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## TALIBAN IN POWER...AGAIN

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# TALIBAN IN POWER...AGAIN



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## Abstract

This essay will expose a brief overview of the reasons why Taliban came back to Afghanistan and how it was easy for them to take over control of Kaboul. It will highlight the causes of the collapse of the regime in place, and therefore, the reasons behind the US's failure to ensure peace and democracy in the country. In order to better assimilate the origin of all these events, this essay will emphasize a brief historical overview of Afghanistan during the past decades, will present the new Taliban of 2021, before discussing the ideological background of the Islamic group and the threat it might or not represent in the region. This analysis will also emphasize the role played by several key actors such as Qatar, Turkey and Russia...

Key words: **Afghanistan, Taliban, ideological background, Islam, state-building failure.**

## Résumé

Cet essai présente un bref aperçu des raisons pour lesquelles les Talibans sont revenus en Afghanistan et comment il leur a été facile de prendre le contrôle de Kaboul. Il mettra en évidence les causes de l'effondrement du régime en place et, par conséquent, les causes de l'échec des États-Unis à assurer la paix et la démocratie dans le pays. Afin de mieux assimiler l'origine de tous ces événements, cet essai mettra l'accent sur un récit historique de l'Afghanistan au cours des dernières décennies et présentera les nouveaux Talibans de 2021, avant de discuter du contexte idéologique du groupe islamique et de la menace qu'il pourrait ou non représenter dans la région. Cette analyse soulignera également le rôle joué par plusieurs acteurs clés tels que le Qatar, la Turquie et la Russie.

Mots clés: **Afghanistan, Taliban, contexte idéologique, Islam, échec de la construction de l'Etat.**

### Historical overview on Afghanistan and Taliban

Afghanistan has a long history of fighting and resistance against external invasions, as many other states have attempted to control the state but in vain. Before the 18th century, the Persian, Turks, Mongols and Greeks have tried to colonise the country in order to get their control over the Silk Road which was an essential bolt for the control of India. By the 19th century, another war started because of a rivalry between the United Kingdom and Russia. A war which results was the defeat and the withdrawal of the British troops . A close similar scenario took place in 1979 after the invasion of Soviet troops in the Afghan soil. A 10-year war ensued leading to the defeat of the Red Army thanks to the United States and the Saudi Arabia who supported the jihadists who fought harshly the Soviets. The Jihadists were headed by Osama bin Ladden and Abdullah Azzam (who founded later the terrorist group AL Qaida). By the 90s the newly composed

Islamist group Taliban started offensives against the government in place in Afghanistan. Supported by the Pakistani army, the Taliban conquered most of the country (except the Tajik reduction in the North-East) and established a fundamentalist dictatorship opposed to the government of Hekmatyar. In 1996, Taliban took power and Mullah Omar became the leader and ruled the country without any political or constitutional basis.

### Reasons behind the easy return to Afghanistan

What is known is that history tells us to learn from our past in order to understand our present and to avoid future mistakes. But in fact, the United States of America did not learn from Afghanistan's history nor from its own experiences such as the fall of Saigon. The United States intervened in Vietnam in order to stop the communist spread of China; which resulted in the defeat of the American troops and the unification of Vietnam in 1975. In a vision of a

fight against terror, the United States engaged in a war against Al Qaida who had safe haven in Afghanistan and ended up defeated by an unconventional army.

The United States have had on the ground 20 years to designate competent leaders to lead Afghanistan towards more democratic standards. However, in the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban regime in 2002, a transitional regime was established by appointing Hamed Karzai- a pseudo-technocrat- in order to lead the country towards stability. Thus, the regime put in place was torn by corruption and tribalism. In 2014, the power was handed over to Ashraf Ghani - a tribalist Pashtun- who today symbolizes the ruin of Afghanistan. The US has poured millions of dollars in Afghanistan in order to train a strong army with high-tech weaponry to oppose and evict Taliban completely from the region and abolish terrorism. But in fact, this financial support did not contribute to strengthen the local army but rather to inflate the accounts of the Afghan elite supporting the regime; it also contributed to create a centralized authority in kaboul neglecting the other provinces of Afghanistan, allowing thus the expansion of Taliban over the country. So, after the settlement of the new government, the question that arose is to know what are the causes that led Taliban to come back in force to

Afghanistan hence to depict the ideological background of the Islamist group and to portray if Taliban is a terrorist group compared to the ISIS and Al-Qaida or is it just a group with a rigorous Islamist background.

