

**THE TALIBAN'S TAKEOVER IN AFGHANISTAN; AN UNCEREMONIOUS
END & A CONFOUNDING BEGINNING**

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the implications of the recent fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban and its impact on the region and global politics. The paper argues that the United States needs to acknowledge the strategic failure in Afghanistan and gain insights from it, including engaging with the Taliban to ensure a sustainable political settlement in Kabul. The paper also emphasizes on the importance of positively interacting with the Taliban to tackle significant issues, such as eradicating terrorist's organizations and stopping Afghanistan from becoming a hub for terrorist activities.

The paper highlights the challenges associated with the Taliban's governance, particularly in terms of human rights, and argues that instead of continuing adversarial relations, the United States should work with regional powers to encourage the Taliban to adopt a more inclusive political system. The paper also underscores the importance of international recognition for the Taliban, which could be used as leverage to negotiate for more leniency in governance, particularly with regard to human rights and counterterrorism measures

Overall, the paper proposes that the collaboration of regional powers, including China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, supported by the United States, could persuade the Taliban to progress towards an all-encompassing political framework, leading to a stable political resolution for the competing factions in Afghanistan.

Key words: Afghanistan, Taliban, Regional Powers, China

Introduction:

The fall of Kabul has been a shocking headline for many, as the Taliban's quick victory was not anticipated by the world's most powerful military. Some have labeled it as "Saigon 2.0," while others believe it was due to the lack of resistance from the Afghan government. Some speculate that the United States intentionally left behind instability for China and Russia to deal with, while others consider it to be the "biggest intelligence failure" Within the context of American history. Irrespective of the causes, the Taliban now holds power in the

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strategically important region of Central Asia, and the international community must address the reality of an insurgent group in control.

Following the declaration of the formation of the Taliban's Government, adjacent nations are in a state of deliberation regarding whether or not to recognize the newly-formed Taliban-led government. The situation poses a significant challenge for the United States, given the difficult questions surrounding the reasoning behind the "Forever War" and the Biden administration's poorly executed withdrawal strategy. Additionally, Washington is faced with the tough choice of how to deal with the Taliban, as well as the management of the return of US citizens and allies from Kabul.

The Takeover Unfolds in Real Time:

The end of the United States lengthy war in Afghanistan was somber and unceremonious, with debris littering the deserted airstrip of Kabul's international airport, and desperate Afghans waiting outside its gates in vain hope of evacuation. As the Taliban fired shots into the night sky in triumph, the war's final moments were characterized by two American Marines exchanging handshakes with Taliban fighters amidst the subdued lighting of the domestic terminal. Exhausted and dehydrated evacuees boarded grey aircraft with uncertain futures, while the Taliban dictated their terms to a generation of Afghans who had spent 20 years hoping for a better future. Across America, overpasses and park benches were named in tribute to the war's casualties. The end, particularly for the Americans and their Western allies, arrived after numerous U.S. troops defending the Hamid Karzai International Airport departed in successive waves of heavy transport planes, until none were left in the closing hours of the war's defeat.

Despite US intelligence assessments predicting that Kabul could fall within 90 days, the city unexpectedly fell in under 10 days, leaving many surprised. This rapid collapse of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the fall of Afghanistan is attributed to several factors, including intelligence failures, a lack of determination to fight, widespread corruption within government forces, and the withdrawal of critical US support such as close air support and logistics.

In contrast to previous transitions of power, the change in Kabul was relatively smooth, The Taliban swiftly took over the entire country as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) offered little opposition and surrendered control in a matter of weeks. After 20-year stalemate, On August 15th, the Taliban seized control of Kabul, while US military retain

authority over specific part of the Kabul airport to facilitate the evacuation of American citizens and their Afghan allies.

After the Taliban took over Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani fled the country and the Taliban declared amnesty for all who had fought against them in the past two decades. While the group promised to protect women's rights under Shariah Law and even invited them to join the government, many rights activists remain skeptical of these assurances due to the Taliban's notorious history of failing to deliver on such promises. At their first press conference, the Taliban presented a more moderate vision for their governance plans, promising freedom of the press and a commitment to preventing Afghanistan from becoming a breeding ground for terrorist groups.

