

The Fall of Kabul and the Taliban 2.0

By El Mostafa Rezrazi

Abstract

The Taliban movement took control of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, without confrontation or resistance, as soon as the president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the country. Afghan forces were not able to face the Taliban, despite of the fact that Taliban was technically outnumbered and outgunned by Afghan government forces.

The New American administration first priority is to make US military mission in Afghanistan conclude by August 31st. Biden believes that the mission US army in Afghanistan have achieved their objectives. (to get the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 and to deliver justice to Osama Bin Laden, and to degrade the terrorist threat to keep Afghanistan from becoming a base from which attacks could be continued against the United States).

The quick and easy access of Taliban to Kabul and The scenes at Kabul's airport are eerily reminiscent of the American departure from Saigon in 1975

Does the Taliban have the sophistication and experience to successfully govern in Afghanistan?
The Taliban movement is trying to adjust itself to new non-fighting duties (supervising talks, negotiating posts, adapting regulations, organizing traffic, securing the mobility of foreigners and to Kabul airport, securing foreign embassies, and other obligations that Taliban fighters were unfamiliar.

The Taliban movement faces major challenges, foremost of which is winning the hearts of a new generation of Afghans born and raised in an urban space in which the Taliban did not contribute, and then winning the trust of the international community, which uses the card of acknowledgment of legitimacy to compel the movement to accept a number of concessions that distance it from its own identity. And finally, the responsibility of Taliban to preserve the country's security and unity.

Afghanistan will witness in the coming weeks increased interactions, whether about the design of a new governing administration, the preservation of security in various regions of the country, or by confronting Western media campaigns that try to undermine the Taliban's reputation and credibility. However, it is also expected that the Taliban will strengthen their talks with Washington to secure a peaceful withdraw of American forces, as with Russia, Pakistan, and China, and other countries that sent positive messages with the aim of normalizing their relations.

The duties of governance and the political and technical management of public life put the Taliban in front of several challenges. But these challenges might disrupt the dream of rebuilding the Islamic Emirate, as they are obliged to respect their commitments related to restoring confidence among Afghans, reassuring international public opinion, expanding freedoms, reconstructing the economy, and protecting the country from insecurity—it is possible that pockets of resistance. We should acknowledge that relevant analysis to these changes taking place in Afghanistan, requires to take into consideration: (a) the transformations that occurred in Afghanistan in terms of demography and urbanization (especially the capital, Kabul), (b) changes experienced by the Taliban movement in terms of its leading figures, its narratives, and its political and military organizational structures, (c) then the shifts of the American foreign policy and national security doctrine over the past two decades.

Certainly, the fall of Kabul in the post-COVID-19 world order coincides with the birth of the new American new era, and a Taliban 2.0 that we need to understand better.

A flash-back: On the evening of April 28, 1975, President Gerald Ford was in a meeting with his team when his deputy national security advisor came in and passed him an urgent note, warning him that Saigon was falling faster than expected. Similarly to what we are seeing today, Congress and the Pentagon had been pressuring the president for weeks to move faster on evacuating Americans and their South Vietnamese allies.

On Sunday August 15, the Taliban movement took control of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, without confrontation or resistance, as soon as the president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the country with his family, and the government collapsed. Tens of thousands of people tried to flee through Kabul International Airport.

International observers have mostly followed with concern the U.S. decision to completely withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan before the end of August. This urgency in concluding the evacuation of US forces seemed incomprehensible, unless its goal is to remove the specter of occupation from the 9/11 twentieth anniversary, But since the continuation of foreign forces on the Afghan soil disrupts the effort to rebuild a new meaning, the urgency to withdrawal comes to end a war that should end with a happy or less traumatic narrative and a meaning.

But it happens that the quick and easy access of Taliban to Kabul made the US evacuation plan unorganized, as it was described as unprofessional by many observers, marked by an anxiety reminiscent of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and the sudden withdrawal after the fall of Saigon.

Perhaps the only difference is that the White House's messaging seems more consistent. Joe Biden addressed his message to the nation: "I stand squarely behind my decision. After 20 years, I've learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw US forces." But despite this discourse, which targets communities affected by war, Biden has not escaped criticism, particularly in relation to the failure of the U.S. administration to anticipate the confusion that has accompanied the process of U.S. withdrawal, and the lack of coordination with U.S. allies.

Transformations that occurred in Afghanistan in terms of demography and urbanization (especially the capital, Kabul), changes experienced by the Taliban movement in terms of its leading figures, its narratives, and its political and military organizational structures, then the shifts of the American foreign policy and national security doctrine over the past two decades; require three levels of analysis:

The first is related to the expectations of the American public. The second is related to the internal debate between the various Afghan players and stakeholders. The third level is the current interactions between various regional and international powers, which are motivated by strategic interests and alliances, rather than integrated values and moral obligations.

Did the Doha talks between Afghan parties fail?

