



The Return of Taliban in Afghanistan

1st Edition

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In mid-August, the democratically elected government in Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. By month end, the last of the U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan had left, leaving Afghan civilians to a life under Taliban rule. The events in Afghanistan have led to geopolitical turmoil on a scale unseen in years. Regional stakeholders (China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Central Asia) and global powers (EU, Russia, UK, U.S.) are all scrambling to secure their vital interests, each showing different degrees of willingness to work with the Taliban regime. While it is too early to make definitive remarks about what a Taliban-led Afghanistan means for the world, it is clear that the events in Afghanistan will have global ramifications. This edition of CUTS Occasional News Wrap (ONW) considers the Taliban's march to power in Kabul, reflecting diverse opinions from various experts.

News/Op-ed	Key Takeaway
<p>Understanding the foreign policy doctrine of the Biden era <i>By Ashutosh Varshney</i> The Indian Express September 07, 2021</p>	<p>The Afghanistan war has formally ended. Its end has led to a new foreign policy doctrine for the Biden era. In a speech of clarity, conviction and force, President Biden laid out the principal components of the doctrine. First, containing China and Russia will be the focus of U.S. foreign policy under him. Second, cyber security is a new mode of warfare and must be given prime attention. Third, America's counter-terrorism project will not be pursued via boots on the ground.</p>
<p>The 'Biden Doctrine' for a New America <i>By Sanjaya Baru</i> Deccan Chronicle September 06, 2021</p>	<p>It is not fashionable these days to say anything favourable about America's President Joseph Biden. Friends and foes, allies and adversaries, just about everyone is criticising the U.S. President either for his decision to pull American troops out of Afghanistan or for the way in which it was done. The countries directly impacted by the decision, such as India, feel that their security concerns ought to have been factored in and better addressed.</p>
<p>Does Joe Biden have any Core Principles? <i>By Gerard Baker</i> The Wall Street Journal September 06, 2021</p>	<p>The jibe comes to mind in these turbulent moments for Joe Biden's presidency. His proliferating woes are his own making: Afghanistan, a stagflating economy, renewed lack of confidence over the course of Covid. All presidents hit turbulence (Paywall) at some point. What sustains the better ones is a sense that they have a compass, a clear set of values beyond the fickle dictates of their party's political demands.</p>

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<p>From China to Iran and Pakistan, who can the Taliban count on as they govern Afghanistan? <i>By Tom Hussain</i> South China Morning Post September 04, 2021</p>	<p>With U.S. and UN sanctions still in place, Taliban leaders, who are ill-prepared to govern, are expected to count heavily on Afghanistan's neighbours for help. To reduce its dependency on Western-dominated financial institutions, the Taliban has signalled its intention to curry favour with its neighbours, particularly China, long-time backer Pakistan, and Iran, with which it overcame prior differences and developed a working relationship during the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan.</p>
<p>Return of the Taliban <i>By Riaz Mohammad Khan</i> Dawn September 04, 2021</p>	<p>The events of mid-August stunned the world, even the Afghan Taliban were surprised at the ease and speed with which they overwhelmed the entire country. Salute to their faith, their valour and their grit. This is their moment. The United States has suffered a setback. But superpowers do not fade away, they are systems that shape world affairs. Russia suffered a setback, and today along with China it is managing the heartland of Asia.</p>
<p>China and Iran seek common ground on Afghanistan <i>By Eduardo Baptista</i> South China Morning Post September 04, 2021</p>	<p>China aims to work with Iran in the reconstruction of their mutual neighbour Afghanistan, China's foreign minister told his Iranian counterpart in a phone call on Friday, September 03. In the call to mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Wang Yi and newly appointed Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian blamed the United States for conditions in Afghanistan, and committed their countries to helping rebuild the war-torn nation.</p>
<p>Is fall of Kabul a Humpty Dumpty moment for U.S.? <i>By Indranil Banerjee</i> Deccan Chronicle September 03, 2021</p>	<p>Disgraceful was indeed the word that came to mind when seeing images of the American military exodus from Kabul airport, the surging crowds desperate to escape and the bearded Taliban swaggering into the Kabul presidential palace. The indelible images from Kabul have done serious damage to U.S. credibility abroad. If the United States is to take a back seat, it is inevitable that China will step forward.</p>
<p>Pathetic retreat from Afghanistan shows shrinking Biden isn't up to the task of president <i>By Scott Jennings</i> USA Today September 02, 2021</p>	<p>Alone under the bright lights of the presidency, Joe Biden has finally shown us the man behind the grin. A man who checked his watch instead of offering empathy to Gold Star families. A man who defaulted to dissembling and exaggeration when a nation yearned for honesty and clarity. A man who found the bottom of his personal deck after a lifetime of free passes from a fawning media establishment desperate to turn this midlevel partisan hack into something he's not — a wise old sage just waiting for history to deliver his moment.</p>
<p>U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan ends 'Great Game' <i>By Michael Jansen</i> The Jordan Times September 01, 2021</p>	<p>The chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan brings an end to the 21st century contest in the "Great Game", the competition for dominance in central and south Asia launched in January 1830 by the British Empire to block the expansion of the Russian Empire into that region. This lasted until 1895 when the frontier between Afghanistan and Russia was defined. The "Great Game" revived in 1979 with the launch of the Soviet-Afghan conflict which drew in Pakistan and the Western powers on the side of the Afghan mujahideen, including the Taliban.</p>

