



75 days later, Taliban rule leaves Afghans in misery

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Abstract

The 'new' Afghanistan under the Taliban presents a picture of utter anarchy. Taliban have struggled to adapt to their new roles as administrators, while battling internal divisions. Yet, they are disinclined to give up their regressive worldview. They are confident that recognition by the international community is a matter of time as they can trade their own notoriety and the danger of Afghanistan lapsing into a failed state for monetary assistance as well as diplomatic engagement. The international community must work towards a consensus based and sustained pressure tactic on the Taliban, with a lead role for the United Nations.

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Analysis

“They will kill me if they find me”. I got a frantic call on August 15 from a friend who was a woman politician in Afghanistan. “They are looking for me, please save me”, said another woman official who worked in dealing with sensitive information at the Presidential palace. Another call from a woman provincial councilor from Kandahar hit me hard. She asked me, “Did we risk our lives in building democracy to be deserted like this?” The number of SOS calls just keeping increasing and haven’t stopped till date. The capture of power by the Taliban on August 15 and the American rush to leave Afghanistan has left thousands of Afghans in deep trouble.

I have worked in various provinces of Afghanistan for more than a decade, and have been deeply involved with the Afghans in rebuilding their country. It was difficult for me to remain unaffected with what happened.

Contrary to popular — and deeply patronising and Orientalist — stereotypes in the international community of Afghans as unruly warring tribes, corrupt or incapable, I found that they were capable and deeply committed to building their country. What made them hedge their bets politically was the unending conflict of last four decades where they witnessed great powers play out their global rivalry in their land. The precipitous US withdrawal from Afghanistan has once again reinforced that opinion.

The Taliban captured power in Kabul. While the international media was projecting a reformed and moderate image of the Taliban, my friends in Afghanistan were sending desperate calls for help. The speed and magnitude of the Taliban takeover was just sinking in. I could not anticipate and believe that the capture would be so swift, though the writing was on the wall for some time, since the US signed the peace deal with the Taliban in Doha in February 2020. Yet, the US and its allies were unprepared for the fallout of what happened on August 15. It was a complete capitulation of power, which the US had gradually conceded to the Taliban in order to exit Afghanistan. This severely dented America’s image not just in Afghanistan but also the region.

The US, instead of strengthening the democratic Afghan government, kept the government out in the initial stages of the peace deal with the Taliban. The deal was thrust on to the Afghans, where the Afghan government was compelled to accept the conditions of the Taliban rather than the other way round. This strengthened the Taliban’s position vis-à-vis the Afghan government. Moreover, none of the conditions of the US peace deal with the Taliban have been accepted by the Taliban, while the US fulfilled its side of the bargain with its complete troop withdrawal. The Afghan government and security forces had to stand down and watch the Taliban make rapid inroads and not fight them in this peace deal making exercise.

The ‘new’ Afghanistan under the Taliban presents a picture of utter anarchy. The ultra- efficient insurgents who withstood 20 years of military assault by the U.S., NATO and Afghan military forces, have come across as pathetic and at one level, disinterested administrators. Deeply divided among themselves and yet disinclined to pull themselves out of the morass of a regressive worldview, they have let countries like China and Pakistan lobby hard for their global recognition. Some Taliban leaders have categorically issued statements against women participation in government and have only grudgingly accepted their restricted access to education and public life. Others like Taliban Defence Minister Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of Taliban founder and late supreme leader Mullah Omar, have appeared on TV as part of the group’s rebranding exercise. At the same time, benefiting from restricted media access, Taliban fighters continue hunting down their opponents, women, and minorities. Such violence is rampant and has been systematised.



In spite of all this, there are clear signs that the world is pushing itself to engage with the Taliban. Caught in the dilemma of legalising the Taliban's de facto control over the country and allowing it to degenerate into a failed state, the international community is gradually moving towards implementing an ambitious plan of making humanitarian aid available to the suffering Afghans. The European Union, wary at the prospect of a surge of Afghan asylum-seekers trying to enter the bloc, is mulling over reopening its diplomatic office in Kabul.

Hope in international relations is a devious thing. The U.S. had hoped for a Taliban-included inclusive government in Afghanistan and the final results are for all to see. Similarly, the argument that the international community will now be able to renegotiate with the Taliban the terms of reformed governance is equally facile. The bitter truth is Afghanistan has entered a new phase of instability, which will be worsened by power brokering and policy of tactical alliance making by some countries. Only a consensus based and sustained pressure tactic on the Taliban by the international community, with a lead role for the United Nations, have some chance of arresting its slide.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. This article has been published firstly in Hindustan Times, 29 October 2021, [75 days later, Taliban rule leaves Afghans in misery - Hindustan Times](#).

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