The agenda of the talks in Doha have included, during the last months, several political and security issues, but the mechanism for distributing power within an agreed government was the most important point. Nevertheless

before the Taliban took control of Kabul, negotiations took place under extreme pressure, because of the U.S.'s urgent planning for a comprehensive military withdrawal from Afghanistan, in addition to the fact that talks were not able to stop the fighting between government forces and Taliban fighters.

Importantly, after Taliban took control of Kabul, talks began to take more extensive forms, in terms of places (Doha, Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and others), and in terms of stakeholders, so that they were not limited to main international and national political actors, but moved to consider warlords and local leaders with wide regional and tribal influences, especially in the areas bordering Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Iran, and China.



Taliban launched a number of intensive consultations with different parties, including the ongoing one the coordination council initiated by former President Hamid Karzai, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah, and a former prime minister, Islamic Party leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. But the shape of the negotiations has already begun to change, because the Taliban is now the power broker, differently

from its previous position in the Doha talks, when it was just a guest, representing a militant movement. In addition, talks will very likely combine negotiating benefits and distribution of roles and positions within a new government, and must also agree on political drivers (as long as the outcomes of the consultations will not be validated by legislative or local elections, but will be consensual, it seems that there is a keenness on

the part of Taliban to maintain balances between central political class based in Kabul, and local leaders from other provinces), and the constitutional principles that will delineate the new pattern of governance.

It is expected that the consensus between the most important leaders of the former political scene and the leaders of Taliban, carries a lot of optimism towards reaching a road map to overcome the current situation. Indeed, the former president Hamid Karzai early initiated a coordinating council together with Abdullah Abdullah, chairman of the Afghan delegation to peace talks, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of the Hesb-i-Islami party, to manage a peaceful transfer of power. Mr. Karzai has called on both Afghan government and Taliban forces to act with restraint.

Hamid Karzai
@KarzaiH



در پی خروج آقای اشرف غنی و مقامات مسئول از کشور، به منظور جلوگیری از هرج و مرج و کاهش درد و رنج مردم و جهت اداره هر چه بهتر امور مربوط صلح و انتقال مسالمت آمیز شورای هماهنگی متشکل از محترمین هر یک داکتر عبدالله عبدالله رئیس شورای عالی مصالحه ملی، رهبر جهادی گلبدین حکمتیار...

5:04 PM · Aug 15, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Hamid Karzai
@KarzaiH



22h
Replying to @KarzaiH
امیر حزب اسلامی افغانستان و حامد کرزی رئیس جمهور پیشین کشور تشکیل گردید. این شورا از نیروهای امنیتی حکومت و نیروهای امنیتی تحریک اسلامی طالبان میخواید با حفظ خویشتنداری جلو درگیری ها، هرج و مرج و تحریکات افراد غیر مسئول و غیر مرتبط را قاطعانه بگیرند. در صورت ضرورت با شماره های...

Nonetheless, we can observe that the Taliban's lead negotiator in talks with the government, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, reacted positively just after the Taliban took control of Kabul. The Taliban said on its 'Islamic Emirate' account on Twitter on Sunday 16th

August, that its forces "reach those areas where some riots and looting took place by some spoilers", stressing that this procedure does aim to fight, but rather to "secure the areas and preserve the property and wealth of citizens". This was confirmed also by Kabul's intelligence department, Fatahullah Madani, who reassured the city's residents, and clarified that the Taliban intelligence network has been deployed throughout Kabul, and as for some of the minor challenges that exist, plans have been made to tackle them.

الإمارة الإسلامية
@alemara_ar



رئيس استخبارات #كابول (فتح الله مدني)، يطمئن سكان المدينة، ويضيف بأنه تم نشر الشبكة الاستخباراتية في جميع أنحاء العاصمة كابول، وأما بخصوص بعض التحديات الجزئية الموجودة، فقد تم التخطيط للسيطرة عليها. كما أكد على إلقاء القبض على جميع اللصوص ومرتكبي أعمال النهب والسلب.

Translate Tweet

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4.3K views

4:02 PM · Aug 16, 2021 · Twitter for Android

He also emphasized that thieves and looters would be arrested.

Did the Taliban spoil the scheme to spread chaos before entering?

Little by little predictions began to come true regarding the scenario of spreading chaos to disrupt Taliban rule.

The plans to sow chaos to disrupt the official transfer of power to Taliban still exist. As shown in multiple news reports, thousands of Afghans crowded into Kabul international airport hoping to flee Afghanistan after the country returned to Taliban control. These images reinforce the common representations of the Taliban's identity in international public opinion.

However, it seems that the Taliban will need more time to impose their control over all the Afghan territories, as is the case now with the province of Panjshir, where former Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh and Ahmed Shah

Massoud, son of the former anti-Taliban leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, are trying to reorganize the resistance against the Taliban.

It is likely that anti-Taliban protests will expand in a number of provinces, whether they are affiliated to former warlords, or are provoked by media mobilization against the Taliban, backed by several Afghan opposition figures.

