



Afghanistan Under the Taliban: The Regional and Global Impact

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Agenda

- Historical overview
- The Dynamics of Foreign Intervention in Afghanistan
- The U.S-led War in Afghanistan
- The Pathway to Taliban's return to power
- The situation in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and the challenges
- Implications of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan for the region and beyond
- Could the War End Differently?
- The costs and Lessons Learned
- The outlook

The Road to Kabul

“The country is extremely well adapted to a passive resistance. Its mountainous nature and the proud and freedom-loving character of its people, combined with the lack of adequate roads, makes it very difficult to conquer and often harder to hold.”

General A. Snegarev, 1921

“We have nothing to fear from Afghanistan, and the best thing to do is to leave it as much as possible to itself. Should Russia in future years attempt to conquer Afghanistan, or invade India through it, we should have a better chance of attaching the Afghans to our interest if we avoid all interference with them in the meantime.”

Field Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, 1880

Afghanistan-the vortex of foreign powers' competition

- **An Historical Overview**
 - **On the path of invasions: west ward to India, southward from the north**
 - **On the Faultline of South, Central and West Asia**
 - **caught up in Crossfire**
 - **Internal fragility prone to internal breakdown and spread of instability-proxy wars**
- **The Gunpower Empires - 16-18 Century**
- **The Great Game -19-20 centuries**
- **The Cold War – the 20th Century**
- **Post Cold War era**





The Dynamic of foreign INTERVENTIONS?

- Afghanistan: Not a graveyard of Empires but the victim of their intervention
- It is easy to invade Afghanistan but hard to control - easy to enter but hard to leave
- Why?
 - Remoteness, landlocked, low resources, difficult geography
 - Hard to sustain large forces
 - Smaller forces face failure



The US-led War in Afghanistan

- 13 years after the last Soviet soldier left, the first American soldier landed in Afghanistan
- It was 82 years after the last British soldier was forced out
- The exception: the 2001 U.S. - led military intervention was overwhelmingly welcomed and received with open arms.
- The U.S. intervention, came as an accidental war caused by 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US
- The invasion that removed the totalitarian regime of the Taliban, was seen as a rescue operation
- The euphoria, however, did not last long as expectations were not managed

Objectives of US-led invasion of 2001

- Evolved over time.
- Elimination of al-Qaeda and removal of Taliban regime
- deny all terrorist groups a safe haven in Afghanistan
- build Afghan security forces so they could deny terrorists a safe haven in the future
- help the civilian government become legitimate and capable enough to win the trust of Afghans.



The Taliban pathway to return to Power

- 2001-post-removal from power
- 2001-2005: Regrouping across the border launching -cross border operation
- 2005-2014: Establishing local bases inside Afghanistan with logistic support from outside
- 2014-2021: Withdrawal of the bulk of US forces – The Taliban expansion of administrative network
- Doha Agreement, legitimacy, the road to Kabul



The Taliban Road to Kabul

February 2020 –Doha Agreement

- More “exit” than “strategy”
- Too much concession to the Taliban in exchange for unverifiable Taliban commitments
- Excluding Afghanistan government and giving legitimacy to the Taliban
- No implementation or enforcement mechanisms
- Calendar-based withdrawal
- No implementation or enforcement mechanisms
- Trusting the Taliban

April 14, 2022 – Announcement of US withdrawal

- Taliban reluctance to hold serious peace talks
- Taliban rush to gain territory as the US forces were packing up
- Morale decline among the ANDSF caused by a sense of abandonment
- Culminative reduction of air force capability due to reduced contractors’ technical assistance
- Complication of supply of far-flung units (district centers) due to Taliban territory and roads control
- Local conflict resolution drive by the Taliban through tribal and community leaders’ mediation

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Afghanistan Defense and Security Forces

- **Built under changing assumptions and priorities (impacting size, structure, mission, and capacity)**
- **A national institution of a sovereign state or an attachment to outside partners?**
- **A force built not to win but not to lose (Way of War)**
- **Heavily dependent on US in logistical sustainability, air support, intelligence and technical maintenance**
- **Political interference and the circumventing impeded professional leadership and freedom of action**
- **Dangerously poor coordination across the Army, Police, and National intelligence**
- **Uneven development of army components and other security institutions (SOF and AAF)**

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Taliban Forceful Return to power

- Taliban entered Kabul as victors through military domination
- They claim the victory was achieved through a two-decade struggle to end foreign occupation and restore their Emirate
- Feeling they defeat another superpower
- Defeat of US-sponsored peace process that was launched 18 months earlier
- Taliban see themselves unchallenged authority to govern the war-weary country.
- They “own” the country and “would govern it as they please”
- The Emirate legitimacy “comes from the faith and their struggle not from the will of the people.”