### **Understanding the Taliban of 2021:**

In order to understand the Taliban new regime, it is necessary to raise an important question relating to the Taliban's attachment to Islam. what is the politico-religious positioning of the Taliban? do they interpret Islamism or ethno-nationalism? For the Taliban, Afghans in general, Islam is not only a religion, but it was considered as a magnet of unification of the country. During the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan, known as "the iron emir", recourse to religion was a means of unifying the country in order to face the external forces of the British and Russian powers. Religion served to impose state dominance on local forces and ethnic minorities who enjoyed some autonomy at the time. This had allowed the iron emir to exploit the Sunni orthodox religion in order to eradicate the Shiite Hazaras, and to spoil their lands.

In fact, I think that it is important to underline this historical religiosity so as not to fall into the error of confusing Taliban Islam with a Deobandi Islam born out of opposition to colonization and which finds its source in South Asia . The

grand madrasa of Binori Town in Karachi figures prominently in the spread of early Deobandi doctrine in Pakistan. Since its foundation, it has trained many radical militants and actively participated in the jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir. It was in 1980 that Deobandi radicalism produced its very first jihadist movement which spread out of the country and reached Afghanistan. Formed at the initiative of the JUI (Jamaat-i-Ulema-i-Islam) and the Tablighi Jamaat (party of preaching) to support the war effort against the Soviets, the HuJI (Harkat ul-Jihad al-Islami) was initially intended to ensure the management of supply camps for the Afghan mujahideen and to form recruitment groups of volunteer fighters sent to Afghanistan. This was the prelude of djihadist conception in Afghanistan.

In fact, since the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979, the Deobandi school has become increasingly popular on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani borders, particularly in Pashtun territory, where the religious schools were strongly influenced by the funding and especially by the Wahhabi ideology coming from Saudi Arabia known to be obsessed with the Shiite "danger" represented by the new Islamic Republic of Iran. Taliban were partly inspired by Deobandist theology on certain very conservative positions, such as the prohibition of music, or a drastic limitation of women's rights., and

this influence did not really go further. Especially, when in 2009, the JUH (Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Hind), one of the main organizations of theologians representing the Indian Deobandist School officially condemned the use of suicide bombing, and even attacks killing civilians. This is why Indian Muslim theologians attached to Deobandism present the Taliban as their "evil children", with whom they refuse to be associated, by highlighting their own rejection of terrorism. So, this outlines that Taliban's religious apparatus does not roots in Deobandist Islam.

As explained in the previous section, understanding Taliban engages an understanding not only on religious basis but also an understanding of Taliban's ideology as result of decades of wars. For the Taliban of the 1990s, the promotion of religion meant first of all the fight against oppression and the end of the disorder engendered by Soviet forces. This reflects a poorly developed theological position of Taliban which, those of 2001, and 2021 aimed to use religion as a tool to rally rural areas and regions that had suffered the harmful effects of the American occupation, such as drone attacks, night raids that did not always respect the codes of local honour, bad governance, an unfair and corrupt judicial system.

Understanding the Taliban post 2021 is projected to us by the group's new positions on questions which were of

paramount importance for elder Taliban. On the one hand, the new Taliban have evolved positively regarding the question related to the Hazaras and to Shiism in general. This has been shown when tried to not to target Afghan Shiites during their attacks to conquer the country. Hence to that, the appointment of Mawlawi Mehdi, a Hazara, as governor of Balkhab district in April 2021 reflects that Taliban the new Taliban regime is no longer hostile to the Shiite minority, which was oppressed by the Afghan central power in the past. On the other hand, Pashtun ethnic nationalism is less prominent than in the past; this appears through the recruitment of non-Pashtuns into the Taliban ranks, with positions of significant responsibility. This reflects equal treatment and inclusion of Afghan minorities with the sole aim of unifying the country under a single emirate.

