

REPORT

# The Impact of Taliban Rule on the Future of Afghanistan

*September 2021*



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## Introduction

As the Taliban consolidates its control over Afghanistan, the group is preparing to lead the country it once ruled until 2001. This significant Taliban advance was possible because weapons were concentrated in Pashtun-populated regions and there was a lack of cooperation among national resistance groups. In the meantime, discussions are focused on the structure of the new Afghan government, the Constitution, the official name and flag of the country and the president of the new administration. Other internal factors will also affect the next Taliban administration such as the distribution of power among different ethnic groups, the impending economic collapse and clashes between the aspirations of the Afghan people and the Taliban. Though there has been some cautious optimism about Afghanistan's future under the Taliban's leadership, international geopolitical and security concerns can only be alleviated if the group adopts a policy of openness that is in line with the modern era.

## 1. A Brief Summary of How the Taliban Captured Afghanistan

After 20 years of fighting in Afghanistan, the United States tried to find a definitive solution by negotiating with the Taliban. After more than a year of negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, an agreement was signed on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar. The agreement included the following:

1. No group or person from the territory of Afghanistan will threaten the United States and its allies.
2. All foreign forces will leave Afghanistan.
3. After the agreement, dialogue between Afghans (Taliban-Kabul administration) will be initiated.
4. A sustainable ceasefire will be achieved through intra-Afghan dialogue and a political roadmap for Afghanistan will be drawn up.

In addition, the agreement included the release of 1,000 Afghan and foreign captives held by the Taliban, the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters, the lifting of sanctions imposed on the Taliban and its removal from the FATF list. Furthermore, the Taliban, referred to as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in the agreement, must not cooperate with, host, and grant residence permits, passports and visas to individuals belonging to groups such as al-Qaeda or allow them to use Afghan territory against the United States and its allies.

After this agreement, the intra-Afghan dialogue began. Negotiations were held in Qatar, Moscow, and Tehran. However, there was no firm outcome from these negotiations. During the intra-Afghan dialogue, the future Constitution, government structure, the official name of the country, women's rights and media freedom were discussed. Amid the intra-Afghan dialogue, Taliban attacks proliferated and the areas under its control expanded.

With regard to the Taliban's attacks, it is understood that during the first stage the group did not capture the provincial centers but focused on attacking districts. As a matter of fact, this issue was discussed a lot on social media and television as questions arose about whether it was part of the agreement between the Taliban and the United States. With the intra-Afghan dialogue failing to reach a final outcome, the

Taliban increased its attacks and moved faster. So much so that the Taliban, which stepped up its attacks in June, captured more than 200 districts in late July. The Kabul government initially called the losses a tactical retreat, but many of the districts captured by the Taliban were not recaptured. With the Kabul government not able to put up an effective fight against the Taliban, the national resistance began to fight the Taliban. Led by different local warlords, the national resistance effort was uncoordinated and spread across different regions.

Ethnic leaders affiliated with the Afghan government were uncoordinated, just like the local warlords. Furthermore, there was no coordination even between the leaders representing the same ethnic group. For instance, Ismail Khan of Tajik origin, Atta Mohammad Noor and Ahmad Massoud, son of Ahmad Shah Massoud, declared war against the Taliban in different regions. However, they did not coordinate with one another. As a result, the Taliban defeated their small unorganized resistance fronts and captured Kabul on August 15.

## **2. Why the Taliban Did Not Face Any Serious Resistance**

When the United States attacked Afghanistan in 2001, Afghan groups had a significant stock of weapons left over from the civil war. However, after the US invasion, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR) began under the supervision of international security forces. As a result, weapons were collected, destroyed or handed over to the central government. However, most of the weapons were destroyed in non-Taliban regions while in the southern and eastern regions dominated by the Taliban, the DDR program was not fully implemented. Therefore, while the Taliban kept weapons from the civil war, many areas bordering the areas under its control were disarmed. The important point to mention is that the areas under Taliban control often overlap with areas inhabited by Pashtuns. From this, it can also be deduced that weapons were collected from the areas not inhabited by the Pashtuns.

