



MIDDLE EAST WEEKLY

Month: Jul 23 | Issue 50 | CSSAME

Middle East in a Week

Regarding international relations and world politics, the Middle East may be the most controversial region in the current times. On the one hand it sits on most of the world's oil reserves, while on the other hand, it inhibits the followers of the most controversial religion in the world, Islam. These matters combined have created a region filled with drastic events. Every day, there are new wars erupting in the region and every day, there are new ways through which the west and the far east try to increase their influence in the region. This region inhibits 411 million people out of which 28 % are under the age of 25 years old. This newsletter tries to give weekly updates on the important issues in the Middle East and combining them with some analysis, hopes to have a role in changing the region's situation to the better.

Inside This Issue

TALIBAN: HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE
US WARNING OF TALIBAN FULL CONTROL
TALIBAN IS SQUEEZING AFGHANISTAN
CHINA SEES AN ALLY IN TALIBAN
TALIBAN SEEKING RELATIONS WITH TURKEY

TALIBAN: HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE¹

In an exclusive with India Today, Taliban's spokesperson, Moulana Yousaf Ahmadi claimed that more than 85% of Afghanistan is under Taliban's control. On the current status of the conflict, the Taliban spokesperson claimed, "Bismillahi Rehmani Raheem we have almost covered 85 per cent of Afghanistan and will soon cover left 15 per cent." On the issue of women in Afghanistan and women being scared of the Taliban rule, he said, the Taliban will allow all rights to them. "It is not true. We will give all the rights to the woman and people of Afghanistan that they deserve," he said. Recently posters surfaced in most parts of Afghanistan with claims that the Taliban has put restrictions on the movement and employment of women. However, the commander of the group denied this. He said, "No, we did not put any poster for any rule or dictate. These posters are put by our enemies to defame us."



US WARNING OF TALIBAN FULL CONTROL²



General Mark Milley, Joint Chiefs Chairman, warned the risk of Taliban's full control as US troops are leaving Afghanistan once and for all. The Taliban is now in control of about half of Afghanistan's district centers and threatening to take more, the U.S. military's top officer said Wednesday, as U.S. forces continue toward full withdrawal by Aug. 31. The militants now control more territory in the country than at any time since the U.S. toppled the group from power in 2001 following the September 11 attacks. Milley says the Taliban now control about over 210 of Afghanistan's 419 district centers—more than twice the number that he said the group controlled just four weeks ago. Milley acknowledged that Taliban have surrounded some of the provincial capitals, but said none have fallen so far. "This is going to be a test now of the will and leadership of the Afghan people, the Afghan security forces and the government of Afghanistan," he said. Evacuation flights of what's being called "Operation Allies Refuge" are set to begin later this month and additional vulnerable Afghans are expected to seek refuge as the violence in their country deepens.

TALIBAN IS SQUEEZING AFGHANISTAN³

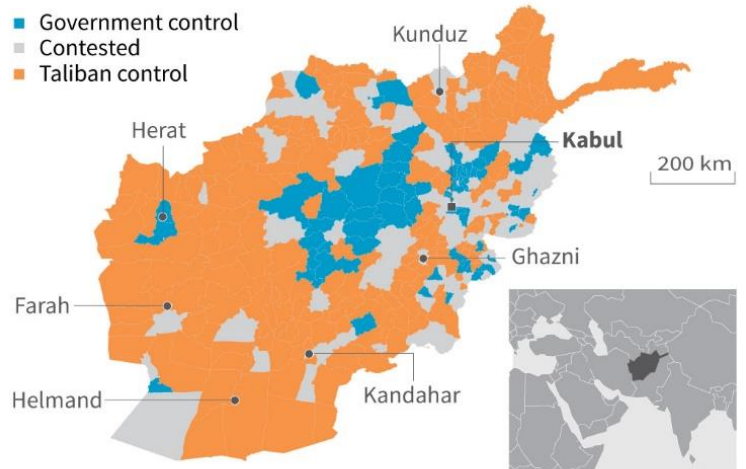
Although some resistance has risen up, Taliban still controls the majority of Afghanistan. Taliban fighters have gained “strategic momentum” in Afghanistan and now control about half the countryside as they drive to cut off population centres from the Western-backed government in Kabul, the United States’s top military general said. “This is going to be a test now, of the will and leadership of the Afghan people, the Afghan security forces and the government of Afghanistan,” Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Mark Milley told reporters at the Pentagon on Wednesday. The Taliban have gained control of about half of 419 districts in Afghanistan and are “putting pressure on the outskirts” of 17 of 34 provincial capitals but have not seized control of any of them yet, the top US general said. “What they’re trying to do is isolate the major population centres. They’re trying to do the same thing to Kabul,” Milley said.