### **Ideological background of Taliban: based on terror or religion?**

The Charia is for Taliban the only source of knowledge and faith. Having studied in Pakistani Koranic schools (Medersas), they are conservative Sunnis whose doctrine is based on customary rules and a rigid and radical interpretation of Islam. That is, they imposed their own version, some kind of an “over-Charia”, a more rigorous and extreme version of Islamic law than that being implemented in other

Muslim countries. They struggle so far for insuring an Islamic government based on a rigorous interpretation of Islam. Their movements are different from those of Al Qaida or Isis, they do not aim for international expansion but only to anchor themselves in Afghanistan based on their rigid interpretation of Charia, which has no connection with terror. Thus, upon the resumption of power in Afghanistan, the first decisions taken by the Taliban were to close Western schools and to open Koranic schools that teach the Taliban's interpretation of Islam. Besides, despite the Taliban's willingness of implementing the over-Charia, they made some changes in their positions regarding women.

### **Regarding Women**

As for women, based on Taliban's interpretation of Islam, they were prohibited from going out without a male chaperone, from photography, journalism, television or from working. Twenty years ago, women did not have the right to pursue higher education or work, nor to vote. The current leaders of the Taliban say they are more mature but also less strict than they were before 2001. The Islamist group had already announced to give the right to women to continue their studies and to work, but it remains to be seen in years to come if they will implement what they say or is it just words to gain international recognition of their new government

in place. For instance, Taliban promised to respect women's rights; thus in response to a question raised about differences between the 1990s Taliban and today's, Mujahid announced that the ideology and beliefs of Taliban are the same because they are Muslims, but there is a change in terms of experience--they are more experienced and have a different perspective . Taliban affirm to be more inclusive and have more opened visions of women's rights and of what women represent in the society.

Today's Taliban present themselves as liberators and not as people who will lock up the Afghans. In a speech, they announce having freed Americans and disbelievers, letting corrupt Afghans flee with the money that was supposed to stabilize and straighten the country. They assure to fight terrorism, and refuse to give safe heaven to terrorist groups such as Al Qaida and ISIS. In the aftermath of this declaration, on August 26, Kabul was the victim of a terrorist attack by the group affiliated with the Islamic state in the province of Khorazan (Northeast of Iran), killing 170 people, including 13 members of the American services.

The Taliban are different from terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State. Al-Qaeda is a transnational jihadist group that seeks to rebuild its networks. ISIS is too, but it will have an uphill battle given that it is the deadly enemy of

Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The Taliban are the most important actor in Afghanistan with national and not international aims.

In the time this research is taking form, it is important to not overlook the important role that play different states in the making of the new government of Taliban, and in ensuring stability in the region. So the question is to know the significant role that play each of the government which already settle the ground of possible relations with Taliban.

### **Why was it easy for Taliban to come back?**

One of the major reasons leading to the return of Taliban is not only the desire of the Islamist group to take over the control of their country of origin, but also the inability of the fallen regime to protect the country against any intrusion, and particularly Ghani's inability to rule the country. Due to his excessive communitarianism, the Afghan president led the country directly towards the control of the Taliban. Moreover, corruption was deeply rotted in the regime in place, which grew rich and was first to leave Afghanistan. Ghani was mainly concerned with buying loyalties in order to maintain his rule, and was opposed to building a state and to generate a mature government on the basis of a meritocracy; this led to creating a strong canal of corruption. This network of dishonesty

conducted to discriminate the government and the whole political class allowing Taliban to gain trust of a significant portion of the Afghan people.