Like Afghanistan's monarchical era, both the presidents who came to power post-2001 were of Pashtun origin. Under Hamid Karzai's government, the Taliban were referred to as "dissatisfied brothers,"

and Ashraf Ghani stressed that 98 percent of Afghanistan's prisoners were Pashtuns which he deemed as [unfair](#). From here, it is understood that both the presidents focused on Pashtun nationalism while ruling the country. In addition, during the Karzai period, the placement of Pashtuns in the northern regions was frequently [raised](#). There is controversy that Ashraf Ghani only employed other ethnic groups symbolically while his core staff was purely [Pashtun](#).

In light of recent conflicts, the Ghani administration was unable to take back several districts and left them to the Taliban in the name of making a tactical retreat. In addition, national resistance arose in certain areas to defend Afghan territories from Taliban advances. Ghani's government initially said it would support the national resistance, but this pledge was not honored on the battlefield. As a matter of fact, the aforesaid has been discussed frequently on social [media](#). Although the Afghan army had sufficient equipment and training to fight the Taliban, at the leadership level there was not enough will to fight against the Taliban. Many cities in Afghanistan were handed over to the Taliban by state-appointed governors without any resistance such as [Ghazni and Jalalabad](#).

### **3. What About the National Resistance?**

As mentioned earlier, the lack of coordination between the national resistance fronts, the lack of ammunition promised by the central government and the conspiracy against resistance leaders led to the resistance failing. Leaders such as Ismail Khan, Atta Mohammad Noor and Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum announced that they had been defeated as a result of a political conspiracy waged against [them](#). Noor stated in a [video](#) released from Uzbekistan that the Afghan army did not offer any support, and the 300 M16s that arrived at the last minute were impractical as part of an orchestrated plot. Therefore, the Taliban took over all of Afghanistan at an unexpected rate without facing any serious obstacles and emerged victorious.

### **4. The Possible Structure of the Next Administration**

Looking at the way the Taliban ruled from 1996 to 2001, it is understood that there was no electoral process in place, and people were appointed.

However, there is a system of allegiance under the Taliban known as *bay'ah*. It emerged in the early Islamic period. However, there is no direct public pledge of allegiance. Based on *ba'yah*, tribal elders pledge allegiance to the head of the administration on behalf of the Afghan people. The head of the administration is called "Ameer-ul Momineen," who appoints other lower-level officials. Unlike the early days of Islam, ethnicity is also of great importance to the Taliban. As a matter of fact, during 1996 to 2001, almost all of its administrators, including district prefects, governors, mayors, and ministers, were of Pashtun origin, including in the areas where other ethnic groups lived.

Presently, the Taliban is doing what it did in the past. In Daykundi Province, where the entire population is Hazara, the governor, the head of the 11 units which make up the main organization of the province, the mayor and the prefects who will serve in the provincial districts are of Pashtun origin. However, the lower-level employees are appointed from among the locals.

This has unsettled other ethnic group leaders, who have emphasized the need for all ethnic groups and minorities to be represented in the new administration. A group of government representatives from the previous administration who traveled to Pakistan for negotiations also stressed this point at a press conference in [Islamabad](#). The Taliban also mentioned that all Afghans would be part of the new administration. However, there is no consensus yet on what kind of administration will be established.

Whether the Constitution will change or not was also hotly debated during the intra-Afghan negotiations. Afghanistan's current Constitution is a mixture of Islamic and civil law. The Taliban has made it clear that it does not accept the [democratic order](#). However, it is not yet clear whether the Constitution will be completely changed or partially. In addition, the name of the country and the flag of the next administration have also been a source of much debate. Although the Taliban have said that they have no problem with the tricolor flag of Afghanistan (black, red, green), images of violence against individuals hoisting it have been posted on [social media](#). But under Taliban rule or Taliban-dominated rule, it seems difficult

to visualize any flag other than the group's. However, the name of the next administration is not as controversial as the flag and the Constitution, as Afghanistan's current name is also the "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan." A decisive issue is whether Afghanistan will be under the control of an emir in the future, or whether an electoral system will be introduced, at least at some levels.