According to a tweet from the defense minister in Ashraf Ghani's government, control over the three districts of the Afghan province of Baghlan has been restored by the resistance forces against the Taliban.

"Resistance to the Taliban is my duty. Pul-e-Hesar, Deh Salah and Banu districts in Baglan are occupied by local resistance forces. The resistance is still ongoing" (@Muham_madi1)

The initial plan of the Taliban after 'Victory':

The Taliban's lead negotiator in talks with the government, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, congratulated all of Afghanistan for the victory. "Now it will be shown how we can serve our nation," he said. "We can ensure that our nation has a peaceful life and a better future."

In an attempt to confront the skeptical media portrayal of the movement, many Taliban leaders have acted passively to reassure international public opinion that it wants to build constructive relationships within both the regional and international environment, and to protect diplomatic and foreign missions based in Afghanistan.

Pledges have also included statements on the Taliban's keenness to continue talks with other parties in order to establish a broad and accommodating government to meet the aspirations of Afghans.

Responding to statements and answering questions raised of the UN security council extraordinary meeting held by the Security Council, Taliban asserted that they were willing to protect the rights of their citizens, and would allow women to work and study, in accordance with the Sharia rules that require the wearing of Hijab (instead of Buqu').

The Taliban spokesman has also expressed the Taliban's wish to reestablish friendly relations with the international community, and announced the Taliban's comprehensive amnesty for all its opponents, in addition to their commitment to protect freedoms for women to work and to study in accordance with the principles of Islamic conduct. They issued reassurances about the freedom of the press in the new Kabul.

However, reactions of the international community have varied, from skepticism about the Taliban's statements, to those who foresaw the good news of what they considered a new opportunity to rebuild a more integrated Afghanistan after an international isolation lasting more than thirty years—since the fall of communist Kabul.

The UN Security Council's meeting on Monday 16th August, was absolutely urgent, but gave the impression, through discussions and interventions, that what was being discussed was not urgent, as if the Council was not ready to discuss practical steps to deal with the new political situation in Afghanistan. The totality of the interventions reflected the lack of up-to-date knowledge on the Taliban.

Different speakers gave the impression that most of the interventions were straying, burdened with fear, anxiety and a feeling of defeat. Speakers focused on issues related to human rights, especially the rights of women and minorities, the protection of diplomatic missions and foreigners. Speakers also requested state members not to rush to recognize the Taliban bilaterally.

Perhaps the Security Council would have been more proactive if the extraordinary session had been held after the historic speech of U.S. President Biden.

This would have allowed the Council to realize understand the USA intentions and philosophy on which the decision to quickly withdraw their forces was based, and then to understand the White House perception on the quick takeover of Kabul by Taliban, and finally to let other members of the UNSC better informed about the priority steps that Washington proposed to deal with this crisis

Peaceful control of Kabul revealed the weakness of anticipation mechanism in the US crisis

The Taliban's lead negotiator in talks with the government, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, made comments in a video posted on social media, surrounded by other members of the Taliban delegation to the talks in Doha, Qatar. He stated that "there was no expectation that we would achieve victory in this war ... But this came with the help of Allah, therefore we should be thankful to Him, be humble in front of Him, so that we do not act arrogantly". Even the U.S. President Joe Biden and other top U.S. officials were stunned by the speed of the Taliban's near-total takeover of Afghanistan. This has led to disruption in the previous planned withdrawal of US forces, and put the US administration under the obligation to make the withdrawal more urgent, even if it is less organized and disorganized.

For many US officials, the scenario of the rapid collapse of the Afghan government carries chaos factors whose repercussions are assessed more dangerous and costly. Biden has on many occasions downplayed the prospect of the Taliban's rise, while arguing that Americans of all political persuasions are tired of a 20-year war, a conflict that has shown the limits of money and military intervention to overcome the political will of the Taliban. By Sunday 16th August, it was clear that the White House had been caught by surprise by the sheer speed of the collapse of the Afghan security forces. This collapse has raised questions about the accuracy of previous assessments of Afghan capabilities being boosted in two decades, costing billions of dollars and thousands of lives.

Uncertainty:

The Taliban movement faces major challenges, foremost of which is winning the hearts of a new generation of Afghans born and raised in an urban space in which the Taliban did not contribute, and then winning the trust of the international community, which uses the card of acknowledgment of legitimacy to compel the movement to accept a number of concessions that distance it from its own identity, and finally, the responsibility of Taliban to preserve the country's security and unity.

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The Taliban will face challenges, as they are obliged to respect their commitments related to restoring confidence among Afghans, reassuring international public opinion, expanding freedoms, reconstructing the economy, and protecting the country from insecurity—it is possible that pockets of resistance will disrupt the dream of rebuilding the Islamic Emirate.

In the Middle East, Arab states will face great difficulties in dealing with the new Afghanistan, because their post-Arab Spring blueprints to confront political Islam are unlikely to be effective with the new 'Moderate' model of governance of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.



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