### **The role played by other states in the actual stability process in Afghanistan**

#### **Iran:**

Today the relations between the United States and Iran are at their lowest. This latter; which for a long time was opposed to the Taliban on religious grounds (Shiite Iran, Sunni Taliban); has recently oriented its foreign policy towards the support for the Taliban on the one hand, and the support for the Afghan government on the other hand. This strategy enabled Iran to maintain relations with the two groups while maintaining their division. Today, the Iranian government has solidified his relationship with Taliban by maintaining its role as an intermediary between the Afghan government and Taliban. Iran fears a rise in the power of the Islamic State which, ideologically, adopts a deadly logic against the Shiites. For Iran, Taliban are the only power that can fight and stop ISIS. Teheran aims to secure its 900 km border with Afghanistan while ensuring the protection of Shiite minorities in Afghanistan.

#### **Russia**

The negotiation network set up between Russia and Taliban allows it

to understand the ambitions of the new Afghan government. Russia apprehends the Afghan crisis since it is a source of an additional problem which the country faces such as the Ukrainian crisis. For Russia, it is more a question of insecurity than any other thing; the state wants to make sure that Afghanistan will not be a source of insecurity in central Asia which may affect Russia. The Russian Interests are rooted towards the influence that Taliban might have on the region and that the relationship between Taliban and Moscow relies on the path the Afghan government will follow. Today, Russia is considered as a weak state because of its domestic economic issues which weakens the country more and more, and the only concern of Moscow is to evict what can threaten security and stability in the region.

#### **Qatar**

Qatari's pursue is to find in depth solution in the long term to the Afghan crisis. The role played by Qatar was very clear. Its vision was ensuring peace and security in the region by adopting a more opened foreign policy, while establishing a new strategy by playing a role of mediator in order to deconstruct and eradicate several conflicts in the region including the Afghan conflict. In this prospect, Qatar is aware of the difficulty of the Afghan conflict. The fact that there are different tribal and demographic components makes it difficult to reach an agreement.



Thus, the situation needs a mature management to stem the problem with knowledge of the cultural and social construction of the country. Qatar has no ambitions in Afghanistan except that of ensuring peace and security in the region.

### **Turkey**

There is a security stake in Afghanistan (hence the maintenance of security in the region), but also an economic stake. Thus, Turkey is trying to establish economic alliances with Taliban in order to make the Kabul airport a platform of exchange to take out all the natural resources such as Lithium, silver, iron, copper, uranium... Despite the proposition of Taliban (the new government in place) to ensure the security of the Kabul airport, Turkey proposed to take on this responsibility since it must "be guaranteed in such a way as to give confidence to the international community". Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that the most important thing is to ensure the security of Kabul airport and to allocate this task to private companies, without going through "military or police forces of a given State".

### **China**

There is a great risk for the stability of the neighboring countries just as there are opportunities to be seized by the key players of the region such as China and Russia (hence to Turkey). Both states play hard to

ensure good relationship with Taliban in order to avoid any increase of instability in the region and that the relationship will provide guarantees from the new government in place. China fears the spread of insecurity and terrorism. There are chances for building security dialogue to ensure peace in the region. It is too soon to talk about opportunities for China concerning security in the region, since we cannot transcript the future political map of Taliban in their country. China has always maintained cordial relations with the Taliban, and its main concern is to expand its influence westward to gain strategic depth against India and the United States in the region.

The Chinese strategy is a long-term strategy that focuses on two main axes. The first aims at strengthening the alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan against India, hence the declining of the American presence against the Chinese in Pakistan. The second axis is economic. Beijing seems to direct its investments towards Afghanistan to be a pioneer in economic exchanges relating to the raw materials of the country from which the important mineral resources.

### **Pakistan**

Pakistan until then has steered the Taliban towards a more flexible attitude towards political opponents such as former president Hamid Karzai, and influenced the Taliban

leaders to facilitate the exit of certain political decision-makers like the old vice president Amrullah Saleh. Islamabad's main concern was the attacks made by Hindis located in the Afghani borders to Pakistan. The return of Taliban put an end to the terrorist attacks conducted against Pakistan and to the withdrawal of the armed groups in the borders of both countries. Besides, Pakistan was one of the witnesses of the construction and establishment of Taliban in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Today Pakistan remains the partner of choice to Taliban, Islamabad has supported their cause since 1994, supported against the Americans. In this prospect, why did the Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden's administrations failed to build a democratic Afghan state?