## **5. Taliban's Top Figures for Inclusion in the Next Administration**

After news of the death of the Taliban's first leader Mullah Mohammad Omar was announced in 2016, the Taliban elected Akhtar Mohammad Mansour as its new leader. In the same year, however, Mansour was killed on Pakistani soil as a result of a US drone attack. After Mansour's death, his deputy, Hibbatullah Akhundzada, assumed the Taliban's leadership.

### **Hibbatullah Akhundzada**

He is approximately 60 years old and is from Kandahar. He belongs to the Nurzai tribe. He is a predominantly religious figure and has a madrassa near Quetta, Pakistan. Many Taliban officials are said to have been educated in Akhundzada's madrassa. Akhundzada has close ties with al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is said to have pledged allegiance to him. He is known as the leader who resolves conflicts within the Taliban.

### **Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar**

Abdul Ghani, approximately 53 years of age, was born in Uruzgan but raised in Kandahar. He is Pashtun and belonged to the Popalzai tribe. He is the head of the Taliban's political office in Qatar. He signed the Taliban-US agreement. He is the deputy leader of the Taliban. He is one of four founding members of the Taliban.

### **Mohammad Yaqoob**

He is the son of Mullah Mohammad Omar and is about 30 years of age. He came to public knowledge first in 2016, after his father's death, announcing that it was a natural death. It is said that he did not approve of Akhtar Mohammed Mansour, who assumed the

Taliban's leadership after his father. He has a good relationship with Hibbatullah. As a matter of fact, he is already one of the deputy leaders. He is in charge of the Taliban's military operations.

### **Sirajuddin Haqqani**

He is the son of Jalaladdin Haqqani, and is in his forties. The Haqqani Network, is known as the Taliban's most radical sub-branch. Sirajuddin Haqqani has lost four of his brothers as a result of US military operations. Sirajuddin is known as the Taliban's second man in charge and is one of its deputy leaders. Shortly after the agreement between the Taliban and the United States, Sirajuddin wrote an article in The New York Times in which he said that the next Afghan administration should be inclusive.

### **Abdul Hakim Haqqani**

He is known for his closeness to the Taliban's founder Mullah Omar. He is mainly known as a religious figure. He led the 21-member Taliban delegation in the talks with the United States. He is a Pashtun and 64 years of age. He belongs to the Isaac tribe. There is no connection between him and the Haqqani family. He is Qadhi al-Qudda of the Taliban (Chief Prosecutor).

### **Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai**

He is of Pashtun origin and was born in Lugar Province, Afghanistan. Stanikzai is 62 years of age. He was trained at the Indian Military Academy Dehradun. During the Taliban's era, Stanikzai served as deputy foreign minister and deputy minister of health. He is the vice president at the Taliban's Doha office. He acted as the vice president of the Taliban's delegation during the talks with the United States.

## **6. The Taliban's Standing in the International Community**

Among the countries that are wooing the Taliban is China. China has said it will respect the choice of the Afghan people and criticized Washington's desertion of Afghanistan at such a critical time. The Chinese Embassy in Kabul remains open and China has said that it welcomes a Taliban-led government which is inclusive.

Russia has stressed that it does not want turmoil close to the borders

of former USSR satellite states after the Taliban captured power in Afghanistan. Indeed, with the rise of the Taliban, the fact that it carried out military operations in coordination with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan explains Russia's concern. Russia has also said that negotiation is possible with the Taliban.

On the other hand, Iran is the first country to refer to the Taliban as the Islamic Emirate and has argued that Afghanistan will now experience stability post-US withdrawal. Iran has said it is closely monitoring developments in the country.

