



**Forum:** Political

**Issue:** Measures to prevent the spread of militant religious ideology in South (Central) Asia due to the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan

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### **Introduction**

The Taliban, which refers to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, is a Deobandi Islamic fundamentalist political movement and military organization in Afghanistan. Currently one of two entities claiming to be the legitimate government of Afghanistan, alongside the internationally recognized Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Taliban have de facto seized control of the country. The Taliban's ideology has been described as combining an "innovative" form of Sharia Islamic law based on Deobandi fundamentalism and militant Islamism, combined with Pashtun social and cultural norms known as Pashtunwali, as most Taliban are Pashtun tribesmen. The group is internally funded by its activities in the illegal drug trade by producing and trafficking narcotics such as heroin, extortion, and kidnap and ransom. They also seized control of mining operations in the mid-2010s that were illegal under the previous government.

### **Definitions of key terms**

Islam – an Abrahamic monotheistic religion teaching that Muhammad is a messenger of God.

Islamism – a political ideology which posits that modern states and regions should be reconstituted in constitutional, economic, and judicial terms, in accordance with what is conceived as a revival or a return to authentic Islamic practice in its totality.

Islamic terrorism – terrorist acts which are committed by Islamists, and which have religious motivation.

The Shahada, also spelled Shahadah – an Islamic oath, one of the Five Pillars of Islam and part of the Adhan. The Shahada declares belief in the oneness (tawhid) of God (Allah) and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's messenger. It is found on several Islamic flags: for

example, on the flag of Saudi Arabia. The Taliban used a white flag with the Shahada inscribed in black as the flag of their Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan between 1997 and 2001.

## **Background information**

### 1) The history of the Taliban

The Taliban, which means “students” in the Pashto language, emerged in 1994 around the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

It was one of the factions fighting a civil war for control of the country following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and subsequent collapse of the government. It originally drew members from so-called “mujahideen” fighters who, with support from the United States, repelled Soviet forces in the 1980s.

Within the space of two years, the Taliban had gained sole control over most of the country, proclaiming an Islamic emirate in 1996 with a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. Other mujahideen groups retreated to the north of the country. Following the Sept 11, 2001 attacks in the United States by AlQaeda, US-backed forces in the north swept into Kabul in November under the cover of heavy US airstrikes. The Taliban melted away into remote areas, where it began a 20-year-long insurgency against the Afghan government and its Western allies.

The Taliban’s founder and original leader was Mullah Mohammad Omar, who went into hiding after the Taliban was toppled.

### 2) The Taliban’s ideology

During its five years in power, the Taliban enforced a strict version of sharia law. Women were predominantly barred from working or studying and were confined to their homes unless accompanied by a male guardian.

Public executions and floggings were common, Western films and books were banned, and cultural artefacts seen as blasphemous under Islam were destroyed. Opponents and Western countries accuse the Taliban of wanting to return to this style of governance in the areas it already controls – a claim the group denies. The Taliban said earlier this year (2021) it wanted a “genuine Islamic system” for Afghanistan that would make provisions for women’s and minority rights, in line with cultural traditions and religious rules. However, the group has already started to prohibit women from working and studying in some areas. Also, all of images of uncovered women among on the streets (on advertising billboards for example) are destroyed.

### 3) The Taliban: International relations

Only four countries, including neighboring Pakistan, recognized the Taliban government when it was in power. The vast majority of other countries, along with the United Nations, recognized a group holding provinces to the north of Kabul as the rightful government-in-waiting instead. The United States and the United Nations imposed sanctions on the Taliban, and most countries show little sign it will recognize the group diplomatically. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Afghanistan risks becoming a pariah state if the Taliban takes power and commits atrocities. Other countries such as China have begun cautiously signaling they may recognize the Taliban as a legitimate regime.

After the Taliban government refused to hand over terrorist leader Osama bin Laden in the wake of al-Qaeda's September 11, 2001, attacks the United States invaded Afghanistan. The Taliban leadership quickly lost control of the country and relocated to southern Afghanistan and across the border to Pakistan. From there, they waged an insurgency against the Western-backed government in Kabul, Afghan national security forces, and international coalition troops. When the U.S.-led coalition formally ended its combat mission in 2014, the ANDSF was put in charge of Afghanistan's security. The ANDSF, however, faced significant challenges in holding territory and defending population centers, while the Taliban continued to attack rural districts and carry out suicide attacks in major cities. The war remained largely a stalemate for nearly six years, despite a small U.S. troop increase in 2017, continuing combat missions, and a shift in U.S. military strategy to target Taliban revenue sources, which involved air strikes against drug labs and opium production sites. The Taliban continued to contest territory, including provincial capitals, across the country. The group briefly seized the capital of Farah Province in May 2018, and in August 2018 it captured the capital of Ghazni Province, holding the city for nearly a week before U.S. and Afghan troops regained control. The ANDSF suffered heavy casualties in recent years. In February 2020, after more than a year of direct negotiations, the U.S. government and the Taliban signed a peace agreement that set a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Under the agreement, the United States pledged to draw down U.S. troops to approximately 8,500 within 135 days and complete a full withdrawal within fourteen months. In return, the Taliban pledged to prevent territory under its control from being used by terrorist groups and enter negotiations with the Afghan government. However, no official cease-fire was put into place. After a brief reduction in violence, the Taliban quickly resumed attacks on Afghan security forces and civilians. Direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban began months after the agreed upon start of March 2020, faced multiple delays, and ultimately made little progress. Violence across Afghanistan continued in 2020 and 2021 as the United States increased air strikes and raids targeting the Taliban. Meanwhile, the Taliban attacked Afghan government and Afghan security forces targets and made territorial gains. Civilian casualties