### **Why did the USA fail USA in Afghanistan?**

Whose fault is it? The fault is neither to Oppenheimer, Hegel nor to Sun Tzu, but in fact it is the fault to Donald Rumsfield, Condoleezza Rice and Bush. In fact the right question is not whose fault it is, but to know why did the US fail in Afghanistan?

According to the American president Joe Bidden, the US's intervention in Afghanistan was not to establish democracy but to fight and eradicate the terrorist group Al Qaida, and since it is done, the US has no longer any role to play on the Afghani soil. Under Bush's administration, the US

were not interested in a nation building vision in Afghanistan but only in fighting terror at any cost, as expressed by Donald Rumsfeld. However, since the deployment of the first American forces on the Afghan territory, the secretary in defence made several tactic errors which made it a hard task to fight terror and ensure stability in the country. Among which we can cite a poor budget allocated during the first 3 years, and not enough soldiers on the ground compared to what the USA invested in South Korea in 1950. During Obama's mandate, the exit strategy put in place started adequately but was no longer as such with a Donald Trump sceptical about the American war on Afghanistan. Trump signed the peace agreement of Doha 2020 with Taliban, which was an omen of an American failure.

Today, the USA left the country after 20 years of an unfinished war, a country in ruins, and so many Afghan allies left behind (who are on the Taliban blacklist). The American main mistake was not only the withdrawal of all the troops, but also the way that the Biden administration chose to exit Afghanistan. Washington could have kept its troops there for more years as it was done by United States in Korea. It is known that the American soldiers have been located in South Korea for more than seventy years. An American implication strategy, that started in 1950, when North Korea launched massive military offensives to reunite the nation by

force. The United States quickly came to the aid of South Korea and kept a military force for 7 decades.

Besides, another mistake was the Biden's management of the exit strategy which was a total failure. The American head of state opted not for a conditional withdrawal but rather an exit on the basis of an agenda. This had as result to weaken the American position, and made it easier for the Taliban to enter the Afghan capital just after the deadline. But why the war in Afghanistan took so long especially after the exit strategy launched by Barak Obama and the death of Ben Laden? Did the USA pursue a nation or a peace building processes?

### **The US Failure in a nation building vision**

The Bush administration main goal was not to build an Afghan nation but was to fight terror at any cost. It is worth noting that Afghanistan is a based tribal system, an ethnically fragmented country which tribes fought each other for ruling the country for over twenty years, during which the country was in a bloody civil war.

Implementing a nation building necessitates a powerful charismatic leader to rule the country, which Karzai neither Ghani are not. The US had to choose a leader who could lead an ethnical fragmented country to live under the banner of a unified nation such as the case of Nyerere in Tanzania. Moreover,

Washington in its pursue of stability in Afghanistan tried to put in place a democratic state at the image of the West, which conducted to more ethnic cleavages and electoral clashes between two main opponents Abdullah the Tadjik and Ghani the Pachtoune, favourite of Washington. These are the main reasons behind the failure of the USA in its vision of a nation building nor in state building.

### **The US Failure in a state building vision**

From a state-building perspective, the major element is the creation of the necessary institutions independent of the control of the ruling leader. For the case of Afghanistan, it should have started with the creation of an uncorrupted central administration elected on the basis of a meritocracy, a multi-ethnic army, and an uncorrupted justice and police; which was not the case of Afghanistan. The ruler was chosen by an external protagonist who ignored totally the social and demographic composition of the state. The United States did not take into consideration several factors which could have contributed to state building. Today that Taliban rules Afghanistan, the remaining question is what is to come?

### **Future Prospects**

It is too early to talk about predictions about the progress and the Taliban government. However, different scenarios seem plausible at

the moment and allow us to draw a picture of what might be next.