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<p>The Mess Joe Leaves Behind (in U.S.) <i>By Seema Sirohi</i> The Economic Times September 01, 2021</p>	<p>The last U.S. C-17 transport plane left Kabul airport, but hundreds are still trapped in Afghanistan. Joe Biden’s presidency is in crisis, and not being Donald Trump is well past the expiration date. Antony Blinken says the U.S. government will hold the Taliban to their pledge to allow safe passage to all and to keep their commitments on counterterrorism. Any legitimacy and any support will have to be earned. With the military mission over, and the U.S. embassy shut, Blinken will do over-the-horizon diplomacy from Doha.</p>
<p>With U.S.’ Shameful Rout from Afghanistan, Who Can Trust America Again? <i>By Manoj Joshi</i> The Quint September 01, 2021</p>	<p>There are many words to describe what the Americans and the NATO have done in Afghanistan. You could use the neutral term “withdrawal”, but any objective person would describe what happened to them as a combination of a retreat and a rout. True, the withdrawal was in reasonably good order, and but for 13 soldiers killed in the bomb attack outside Kabul’s main airport, the U.S. did not suffer casualties. But how do you judge an army that left behind a vast quantity of weapons and equipment on the battlefield and abandoned thousands of supporters?</p>
<p>Post-Afghan withdrawal, India and U.S. can together fight terrorism: Raja Krishnamoorthi Financial Express September 01, 2021</p>	<p>India and U.S. can collaborate in fight against terrorism in many ways, including through intelligence gathering and sharing, and also assisting each other with augmenting capabilities to act against terrorists and thwart their plots, said Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi. U.S. should continue its counter-terrorism mission in Afghanistan so that it will not become a safe haven for terror groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda, he said.</p>
<p>China not outright winner from Taliban takeover: European think-tank The Economic Times September 01, 2021</p>	<p>China may not be outright winner from the Taliban takeover as it has to grapple with a hard line regime (Paywall) next door as well as counter USA with the Biden administration having energy to focus in the Indo-Pacific region, argued Europe’s top think tank European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). The ECFR has published a detailed paper on the ‘The fall of the Afghan government and what it means for Europe’ with wide ranging focus on various issues including Afghanistan’s neighbours – China.</p>
<p>Biden's broken promise: President shamefully leaves Americans behind in Afghanistan <i>By Todd Young</i> USA Today September 01, 2021</p>	<p>This is how the U.S. mission in Afghanistan ends. With a bang. And a whimper. The last American soldier left the country. President Joe Biden issued a flimsy written statement. Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivered a dispiriting address. America can no longer with a straight face say we leave no one behind. And the people I’ve spoken with in Indiana are seething, embarrassed, ashamed.</p>
<p>U.S. Turned Its Back on India in Afghanistan, Let’s Accept It <i>By SNM Abdi</i> The Quint August 31, 2021</p>	<p>Evidently, India is useful to America only in the Indo-Pacific region as a key member of the coalition of democracies, including Japan and Australia - known as the Quad - led by the U.S. for countering China. It’s another matter that the quadrilateral alliance established as a counterweight to China is in reality an acknowledgement of China’s military and economic might. It’s an admission by the four that they are not individually capable of taking on China and have therefore pooled their resources to fight their common enemy.</p>