The Taliban 2.0 –Are they different?

- Despite certain symbolic changes in their past behavior the Taliban ideology is not changed
- The 1990s ideology saw later changes as the Taliban's exposure to foreign jihadists grew
- Major evolution in their 1990s rule is seen in hybridization of strict Sunni religious ideology with traditional nationalistic tradition of fighting foreign occupation
- Crosspollination with foreign Jihadist groups in the past 25 years – the ties hard to sever
- Commitment to Sharia law as they interpret it
- Talibs have reintroduced their restrictive policies
 - barring women from government positions,
 - Restriction on women education, movement and other liberties
 - Banning many forms of entertainment
 - Restriction on cultural issues and on freedom of the press.



Taliban ideological constraints to change

- Ideological commitments,
- Deep ties with global jihadists, (TTP and ETIM help not others)
- Placating the ideologically inspired base
- Internal ideological, political, and regional differences (Traditional vs HNW)
- Taliban fighters have come from different parts of the country, each beholden to their immediate commanders, complicating coordination in fighting the ISIS-K

The background of the slide features a silhouette of three armed men standing on a grassy hill. The man on the left has his hands on his hips, the middle man is holding a rifle, and the man on the right is also holding a rifle. In the background, a city skyline is visible against a sunset or sunrise sky. The text 'Islamic State-Khorasan' is written in white on the left side of the image.

Islamic State- Khorasan

- A rebranded Taliban adapted by the ISIS
- A violent extremist movement with wider regional and global agenda
- Anti-Shia and Hazara communities
- Based in eastern Afghanistan with cells in Kabul and northern provinces
- Fought foreign forces and Afghan government targets
- Reinforced by freed Da'ish prisoners

Challenges Facing the Taliban Government

- **International isolation, sanctions and lack of International recognition**
- **Domestic legitimacy (public restlessness, disapproval)**
- **Dealing with economic and humanitarian crisis**
- **The challenge of transition from fighting to controlling. Can they control the country?**
- **supplanting a wartime structure to an inefficient governance**
- **Filling the hollow shells of the fallen regime's institutions without capacity to serve.**
- **Managing internal differences (leadership split- rank and file diffusion)**
- **Security threats from IS-KP and other potential oppositions**

Immediate impact on the region and beyond

- Taliban victory emboldens the violent extremist groups in the region
- invigorates Islamist agenda across diverse socio-political contexts.
- Global Jihadist groups threatens the regional powers
- Continued instability and loss of foreign aid promote illegal economy and drug trade
- Driving refugees across the region
- Failure of Taliban control make the country a haven for global terrorists
- The level of such regional fallout is linked to the Taliban ideological vision which defines their strategic behavior in domestic conduct as well as in their relationship with outside world

Taliban Internal division and differences

Quetta Shura

- A sophisticated extremist Islamist group
- close ties with global jihadist groups
- Fought mostly through acts of terrorism
- Dominated in the East, and Southeast of Afghanistan, including Kabul,

Haqani Network

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The Regional Response

- No country decided to recognize the Taliban Emirate
- Security of paramount concern
- Regional powers call for engaging the Taliban to encourage the emergence of an inclusive responsible government
- International calls for responding to economic and humanitarian crisis
- Individual countries policy approaches
 - Pakistan
 - Central Asia, Iran
 - Gulf states
 - Great powers: U.S, Russia, China, EU

International conditions for recognition of the Taliban government

- Combating terrorism
- work with other groups to build an inclusive government
- Respects the rights of all Afghans and to give equal rights to women and girls for participation in all levels of society
- protection of security and legitimate rights of foreign nationals and institutions in Afghanistan
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The cost of US war in Afghanistan FY 2001-2022

(Brown University estimate)

Budgetary cost in 2022 dollars \$2.313 trillion

Direct war deaths

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| • US military | 2,324 |
| • US contractors | 4,007 |
| • National military and police | 78,526 |
| • Other allied troops | 1,144 |
| • Civilians | 70,418 |
| • Opposition fighters | 85,713 |
| • Others | 712 |