across Afghanistan have remained high over the past several years. The United Nations documented a then-record high of 10,993 civilian casualties in 2018. Although 2019 saw a slight decline, civilian casualties exceeded 10,000 for the sixth year in a row and brought the total UN-documented civilian casualties since 2009 to more than 100,000. Despite another decline in 2020, the first half of 2021 saw a record high number of civilian casualties as the Taliban ramped up their military offensive amid the withdrawal of international troops. In addition to the Taliban's offensive, Afghanistan faces a threat from the Islamic State in Khorasan, which has also expanded its presence in several eastern provinces, attacked Kabul, and targeted civilians with suicide attacks. Uncertainty surrounding the future of international assistance has strained the Afghan economy. Although the United States and its allies pledged in late 2020 to continue providing support to the Afghan government, they could reduce aid following the Taliban takeover. Such a move could compound Afghanistan's deteriorating economic situation.

#### 4) Recent developments

In April 2021, President Joe Biden announced that U.S. military forces would leave Afghanistan by September 2021. The Taliban, which had continued to capture and contest territory across the country despite ongoing peace talks with the Afghan government, ramped up attacks on Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) bases and outposts and began to rapidly seize territories. In May 2021, the U.S. military accelerated the pace of its troop withdrawal. By the end of July 2021, the United States had completed nearly 95 percent of its withdrawal, leaving just 650 troops to protect the U.S. embassy in Kabul. In the summer of 2021, the Taliban continued its offensive, threatening government-controlled urban areas and seizing several border crossings. In early August, the Taliban began direct assaults on multiple urban areas, including Kandahar in the south and Herat in the west. On August 6, 2021, the Taliban captured the capital of southern Nimruz Province, the first provincial capital to fall. After that, provincial capitals began to fall in rapid succession. Within days, the Taliban captured more than ten other capitals, including Mazar-i-Sharif in the north and Jalalabad in the east, leaving Kabul the only major urban area under government control. On August 15, 2021, Taliban fighters entered the capital, leading Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to flee the country and the Afghan government to collapse. Later that day, the Taliban announced they had entered the presidential palace, taken control of the city, and were establishing checkpoints to maintain security. The speed of the Taliban's territorial gains and collapse of both the ANDSF and Afghan government surprised U.S. officials and allies—as well as, reportedly, the Taliban itself—despite earlier intelligence assessments of the situation on the ground. The Biden administration authorized the deployment of an additional six

thousand troops to assist with the evacuation of U.S. and allied personnel, as well as thousands of Afghans who worked with the United States and were attempting to flee. The speed of the Afghan government's collapse threatens a mass exodus of refugees from Afghanistan and has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis.

#### 5) Concerns

The United States has an interest in attempting to preserve political, human rights, and security gains that have been achieved in Afghanistan since 2001. The Taliban takeover of the country could once again turn Afghanistan into a terrorist state, as the group is believed to maintain ties with al-Qaeda. The takeover also threatens to reverse advances made in securing the rights of women and girls. Moreover, increasing internal instability, a mass exodus of refugees, and a growing humanitarian crisis could have regional ramifications as neighboring countries respond. In addition, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Russia are all likely to compete for influence in Kabul and with subnational actors.

#### **Countries and organizations involved**

- Afghanistan
- Pakistan
- India
- China
- Iran
- Russian Federation
- the United States
- United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is a UN Special Political Mission established to assist the state and the people of Afghanistan in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. UNAMA was established on 28 March 2002 by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1401.

#### **UN documents related to the issue**

**S/RES/2593** A resolution that addressed recent developments in Afghanistan, including the Taliban's seizure of power and the 26 August, 2021 attack at Kabul airport.

**S/RES/2596** This resolution extended the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2022.

**A/RES/49/60** A resolution adopted by the General Assembly. Measures to eliminate international terrorism

**A/51/201** Human Rights Questions: Human Rights Questions, Including Alternative Approaches for Improving the Effective Enjoyment of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

### **Possible solutions**

Considering the existing and potential effects of the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, several aspects should be considered. The rise of Taliban has forced many Afghan citizens to leave their homes and try to escape from the country. Therefore, the problem of refugee flow should be considered, as well as a danger of potential terrorists entering other countries as refugees. All risks concerning Taliban's possible terroristic activity should be evaluated and security measures analyzed and updated. It is also necessary to analyze potential ways that can be used by Taliban to recruit people to become terrorists, and, therefore, mechanisms and algorithms to prevent this recruitment should be worked out. Human rights of Afghan citizens, especially of women and girls, must as well remain a concern for the international community.

### **Useful links**

UN Documents for Afghanistan: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/afghanistan/>

2021 Taliban offensive: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021\\_Taliban\\_offensive#See\\_also](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Taliban_offensive#See_also)

News from Afghanistan: <https://news.un.org/en/tags/afghanistan>

Key facts about the Taliban: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-key-facts-islamic-militant-group-2021-08-15/>

The Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan. Regional Responses and security threats: <https://icct.nl/publication/the-rise-of-the-taliban-in-afghanistan-regional-responses-and-security-threats/>

Current Challenges to Central Asia and Afghanistan: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kasachstan/13545.pdf>

Central Asia and Taliban: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/08/afghanistan-creates-tricky-new-reality-central-asia>