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<p>No, Trump didn't force Biden's withdrawal <i>By S. Paul Kapur</i> The Wall Street Journal August 31, 2021</p>	<p>The Taliban didn't honor its political commitments and ultimately took Afghanistan by force. The Biden administration's claim that the Doha agreement left no choice (Paywall) but to quit Afghanistan unconditionally is false. Given the Taliban's behavior, the U.S. wasn't obligated to withdraw by May 1, by August 31, or any other date. Withdrawal was a choice. And the Biden administration's announcement of this choice in April triggered the Taliban offensive to retake Afghanistan and set the disastrous U.S. departure in motion.</p>
<p>Biden's choices and America's moment of reckoning <i>By harsh V. Pant</i> Observer Research Foundation August 28, 2021</p>	<p>There are times when an image can become a defining moment in a leader's life. U.S. President Joe Biden bowing down his head at a press conference in response to a reporter's question perhaps sums up Biden's Afghanistan policy so far. There is chaos, there is confusion and then there is sheer incompetence. Biden is losing his grip on the narrative and his team looks clueless in even managing a patina of order.</p>
<p>Has Biden's withdrawal from Afghanistan made us safer? Clearly not. <i>By Josh Rogin</i> The Washington Post August 26, 2021</p>	<p>Yes, the United States will save billions by not arming the Afghan National Army (problematic partner that it was). But now we face the costs of dealing with the fallout (Paywall), which already includes caring for tens of thousands of new refugees. The United States undermined its credibility with its allies, damaged its ability to earn the trust of future local partners and abandoned millions of innocent people it professed to care about to a cruel fate. Meanwhile, Taliban-ruled Afghanistan is already becoming a haven for terrorist groups of all stripes.</p>
<p>Another U.S. failure that has little beyond blood in the sand to show <i>By Jeffrey D. Sachs</i> Livemint August 26, 2021</p>	<p>The magnitude of the American failure in Afghanistan is breath-taking. It is not a failure of Democrats or Republicans, but an abiding failure of U.S. political culture, reflected in policymakers' lack of interest in understanding different societies. And it is all too typical. Almost every modern U.S. military intervention in the developing world has come to rot. It's hard to think of an exception since the Korean War. In the 1960s and first half of the 1970s, the U.S. fought in Indochina-Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia - eventually withdrawing in defeat after a decade of grotesque carnage. President Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat, and his successor, the Republican Richard Nixon, share the blame.</p>
<p>The American withdrawal from Afghanistan and the sins of empire <i>By Pratap Bhanu Mehta</i> The Indian Express August 22, 2021</p>	<p>American empire has been stuck in a place where, to use Polybius's words, "it can neither endure its condition, nor the means to overcome it." In the context of Afghanistan, learned strategic thinkers and broadsheets of imperial privilege like The New York Times, will fulminate over roads not taken. But this exercise, as valuable as it might be, misses the wood for the trees. These questions re-enact the presumption of imperial omniscience, innocence and power.</p>
<p>In Afghanistan, China is ready to step into the void <i>By Zhou Bo</i> The New York Times August 20, 2021</p>	<p>The speed and scope of the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan have prompted introspection (Paywall) in the West over what went wrong, and how, after billions of dollars spent on a 20-year war effort, it could all end so ignominiously. China, though, is looking forward. It is ready to step into the void left by the hasty U.S. retreat to seize a golden opportunity.</p>

