

In Afghan collapse, the fall of international relations

That global mediation has had a positive role in asking for a more pragmatic attitude from the Taliban is wishful thinking



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

The heartbreaking images of Afghans clinging on to a United States Air Force plane in Kabul, on August 16, in a desperate bid to flee Afghanistan is a reminder of the fall of Saigon, Vietnam, and the horrifying scenes of American diplomats evacuated by helicopter, leaving behind supporters to languish in re-education camps. We have the urge to ask this question: Who is responsible for the return of the Taliban and a new rise of barbarism in the name of Allah in Afghanistan?

One-sided accord

In his defiant speech justifying his Afghanistan policy, U.S. President Joe Biden conveniently omitted acknowledgement of his responsibility for the disastrous endgame. He squarely laid the blame on the Afghan government and army for all the problems. One cannot shift the blame away from the Biden administration for the current chaos in Afghanistan. But one has to recognise the fact that once the pre-

decessor administration of President Donald Trump and U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad signed the disastrous one-sided agreement with the Taliban, the fate of Afghanistan was sealed. It was just a matter of time. Whether keeping 2,500 personnel or 5,000 personnel or just one American soldier would have made a difference is subject to conjecture.

Lessons missed

This does not mean that the decision to withdraw American soldiers was wrong *per se*; rather, there was obviously inadequate planning in preparing the operation. As usual, many innocent people were left behind. **There was certainly a moral failure in getting out as many of those Afghans who supported the U.S. intervention and military presence in Afghanistan as possible. One historical lesson that was not learned was the predictable collapse of the Afghan government. The surrender to the Taliban slowly gained pace in the months following the Doha deal in 2020, but it began to snowball as soon as Mr. Biden announced in April that U.S. forces would withdraw from Afghanistan.**

But there is a second part to the debacle in Afghanistan. Surprisingly, when we think of the Tali-



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ban, we have in mind a shabby army of 70,000 fervently Islamist foot soldiers confronting and defeating a modern Afghan army of 3,00,000 men. **However, the world was surprised by the speed of the Taliban army in reconquering Afghanistan, from Kunduz on August 7-8 through Mazar-i-Sharif and every other provincial capital last week to Kabul on Sunday.** Certainly, one of the reasons for the defeat of the Afghan army has been the poor training and corruption of the Afghan officers.

We can also add that the strategy of pushing the Taliban into the mountains and hinterlands, while securing towns and cities by the Afghan army did not work as expected. It took the Taliban only a few weeks to sweep away the Afghan army, which had been financed and trained by the United States for 20 years.

It is impossible to predict how the current situation will evolve.

But we can have a better understanding of the Taliban's violence if we go back to their history. **The Taliban was a Pashtun movement which appeared in the early 1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989.**

Posing a danger

Once in power in Afghanistan, the Taliban imposed their own violent and authoritarian version of Sharia Law, exemplified by 'punishments such as public executions of convicted murderers and adulterers, amputations for those found guilty of theft and imposing the all-covering burka for women. Television, music and cinema were also banned by the Taliban and girls aged 10 and over were forbidden to go to school'. All these previous actions show that the Taliban will rule Afghanistan once again with extreme violence and barbarity. However, some analysts continue to believe that because of the negotiations in Doha, there is room for compromise with the Taliban and that international mediation has played a positive role in asking for a more pragmatic attitude from the Taliban. This is just wishful thinking that ignores the fact that the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan will be a great danger for all Afghans and the neighbouring countries. Let us not forget that once

again, **terrorist groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State will take advantage of the new rise of the Taliban to create their own power bases in Afghanistan.**

Challenge for diplomacy

Last but not least, on a human level, the fate of the Afghan people under the new Taliban government is most important. One thing is certain. The sufferings of the Afghans will not end under Taliban rule. From the point of view of international affairs, it will certainly take a Herculean effort to maintain decent working relations with the Taliban. However, India, Iran, Russia, and China are hoping for stability and an end to bloodshed in Afghanistan. But the return of the Taliban will not necessarily be welcomed by all these countries despite the fact that they would rejoice at America's setback. **There will also be a fear of Islamic jihadism all over West Asia, including in Turkey and in Saudi Arabia. So, all and for all, the Afghan debacle is not the story of a defeat of democracy in one country but a sign of a fiasco in international politics in general.**

Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Non-violence and Peace Studies at Jindal Global University