

Taliban Takes Control of Two-thirds of Afghan Territory

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Violence continues to escalate in Afghanistan. As experts predicted, the Taliban launched a brutal offensive against government forces, achieving full control of 65% of the entire national territory. The situation is extremely dangerous for the central government, as the state does not have strength enough to combat the threat, while international support seems increasingly distant.

In a recent attack, Taliban militants have taken over Pul el Khumri, the capital of Baghlan, a province in the north of the country. According to reports from local residents, the Taliban won the fighting against the military, forcing government soldiers to quickly leave, fleeing into the Kelagi Desert, where an army military base is located. With this maneuver, the terrorist group conquered the seventh Afghan regional capital in about a week, consolidating one of the most successful military campaigns undertaken by the Taliban in recent years.

The problem goes far beyond a mere political issue, with a serious humanitarian crisis emerging. Trying to escape the fighting, around 60,000 families have been displaced from their homes in 25 different provinces in the past two months. Internationally, a wave of refugees is already starting. In Europe, several countries are concerned about the possible start of a migration crisis similar to the one in 2016 and are asking Brussels to resume the deportation of Afghans. Shortly after the serious crisis generated by the pandemic, the mass arrival of Afghan refugees could make the European economy collapse, as well as contribute to the return of health chaos, considering the possibility that many Afghans have COVID-19.

In fact, the Taliban’s advance seems almost impossible to be neutralized. Without foreign support, the country’s security forces simply cannot stop their enemies, whose military power is comparable to that of a regular national army. The loss of control over capitals, strategic cities and entire provinces is a consequence of the strong institutional vulnerability and material weakness that have affected the country for decades and which was profoundly aggravated by the withdrawal of American troops. Without a concrete plan to replace American presence with another foreign military force, the government is absolutely vulnerable and tends to lose control over almost all of its own territory.

However, this does not seem to be a concern for the American government, which persists not to give any proposal to help Afghanistan. In a recent statement, US President Joe Biden [said](#): “Afghan leaders have to come together (...) They’ve got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation.” As we can see, from now on, Washington wants Afghans to “fight for themselves”, which reveals the new US guidelines for that people.

While “abandoning” Afghan forces, however, the US is trying to find the best solution to its own problems. The Washington Department of Defense said it is assessing the security situation at the US embassy in Kabul on a daily basis. No measures to protect the embassy have yet announced, but it is likely that Washington will decide to keep some military in the country to at least guarantee diplomatic security (but if that happens, the Taliban will become even more aggressive).

Without any expectation of foreign aid, Kabul does its best to keep it safe. Now the government is encouraging civilian people to take arms and urge the entire population to defend the country in the streets, appealing to stop further Taliban incursions, helping the armed forces in their quest for victory. In addition, governments in some provinces are trying to form alliances with local militias in order to establish a coalition to rival the Taliban.

All these plans to try to contain the Taliban seem insufficient. In fact, without foreign forces, the Afghan government will not have strength enough to deal with the situation. A new international alliance needs to cooperate with Afghanistan to ensure national security. In the same sense, it is essential that the peace negotiations in Doha move forward as quickly as possible.

The Taliban recently announced that it is willing to negotiate in a more advanced way, but Kabul requires international observers to talk with its enemy. The scenario of discussions to reach a peace agreement still seems very far from being achieved, but decisions need to be taken as quickly as possible because many lives are being lost. For this, foreign diplomatic intervention will be necessary. It is necessary that the powers of the ‘extended troika’ actively act in the mediation of the dialogue and help to reach an agreement. Only with international cooperation, both military and diplomatic, it will be possible for the Afghan people to overcome the current crisis.

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