The historical, cultural, and religious factors that contributed to the Taliban's rise to power and their success in the recent conflict. He also discusses the impact of the Taliban's victory on the region and the global fight against terrorism. Rubin, B. R. (2021)

The strategic failure of the West in Afghanistan and argues that the Taliban's takeover was a predictable outcome of the US-led military intervention. He discusses the failures of the US military and political strategies and the impact of corruption and mismanagement on the Afghan government. He also analyzes the role of regional actors, such as Iran, Russia, and China, in the conflict. Collins, J. (2021)

Political vision of Taliban's government:

It is unclear what political system the Taliban will implement in Afghanistan now that they have taken control of the country. While the Taliban have engaged in sporadic peace talks over the years, they have been tight-lipped about their political vision and have emphasized their desire to establish an Islamic system. It remains to be seen whether they will follow the model of their 1990s government, which had an emir at the top and appointed ministers without any elections, or if they will adopt a hybrid system with both theocratic and elected components, as seen in Iran. It is also unknown whether the Taliban will consider the constitutional democracy that had been in place in Afghanistan, albeit imperfectly implemented, since 2004.

In the absence of clear answers from the Taliban on their political vision, they may opt to form a temporary administration through opaque selection of ministers and a president or prime minister. It is likely that they will create some sort of religious hierarchy in their new system, though no official announcement has been made about it yet. It is possible that the group may establish Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, their emir, as a higher authority than the

governing administration, or create an ulama council comprised of Taliban leaders that would hold the final decision-making power over policies and laws. Although the Taliban may introduce some changes to the previous Emirate's systems and strategies, it is improbable that they will renounce the legitimacy and utilization of the title "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," which they employed for their regime during the 1990s. They hinted that they might consider including individuals associated with the politics of the last two decades in their new administration. Former President Hamid Karzai and ex-senior government official Abdullah Abdullah have engaged in talks with them. Due to the Taliban's obligation to satisfy their own leaders and supporters in the process of forming a government, it is anticipated that they will only make symbolic efforts to include individuals who are not affiliated with the Taliban. Nonetheless, there are compelling reasons why such inclusion would benefit the Taliban. One possible benefit of this approach to governance is that it could eliminate the possibility of domestic opposition gaining momentum against the Taliban's rule. Additionally, it could fulfill the expectations of foreign nations, particularly those in the region whose assistance will be critical to the Taliban, that stability demands the inclusion of non-Taliban entities. The Taliban may use even a minimal degree of inclusiveness to argue that their victory was not just a result of military action, which they were advised against pursuing, and to strengthen their legitimacy.

While the Taliban are expected to retain dominance over the most influential ministries and establishments, there may be more opportunities for inclusion at the technocratic sphere, particularly in the civil service and government departments accountable for delivering public services. There are indications that some Taliban leaders acknowledge their limitations in handling the more complex aspects of governance. For instance, they requested that the health minister continue to serve in his position and have encouraged employees in the public sector to return to work with assurances of continued salaries. The group has previously practiced shadow governance in certain rural areas, but their reach has been limited, and their dependence has been both on the Afghani government and on NGOs to provide services, especially in fields such as education and healthcare.

It is currently uncertain how far the Taliban will go in terms of political inclusiveness, how long it will be sustained, and what shape their government will ultimately take. The outcome of this transition from insurgency to governance will largely depend on their ability to navigate the challenges ahead.

The immediate obstacles faced by the Taliban:

The Taliban did not have a prearranged strategy for governance or political agenda before taking control, which makes it vital for them to quickly establish one. This will enable them to maintain public services and prevent unrest while also demonstrating their commitment to creating a more Islamic society. The most pressing objectives for the Taliban will be to establish a government and preserve public order by utilizing their military commanders and fighters. While armed opposition to the Taliban is currently limited and unlikely to gain foreign support, it is still a situation that should be monitored closely (BBC News 2021).

The Taliban may face economic challenges in their governance if they pursue ambitious public spending plans, as the previous government relied heavily on foreign grant aid, which is likely to be suspended for the foreseeable future. While the Taliban will have access to revenue streams that supported their insurgency and customs revenue that was a major source of domestic revenue for the previous government, it remains unclear whether new donors will provide financial support to cover any funding gap. The situation warrants monitoring as economic strains could impact the stability of the Taliban's rule.

Prior to the recent events, Afghanistan was already grappling with a range of humanitarian issues, including drought, COVID-19, and displacement resulting from conflict. It was estimated that around 50% of the population would require humanitarian aid in 2021. These challenges are expected to be exacerbated by an economic crisis, with the national currency depreciating and the cost of basic necessities rising. Even though donors are expected to persist in supplying humanitarian assistance via international NGOs and UN agencies, the Taliban must guarantee access and coordinate efficiently with these providers to mitigate or forestall the escalation of these crises (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2021)

Taliban faces international isolation. Many countries have condemned the group's takeover, and some have already imposed sanctions on them. The United States, in particular, has frozen Afghan assets, which could exacerbate the economic crisis in the country. A report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (2021) suggests that the Taliban's international isolation could prevent them from accessing aid and investment, hindering their ability to stabilize the economy and provide basic services to the Afghan people. Center for Strategic and International Studies (2021).