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<p>The Return of the Taliban: Advantage China-Pakistan <i>By Sanjay Pulipaka</i> The Economic Times August 19, 2021</p>	<p>To a large extent, the Taliban's durability will be contingent on China's economic and political support. Pakistan is in a serious economic crisis and will not be in a position to support Afghan reconstruction. The Western countries will hesitate to provide unqualified development assistance. On the other hand, China can deploy significant economic resources in return for access to Afghan mineral resources.</p>
<p>U.S. exit from Afghanistan was a matter of priorities involving China & Russia <i>By Krzysztof Iwanek</i> The Quint August 18, 2021</p>	<p>President Joe Biden in his recent address on the Afghanistan crisis, admitted, in a rather cold way, where American priorities lay: it was beneficial for China and Russia to see the U.S. spend monstrous amounts of money on Afghanistan and the American mission there, and for this and other reasons, the situation had to end. In other words, with Al-Qaeda, the original primary target of the mission, partially broken, Washington must pull out from Afghanistan and focus even more on the challenges posed by Moscow and Beijing.</p>
<p>Taliban has taken Kabul. Delhi must watch, not pronounce doom <i>By C. Raja Mohan</i> The Indian Express August 18, 2021</p>	<p>As we reflect on the rapid collapse of the Afghan government and the triumphant return of the Taliban, it is worth recalling the insight of K M Panikkar on the relationship between Kabul and Delhi. Panikkar affirmed that developments in the Kabul Valley inevitably affect the empires of the Gangetic plains. He was referring to the innumerable invaders consolidating in the Herat and Kabul valleys before attacking northern India's heartland.</p>
<p>We All Lost Afghanistan <i>By P. Michael McKinley</i> Foreign Affairs August 16, 2021</p>	<p>What is happening is a terrible tragedy, but the blame cannot be laid at any one door. The Biden administration's short timetable for withdrawal, tied to the 20th anniversary of 9/11, and in the middle of the fighting season, was a mistake. But the situation on the ground is the result of two decades of miscalculations and failed policies pursued by three prior U.S. administrations and of the failure of Afghanistan's leaders to govern for the good of their people. Many of the critics speaking out now were architects of those policies.</p>
<p>The withdrawal from Afghanistan was destined for disaster <i>By Jonah Shepp</i> Intelligencer August 15, 2021</p>	<p>There is really no conceivable circumstance under which the U.S. could have extracted itself from Afghanistan without the government crumbling and the country falling back into the hands of the Taliban. The Afghan government and its security forces were always dependent on the backstop of a U.S. military presence in their country. The corrupt officials in Kabul took it for granted that we would be there to keep them in power indefinitely. The Taliban has always known this, and they have been waiting and planning for this very series of events for the past 20 years.</p>
<p>Taliban: A strategic analysis of the Islamist group's historic rise <i>By Major Amit Bansal (Retd.)</i> The Economic Times August 15, 2021</p>	<p>It always assumed that Afghan Taliban and Pakistan Government have been two faces of the same coin. They were being recruited and trained by ISI and Pakistan Army regulars were made part of Taliban to ensure success. Taliban fighters were provided training, War like stores and strategic directives from Pak Army. It was Taliban which gave shelter to Osama bin Laden and entire Al-Qaeda. It was Taliban which was facilitating the training and logistics of almost all Islamic terror groups of the world. Be it Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Haqqani network or Lashkar-E-Toiba.</p>

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<p>U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan a mistake, says UK defence secretary The Guardian August 13, 2021</p>	<p>The UK defence secretary Ben Wallace has criticised the U.S. decision to leave Afghanistan as a “mistake” that has handed the Taliban “momentum”. Speaking to Sky News, he warned that the international community will probably pay the consequences and said he was worried al-Qaida would regain a base in Afghanistan.</p>
<p>Pakistan’s Pyrrhic Victory in Afghanistan <i>By Husain Haqqani</i> Foreign Affairs July 22, 2021</p>	<p>Pakistan’s security establishment is cheering the Taliban’s recent military gains in Afghanistan. The country’s hard-liners have funneled support to the Taliban for decades, and they can now envision their allies firmly ensconced in Kabul. Pakistan got what it wished for—but will come to regret it. A Taliban takeover will leave Pakistan more vulnerable to extremism at home and potentially more isolated on the world stage.</p>

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