### Scenario 1

On the one hand, Taliban will establish an inclusive and open progressive system leading to a moderate Islamic emirate of Afghanistan. This can lead to an international recognition of the government in place. On the other hand, the government will retreat on the political and social fronts by imposing restrictions. It will make restrictions on public freedoms, women's rights and relapse into more restrictions under an Islamic utopia.

### Scenario 2

A Fractured Taliban: within the organization there would be fragmentation; on the one hand those who favour a moderate Afghanistan opened to agreements with economic powers such as China, to establish a solid base of economic agreements. On the other hand, a faction which works to establish and maintain severe Islamic laws (over-charia) putting an end to any vision of freedoms which may lead the country to close itself off from the rest of the world and become easy prey again in the hands of terrorist groups. Besides, some factions operating under the banner of Taliban might claim leading position in the country, and if the leaders fail to do so, a fracture and maybe a civil war can be possible.

Nowadays, the Western concern is that Afghanistan becomes a failed state, as it was before 2001, giving safe heaven to terrorist groups. There are several concerns about the hospitality of Taliban and their willingness to allow terrorist groups to engage freely in organized crime in Afghanistan. It is known that Taliban is very discreet about the internal organization of their "Islamic Emirate", making their decision-making process opaque, but their position against the ISIS is very clear. Taliban is opposed to the ISIS and will fight it so that it does not establish itself in Afghanistan, as stated by the head of a Taliban delegation in Moscow on July 8 "We will do everything we can to ensure that the ISIS never settles in Afghanistan".

### Scenario 3

A Humanitarian crisis: Many politicians as well as political scientists criticize US President Joe Biden for withdrawing his troops. It is unlikely, given all these regional forces at play, that the United States could ever have achieved stability in Afghanistan, whatever the duration of their presence there. The return of the Taliban has caused a serious humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, starvations, and is accompanied by terrible human rights violations. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan accused the United States of leaving "chaos" behind.

#### Scenario 4

The Taliban live up the promises made in their first declaration. It is obvious that a democratic state will never see the light of a day in Afghanistan, but certain forms of limited inclusiveness will mark the new government. State institutions will be divided between institutions applying religious law and political and repressive institutions. Public freedoms as well as the participation of women and the role they can play will be limited on the basis of what Shariaa allows.

In conclusion, even though Taliban attempts to adopt moderate policies both at home and abroad. The group made some changes aiming at ensuring international recognition, so as to enforce its form of government regardless of any international tendency. The international community keeps a close eye on any future moves by Taliban at different levels.

Clearly, the US waged war for 20 years in Afghanistan and still did not understand the country; a story that repeats itself. The conquerors of 1996 are returning today with more force and support from neighboring countries. Taliban needs support and foreign aid in order to be able to rule over a population whose vision of a different society more open to the West. Today, foreign countries must act, the European Union must take decisions in order to save the Afghan economy and to release development

funding blocked by the World Bank. Besides, its should keep a presence in place in order to keep an eye on what is happening in Afghanistan in terms of the protection of human rights and women's rights, in order to avoid falling back on the same scenario before 2001. Foreign minister of the European Union Joseph Borell encouraged the maintaining of relations with Afghanistan which was not the case of Ursula von der Leyen, who is not encline to recognise Taliban as the government of Afghanistan.

To sum up, Afghanistan has become the representation of the Western failure of the American superpower, but it is also the showcase of the region to the rest of the world. Alliance with the Taliban is required to face the advance of terrorist groups. financial support is not possible as long as the political apparatus is not exposed. Thus, opening of negotiations with Taliban is rigor in order to create alliances while creating pressure on the new Afghan government in order to stop any initiative to establish terrorist groups on Afghan soil.

Women will have to fight and the international community must support them in their fight to defend their rights to keep their children, property rights and even the right for a descent life.

At the end, we can only attest that the world is going through a period of geopolitical split, a transfer of

power; booming economic powers such as India. The Americans withdrew from three important geographic areas: Afghanistan, Iraq

but also almost from Syria, thus marking the end of the century of American power.

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