How will the triumph of the Taliban impact the neighboring nations?

The triumph of Taliban in Afghanistan has led to a shift in the strategic interests of certain regional powers, namely China and Russia. These powers see potential benefits in the

Taliban's presence in Kabul. China has been reassured by the Taliban that extremist elements will not cause trouble in Xinjiang, and China also sees potential economic benefits in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Similarly, Russia shows interest in a deal which would prevent instability and extremism from spilling over into Central Asia. As a result, both China and Russia have signaled their willingness to establish friendly relations with the Taliban government. Russia, in particular, has expressed a sense of satisfaction in seeing its rival's defeat and considers the Taliban to be the de facto authority in Afghanistan, possibly leading to formal recognition of the Taliban government.

Pakistan has expressed satisfaction with the Taliban's commitment to reject the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and prevent them from using Afghanistan as a base to launch attacks on Pakistan. However, some observers fear that the Taliban's takeover could increase the threat of terrorism by hostile groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban. Thus, Exercising caution is necessary for Islamabad in its dealings with the Taliban's government in Kabul. India is in a challenging position regarding its policy towards Afghanistan, given its historical opposition to the Taliban and support for the previous Afghan government. It must now decide between maintaining support for exiled Afghan leaders or engaging with the Taliban to safeguard India's investments and influence in the region. India is monitoring the situation closely and could consider reaching out to the Taliban if necessary, guided by Kautilya's statecraft. The Taliban's recent flexibility on issues like human rights and strategic assurances to regional powers, including the US, could help them gain greater recognition and legitimacy than during their previous rule in the 1990s.

One study by Mohammad Reza Noroozi and Sayed Rouhollah Hashemi, published in the *Journal of World-Systems Research*, analyzes the historical relationship between Afghanistan and its neighboring nations. The study suggests that the Taliban's takeover could lead to increased instability and insecurity in the region, particularly in Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia. The authors argue that the Taliban's extremist ideology could inspire similar groups in these countries, leading to a rise in religious extremism and terrorism.

Similarly, another study by Frederic Grare, published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggests that the Taliban's return to power could destabilize the already fragile political situation in Pakistan. The study argues that Pakistan has long supported the Taliban and other extremist groups in Afghanistan, and the Taliban's victory could embolden these groups to increase their activities in Pakistan, posing a threat to its stability.

The Greatest Intelligence Failure for the United States:

The United States' rapid exit from Afghanistan has raised concerns about its commitment to allies in the region. While some experts argue that the withdrawal was inevitable, while some critics argue that the hurried exit and favoring of American interests over those of the Afghan populace have drawn disapproval from some quarters. This has garnered notice from both supporters and opponents of the United States.. In the event that Washington is perceived as deserting its allies, its adversaries may exploit the situation to their advantage.. As an illustration, China has already initiated portraying the United States as a feeble and untrustworthy power that lacks the ability to safeguard Taiwan, a claim that the US has staunchly denied (Wertheim, S. 2021)

Until the Taliban proves its dedication to human rights, the United States has explicitly stated that it will not recognize the Taliban government., and this stance can be justified. Some hawks in Washington are struggling to accept the fact that the after spending \$2.3 trillion over the course of two decades, the United States has not succeeded in accomplishing its objectives.. Some, such as John Allen, a retired US Marine general and president of the Brookings Institution, have called for a military response against the Taliban. However, It is a fact that the US mission in Afghanistan rapidly lost its focus and transitioned towards nation-building after the dismantling of Al-Qaeda. Despite training and equipping the Afghan National Defense Forces (ANDF), the US was unable to instill in them the will to fight. Those who pushed for this mission creep continued to overestimate the ANDF's strength, hoping to forestall a withdrawal. The resulting downfall of the country that was constructed with trillions of US dollars and thousands of American lives is a sorrowful spectacle, and it is imperative that lessons be gleaned from it in the coming years.

In the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is important for Washington to acknowledge its strategic defeat and take steps to learn from its mistakes. As noted by Stephan Wertheim in the Washington Post, it is unrealistic to expect the outcome of a lost war to resemble a victory. Instead of denying the situation, the US should leverage its influence to establish favorable political conditions in Afghanistan. It is imperative to have a comprehensive review of US strategy in the global war on terrorism to avoid similar mistakes as in Vietnam.