Contested Afghanistan

Zones of control by district

As of July 18, 2021

Analysis by Bill Roggio -- Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies
Editor, FDD's Long War Journal



CHINA SEES AN ALLY IN TALIBAN⁵

As US troops are finally leaving Afghanistan, China seems eager to get in. Amid all of this regional angst, China is quietly attempting to secure its interests in post-U.S. Afghanistan. Beijing has reportedly been actively engaging with Kabul on construction of the Peshawar-Kabul motorway, which would connect Pakistan to Afghanistan and make Kabul a participant in China’s massive infrastructure and investment plan, the Belt and Road Initiative. Up until now, Kabul has resisted participation in the initiative to avoid getting on the wrong side of Washington. Beijing is also building a major road through the Wakhan Corridor—a slim strip of mountainous territory connecting China’s westernmost province of Xinjiang to Afghanistan—and onward to Pakistan and Central Asia, complementing its existing road network through the region. Once completed, these new thoroughfares should enable Beijing to pursue its goals of increased trade with the region and natural resource extraction in Afghanistan. According to a 2014 report, Afghanistan may possess nearly a trillion dollars’ worth of extractable rare-earth metals locked within its mountains.



TALIBAN SEEKING RELATIONS WITH TURKEY⁴

Taliban is seeking allies among Muslim states such as Turkey. Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban's spokesperson, argued that the solution to the current problem in Afghanistan is an "inclusive" Islamic government and said the group wants to work with other countries to restore peace and security and start a rebuilding process. "We want good relations with Turkey, Turkey is our brother, we have many points in common based on faith. We want Turkey to leave the past and return to the present and the future. After that, we can ask for dialogue," Mujahid told TRT Arabi, the Arabic broadcasting service of Turkey's public broadcaster, TRT, during an interview that touched on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, the operation of Kabul Hamid Karzai International Airport and peace negotiations between Afghan parties in Doha, Qatar. On an Afghan peace conference that is expected to be held in Istanbul, he said the Taliban evaluated every opportunity to bring peace to Afghanistan and the region.



Editor:

Sahand EP Faez

*Centre for Studies on South
Asia and the Middle East,*
National Chung Hsing
University, Taichung, Taiwan

Email: submissions.cssame@gmail.com

Tel: +886-4-22840310

References & Further Readings

¹Taliban: Covered almost 85% of Afghanistan, will capture rest soon, Ashraf Wani, INDIA TODAY, 21-JUL-2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/afghanistan-taliban-conflict-moulana-yousaf-ahmadi-1830742-2021-07-21>

²Top General Says 'Taliban Takeover' Possible as U.S. Nears Full Military Withdrawal, W.J.HENNIGAN, TIMES, 21-JUL-2021, <https://time.com/6082533/top-general-says-taliban-takeover-possible-as-u-s-nears-full-military-withdrawal/>

³Taliban seek to cut off Afghan population centres: Top US general, ALJAZEERA, 21-JUL-2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/21/taliban-seek-to-cut-off-population-centres-top-us-general>

⁴Taliban wants good relations with Turkey: spokesperson, Anadolu Agency, DAILY SABAH, 21-JUL-2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/taliban-wants-good-relations-with-turkey-spokesperson>

⁵China and the Taliban Begin Their Romance, Derek Grossman, Foreign Policy, 21-JUL-2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/21/china-taliban-afghanistan-biden-troop-withdrawal-belt-road-geopolitics-strategy/>