Pakistan has also said that it is closely monitoring developments and it did not consider the Taliban to be a terrorist organization. Prime Minister Imran Khan in the aftermath of the Taliban capturing power said that the Afghans had broken the shackles of slavery. Although Pakistan has not acknowledged the following point, it is believed that many Taliban fighters have crossed the border from Pakistan into Afghanistan.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey are among the countries which have shown positive signs about the Taliban. Erdogan has said that he may meet with the Taliban's leadership, and the latter has said that it needs Turkey's help to rebuild [Afghanistan](#).

The aforementioned countries are highly likely to formally recognize the Taliban after the formation of the next government. Other countries have adopted a negative or conditional stance towards Taliban rule. For example, Canada has announced that it will not formally recognize the Taliban's [leadership](#) while the European Union has stated that its assistance will depend on whether the Taliban respects [human](#) rights, especially women's rights.

## **7. Possible Dynamics Threatening the Taliban in Afghanistan**

The first challenge facing the Taliban is in regard to the distribution of power between Afghanistan's ethnic groups. The Taliban during its previous rule adopted a highly ethnic centered approach to governing Afghanistan. However, this time, the Taliban claims it has changed its approach, but by examining its decision-making officials, it is clear there are no officials from other ethnic groups than the Pashtuns.

As a matter of fact, this ethnic centered approach was mentioned by other ethnic group leaders who fled the country after Kabul fell. Throughout history, the distribution of power has led to internal conflicts among Afghans. Therefore, it is inevitable that similar consequences will occur when past mistakes are repeated. Therefore, the unfair distribution of power appears to be a real or perhaps the most important challenge facing the next Taliban administration.

Tajik leader Atta Mohammad Noor mentioned that Ghani had monopolized power and decision-making was centered around three people of Pashtun origin (Mohib, Fazli and Ghani). As a result, the country was in chaos, and he will undertake definitive steps if the new administration makes a similar mistake. Similarly, speaking to Afghan International TV, Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqqiq stressed that the Hazara community would act to seek its rights if the Taliban monopolized power like Ghani, and if the Hazaras were not represented in the new [administration](#). Unlike the Pashtun dominated Taliban, the Hazaras are the most vulnerable community, both in terms of ethnicity and as a sect. The Taliban, on the one hand, attended the Ashura ceremonies in Kabul to create a good image, while on the other hand, blew up Abdul Ali Mazari's statue, the Hazara community's leader in Bamiyan Square. This Taliban contradiction is visible in other areas as well.

Another problem the Taliban may face is that the gains made by the Afghan people over 20 years do not match Taliban values. Media freedom and women's rights are among the main achievements. Within the two decades since the fall of the Taliban, the media in Afghanistan has considerably improved. According to the latest research, there are currently 96 television channels, 190 radio stations and 231 print media companies in [Afghanistan](#). In addition, Afghanistan is in a very good position in terms of media freedom compared to the countries in the region. With the arrival of the Taliban, many television stations stopped entertainment programs. Many journalists had to go abroad. The Taliban, on the other hand, have stated that the media is free within the framework of the Sharia. By the time the action came, however, it was clear that the Taliban had broken its promise. As a matter of fact, Shabnam Dawran and Khadija Amin, who worked as presenters at the Radio and Television

of Afghanistan (RTA), were prevented from entering their offices because they were [women](#).

Currently, social media is widely used in Afghanistan, especially Facebook. The Taliban has yet to impose restrictions on social media. However, as with other closed regimes, the Taliban is expected to impose restrictions on social media, but the acceptability of this situation is a matter of debate among the young and dynamic generation who are adept users of social media. On the other hand, with the Taliban's takeover of the country, many young people with social media platforms have gone abroad. This will obviously give the Taliban a hard time. Just like the challenges posed by Iranian journalists operating abroad to the current Iranian leadership.