While achieving the objectives and withdrawing from Afghanistan is important, it is equally crucial to refrain from forsaking the country and repeating the error of permitting it to

transform into a breeding ground for terrorism. The leader of the political and military coalition of Afghan factions has appealed to nations of the west, particularly the US, to provide aid in combating the Taliban.. Nonetheless, capitalizing on internal divisions only aids terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Rather than pursuing such a strategy that Promoting national unity in Kabul and acknowledging the inclusive Taliban-led government would be more advantageous. By engaging diplomatically, the interests of the United States would be served by making it more expensive for the Taliban to shelter extremist groups or disregard human rights (Ghani, A. 2021)

Some experts argue that the US failed to adequately address the insurgency and the underlying grievances of the Afghan people, which allowed the Taliban to gain support and influence (Levy & Williams, 2021).

Others point to the overreliance on airpower and the failure to build a strong and sustainable Afghan security force (Jaffe, 2021).

Breaking the Stereotype and the Way Forward:

Apart from the issue of human rights, the aftermath of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan poses a significant challenge in facilitating an inclusive national dialogue to establish a sustainable political settlement in Kabul. However, the current perception of the Taliban as a harsh, inflexible, and unsophisticated group obstructs constructive interaction and hampers the safeguarding of human rights. General Nick Carter, the Chief of Defense Staff of Britain, urged against labeling the Taliban as enemies and described them as "country boys" who abide by a code of honor. Thus, listening to the Taliban, allowing them to demonstrate their credentials, and It is crucial to evaluate their governance by taking into account the realities on the ground.

The main objective of the Taliban was to combat the US military presence and regain control. Which they have achieved. However, to rebuild Afghanistan and combat terrorism, they need to cooperate with the international community to address bigger challenges. Terrorism remains a major concern, as highlighted by the recent suicide bombing at Kabul airport carried out by ISIS. With the deaths of 175 individuals, including 13 US Marines, the attack highlighted the danger posed by the terrorist organization. In addition, ISIS poses a challenge to the Taliban's authority and security. While the Taliban's control of Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan is not yet secure, they must fulfill their commitments to prevent terrorist attacks originating from Afghanistan. The United States, together with its allies and regional powers,

should work with the Taliban to address these challenges, including dismantling ISIS and al-Qaeda. The evaluation after the withdrawal should involve positive interaction with the Taliban concerning political and security issues, while also obtaining assurances regarding human rights. Gen Frank McKenzie has emphasized the need for a common purpose with the Taliban, which can be achieved through joint efforts to combat terrorism (Ahmad, S. 2021)

The negotiations in Doha, led by the US, demonstrated that a regional agreement that includes China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran could convince the Taliban to pursue an inclusive political system that leads to a lasting political resolution for all the competing factions in Afghanistan. The Taliban's efforts to reach out to former warlords, such as Abdullah Abdullah, Hamid Karzai, and Gulbadin Hekmatyar, who have substantial political support, indicate their readiness to take steps in this direction. The Taliban is aware that ignoring potential opposition forces could lead to resistance and a bloody civil war. Additionally, the Taliban needs international recognition, and the US should take the lead among all the regional nations in leveraging this opportunity to negotiate for more flexibility in governance, particularly with regards to human rights and counterterrorism, which are mutual concerns for all stakeholders (Ali, N. 2021).

Experts have criticized the United States' withdrawal and its impact on the country's stability (Rashid, 2021), others have emphasized the need for the international community to support the Afghan people and provide humanitarian aid (Kumar, 2021).

Additionally, some scholars have suggested that the current situation in Afghanistan could have implications for the global balance of power, particularly in the context of China's growing influence in the region (Pant, 2021).

Some have suggested that the international community should continue to provide aid to Afghanistan and support the formation of an inclusive government that respects human rights (Kugelman, 2021).

Others have emphasized the need to engage with the Taliban and encourage them to become more moderate and inclusive (Bishara, 2021).

Some experts have suggested that regional powers should play a more active role in stabilizing Afghanistan, with Pakistan and Iran playing a critical role (Kugelman, 2021).

Conclusion:

The fall of Afghanistan has left the international community with a range of challenges that require immediate attention. While there are legitimate concerns regarding the Taliban's governance and human rights abuses, it is important to recognize that productive engagement

and diplomatic efforts can help to mitigate these concerns. The United States and its allies should avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and work toward a sustainable political settlement in Afghanistan. To accomplish this, it is necessary to interact with the Taliban and other regional powers such as China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, to establish an inclusive political system that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders. Such efforts should also aim at preventing Afghanistan from becoming a breeding ground for terrorism, which poses a significant threat to global security.

Overall, it is crucial to recognize that the fall of Afghanistan represents a strategic defeat for the United States and its allies, but it also presents an opportunity to learn from past mistakes and adopt a more constructive approach to diplomacy and engagement. The international community must now work together to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a failed state and a breeding ground for extremism, but instead becomes a stable and prosperous country that respects human rights and contributes positively to the region and the world.

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