in making the final decision and was immune to any type of mistake. Based on this, the identity of the emirate system is based on the identity of the emir (ruler) and the order of the emir (ruler). Of all the meanings attributed to Amir (ruler), the closest and most accurate one refers to the one who commands (Moheq, 2020). In this system, the ruler commands, and the people are obliged to obey. The role of the people is reduced to obedience and they no longer have a right in the relations of power and politics. In addition to the person-centeredness of the Islamic Emirate system, there is also the life-long rule of the Amir. As long as the Amir (ruler) is alive, he has the right to rule and command, and there is no mechanism that can remove the Amir (ruler) from power. In other words, there is no peaceful and practical way to remove the power of the ruling Taliban (Amir), in case of committing crimes, corruption, and violation of principles (Naimi, 2020). The famous sentence of English philosopher and historian John Acton that power breeds corruption and absolute power breeds absolute corruption also applies to the lifelong leader of the Taliban. Because being in power for a lifetime brings corruption and leads to autocracy and dictatorship. In other words, the nature of power is indomitable and any person who relies on the seat of power for life cannot ensure justice in society and meet the needs of all people in today's diverse and pluralistic society. Therefore, the leadership structure and nature of leadership in the Taliban Emirate system are not compatible with the realities of the modern world and are more related to the patriarchal era of prehistoric tribal systems.

Ethnocentrism and Exclusivity

The Taliban came into existence at a time when the Pashtuns were in disarray and losing power in Afghanistan. In fact, the emergence of the Taliban means more to restore the traditional and exclusive rule of the Pashtuns (Ahady, 1995: 622). This is why many Afghan writers consider the Taliban to be more of an ethnic movement than a religious movement. (Waaazi, 2002: 55). From the point of view of many Afghan writers, the Taliban have an ethnic agenda and have put on religious robes to fulfill their ethnic agenda. Therefore, the slogan of "religion preservation" and the establishment of an "Islamic government" by the Taliban is a ladder to meet the ethnic demands of this group (Hosseini, 2024). The Taliban think that no matter how much the political order is centralized, rigid iron, and mixed with the veneer of religion, it can be effective in

preserving and consolidating the "traditional and exclusive rule of the Pashtuns". This is why the Taliban are extremely afraid of an open and democratic order. Because in the free order, the foundation of the Taliban's ethnic aspirations will collapse. The stubbornness and standing of the Taliban against the establishment of a comprehensive national government and a decentralized political order in Afghanistan can be interpreted in this context. Emphasis on preserving religious values and establishing an Islamic government is a slogan for the Taliban rather than a firm belief in it. The Taliban pursue their ethnic demands under the guise of political Islam. Religion is a tool in the hands of the Taliban to realize the ethnic claim. Based on this, the fact that the Taliban are Pashtuns and that this group has an ethnic claim is not a secret to anyone. However this cannot necessarily prove that the entire Pashtun community is Taliban (Amini, 2022).

Conclusion

In the annals of political history, few nations have experienced the tumultuous cycle of regime collapses witnessed in Afghanistan over the past century. According to data from the World Bank, Afghanistan ranks among the highest globally in terms of failed political systems. This perpetual instability has severely undermined the country's political, social, economic, and military foundations, rendering it exceptionally fragile and vulnerable. The downfall of the republican system in August 2021 marked the latest episode in this ongoing saga of political upheaval. With the resurgence of the Taliban, Afghanistan has once again transitioned to a new political paradigm, characterized by radical Islamism and tribalism, particularly rooted in Pashtun ethnicity, known as the Islamic Emirate. This system, however, stands in stark opposition to democratic principles, embodying totalitarianism and religious-ethnic autocracy. Over the past two years, the Taliban's rule has demonstrated an overreliance on the arbitrary decisions of its leadership, flouting the rule of law and basic human rights. The regime's oppressive tactics, including repression, intimidation, public floggings, and systematic discrimination against women, have elicited widespread condemnation both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, the inherent inefficiency of the Taliban Emirate system has exacerbated human rights abuses and institutionalized violence against Afghan citizens. Consequently, the future of Afghanistan's political stability and the well-being of its people remain uncertain. A bright future for Afghanistan seems elusive in the immediate term, as the country continues to grapple with the enduring legacy of political turmoil and authoritarian rule.

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