Another problem the Taliban may face is that Afghanistan is not standing on its own two feet economically. The salaries of civil servants and military personnel, the provision of basic needs such as water and electricity, and the implementation of development projects can be considered as economic expenses. Before the Taliban's recent takeover, 80 percent of Afghan military personnel were paid by the United States and ISAF. Development projects were mainly funded through international aid. Other expenses were covered by Afghanistan's own revenues. Afghanistan is a very rich country in terms of natural resources. Iron, copper, lithium and gemstones are some of the most important resources in Afghanistan. The growing demand for lithium in the age of technology provides Afghanistan with a great advantage. Afghanistan also has enough natural gas [and oil](#).

Yet, for Afghanistan to benefit from its natural resources, the next Afghan administration must be integrated with the global economic system. China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, are cautiously optimistic about the future Taliban leadership. Despite Ghani's positive relationship with the world, Afghanistan's natural resources, especially its mines, were not utilized due to security problems and massive corruption within his administration. With the arrival of the Taliban, the security problems have disappeared. However, the Taliban leadership has to make an important decision and choose between a positive and negative

path. If the Taliban pursues economic integration by compromising on its fundamentalism and adopts a policy of openness to the world, Afghanistan will see positive results. However, in line with its ideology, economic disarray is an inevitable consequence if the country's potential is not fully realized, just like in other closed regimes.

## Conclusion

When we examine Afghanistan's history, it is clear that although it has always resisted and defeated foreign powers, it has been riven by internal conflicts. This lack of national cohesion has plagued Afghanistan for decades and has become a repetitive scenario every 20 to 30 years. The main cause of Afghanistan's unrest is its ethnic structure. Afghanistan is home to a large number of ethnic groups including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks.

. The distribution of power between these ethnic groups has led Afghanistan into a cycle of perpetual conflict. For instance, with the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan in 1989, a power vacuum emerged. Members of the Afghan mujahideen forces, who fought against the USSR as a united entity, tried to fill this vacuum individually in the post-USSR era. The groups that attempted to fill the power vacuum in Afghanistan turned into ethnic based political parties over time. After years of bloody fighting, the Taliban seized power on behalf of the Pashtuns, Afghanistan's most populous ethnic group. In 1996, the Taliban's leadership was established under the name of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."

Now history is repeating itself. However, the main difference this time is that the Taliban took over the country because of a deal, not due to war. Pashtun President Ashraf Ghani surrendered the country to the Taliban without any resistance. Other ethnic group leaders have warned that without a fair distribution of power, a new civil conflict will erupt. The main reason for Ghani's easy surrender was his questionable electoral victory in the last elections as the debate continues over whether Abdullah Abdullah, who represented the Tajiks, actually won in the last two elections. However, after lengthy discussions, the coalition government was established without the

final election results being announced. Therefore, Ghani preferred to surrender Afghanistan, which has been historically ruled by Pashtuns since 1747, to another Pashtun group, rather than see another ethnic group govern Afghanistan.

In the current situation, the formation of a new administration is vital to the Taliban in its first political move because if other ethnic groups are not represented in the new government, it is inevitable that a possible internal conflict will occur sooner or later. The Taliban's statements on the creation of an administration that would include all minorities and ethnic groups show that they are aware of the potential danger. But how the Taliban strike a balance between their values and the realities of Afghanistan will determine the course of the coming years.

In addition, the Taliban will have to take external dynamics into account as establishing a sustainable and successful political system in a world that has turned into a village because of advances in communication technology depends on external factors as well as internal factors. For example, the Taliban may face international pressure regarding the establishment of a just electoral system which would have both positive and negative consequences for the Taliban. If the Taliban pursues an open and reliable policy towards the world, it will benefit from the world order and will be able to contribute to the country's development. As a matter of fact, many Western countries have conditioned forming relations and offering assistance to the Taliban on respecting human rights, particularly women's rights. Although it may seem difficult for an administration that has traditionally recruited members with slogans of jihad to adapt to the modern world, it is worth noting that this group has now come to power after concluding an agreement with the United States, the pioneer of Western civilization.



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