Total 243,000

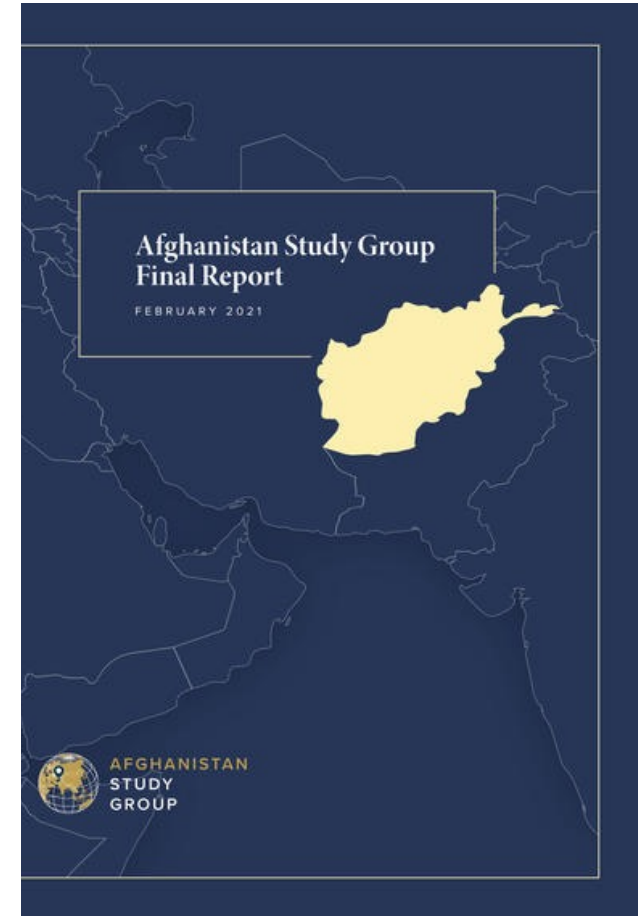
Could the War End Differently?

- Different views
- A once popular war became anything but.
- 62% in August 2021 thought not worth fighting. 70% thought failure
- Biden withdrawal: Best of bad choices?
- Withdrawal already decided on by Trump
- Options: Honoring that deal or reneging and sending in thousands more troops for no differ result
- the real choice — between leaving and escalating
- Biden: “I was not going to extend this forever war, and I was not extending a forever exit.”



Afghanistan Study Group Final Report

- **A responsible and coherent set of U.S. actions could greatly increase the chances of a peaceful resolution of conflict; a rash and rushed approach could increase the chances of a breakdown of order in Afghanistan**
- **An immediate diplomatic effort to extend the current May 2021 withdrawal date**
- **A key objective of the ongoing U.S. military presence, in addition to CT, is to help create conditions for an acceptable peace agreement.**
- **Continued basic support, with other donors, for the essential institutions of the Afghan state, including security institutions, while continuing to message our Afghan partners that this support is not open-ended and is conditioned on progress in the peace talks**
- **A reemphasis on diplomacy and negotiation, including a regional diplomatic strategy implemented over the longer term.**
- **The harnessing and coordination of international support for a post-agreement Afghan state.**



Is the Taliban Regime Sustainable? What Lies Ahead?

Certain challenges are of note:

- Will they move from a factional authority to national government with national capacity?
- Lack of Taliban capacity and resources to respond to the deepening economic crisis in the country that affects 95% of the population with potentials of civil disturbance
- Internal division within the movement that inhibits the formation and function of an effective administration
- The absence of domestic and international legitimacy that may encourage or fuel anti-regime resistance leading to the government repression
- Galvanization of militant groups in and around Afghanistan including al-Qaeda and ISKP
- Can it get enough outside aid to survive
- What will be the impact of the Taliban dependence on Pakistan and its regional interests

Lessons learned per SIGAR analyses

- Strategy: Absence of coherent strategy failed to achieve the desired results
- Continued Insecurity inhibit successful stabilization and reconstruction
- Unchecked corruption in Afghanistan undermined strategic goals
- Timeline: The US government consistently underestimated the amount of time required to build Afghanistan
- Sustainability: Many of the institutions and infrastructure project turned unsustainable
- Personnel: Counterproductive personnel policy thwarted the effort
- Context: Lack of understanding Afghan context
- Monitoring: rarely conducted sufficient monitoring and evaluation





Questions
