

## New Afghanistan and its Neighbours' Responsibility

US-NATO forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan has raised some crucial questions about the future of the country. With foreign troops leaving, the Taliban fighters were advancing, with almost no resistance from government forces. In recent weeks, the Taliban have captured most districts and its fighters have taken the control of almost all the provincial capitals, not to mention the capital Kabul without any bloodshed.

*"The Taliban escalated its campaign, moving to seize provincial capitals that have fallen like a row of dominoes and mounting a surprisingly sophisticated campaign. They moved early in the north, knowing that this region had spawned the Northern Alliance under Ahmad Shah Massoud that drove the Taliban from power in 2001. The Taliban deployed their own version of special operations forces, known as "red units," which helped break government defences. When the Taliban seized provincial capitals such as Kunduz, they freed prisoners held there, augmenting their forces."*[\[ii\]](#)

The speed of the Taliban's advancement is quite a stunning manifestation of combat zone momentum. Each victory fuelled another, added with Biden's decision to withdraw all US combat troops without a concrete power transfer plan to the victorious Taliban that could help stabilize the country afterwards.

*"The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan less than a month before the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Strengthened by the copious U.S. weaponry they have captured, and by the prestige that comes with having humbled a superpower."* (The Washington Post, 15 August 2021)[\[iii\]](#)

The most surprising situation for the US and its allies is that the Afghan military has not performed any better on the battleground despite Biden's claim that they are now better trained, which justifies US troops withdrawal.

*"The Taliban exemplified something that inspired, something that made them powerful in battle, something closely tied to what it meant to be Afghan."* (Carter, 2021)[\[iii\]](#)

The Taliban stated after their takeover that they are willing to cooperate to stabilise the country, but the West-installed government seems reluctant to acknowledge them in masses. The situation in the near future will determine the course of events not just in Afghanistan, but the whole region.

The unwillingness of the West-sponsored government to cooperate with the Taliban will reflect in the chaos; and the disorder cannot be contained only within Afghan borders. It will certainly spread beyond Afghan borders and destabilise the whole region. If Afghanistan's neighbours want to ensure peace within their own borders, they will have to cooperate with the Taliban to stabilise the already war-torn Afghanistan.

If regional powers and their Western masters failed to conduct a peaceful power transfer to the Taliban, Afghanistan will plunge into another full-scale proxy war, and the whole region will be destabilised, which will have a ripple effect into the rest of Asia and all the way to Europe.

*"The pentagon and the U.S. Congress deserve a share of the blame for the debacle, and certainly for the rosy progress reports that so often emerged. But what the United States or its allies could or should have done differently.... is a debate that should consume politicians, pundits and historians for years to come."* (The New York Times, 15 August 2021)[\[iv\]](#)

One of the immediate outcomes of such a fearful situation will certainly be a massive refugee crisis, like that in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s or the recent Syrian War. The first waves of this mass departure are already felt in Turkey and the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan.

It is significant to acknowledge that not only have the Afghans changed culturally, politically, and demographically since the 1990s when the Taliban ruled the country, but the Taliban too has changed.

They have successfully participated in diplomatic engagements with the global superpower. Their approach on the battlefield has proved more mature than expected. They have proven successful diplomatically as well as militarily.

It is high time for both the neighbours of Afghanistan and Western powers to stop defaming the Taliban and adhere to the humane principles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Those who believe that they can stop the Taliban are delusional. The Taliban's recent advancements have negated the propaganda made against them, such as the belief that they will do what ISIL did in Syria and Iraq.

Regional powers must take the challenge seriously and act before Afghanistan plunges into turmoil and turns into a civil warring state. All regional players and the West should urgently initiate a mutual cooperation framework that mobilises the region around a common security goal: to stabilise Afghanistan. Pakistan and Iran's role is especially important here, as these countries are known to be much closer and supportive to the Taliban and maintain extensive influence over them.

The withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan has provided its neighbouring countries a time to make a historic decision about the future of the region. If the region wants to live in peace, anchored in the values of tolerance, progress, and co-existence, every country must accept the re-emergence of the Taliban. No one in the region wants to continue to engage in a destructive never-ending zero-sum game of conflicts. It is logical to understand that the US and NATO had the luxury to choose between staying in Afghanistan and leaving. But Afghanistan's neighbours do not have this luxury. So the wise choices to be made in these tough times will determine the collective future of the region.

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[i] [The bloody war in Afghanistan is nearing a final tipping point.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/12/bloody-war-afghanistan-is-nearing-final-tipping-point/)  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/12/bloody-war-afghanistan-is-nearing-final-tipping-point/>

[ii] [Twenty Years of Afghanistan Mistakes.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/15/twenty-years-afghanistan-mistakes-this-preventable-disaster-is-biden/)  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/08/15/twenty-years-afghanistan-mistakes-this-preventable-disaster-is-biden/>

[iii] [Malkasian, C. \(2021\), "The American War in Afghanistan". Oxford University Press](#)

[iv] [The Tragedy of Afghanistan.](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/opinion/afghanistan-taliban.html) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/opinion/afghanistan-taliban.html>