



ALERT +

The Fall of Kabul

Afghanistan – August 2021



SITUATION SUMMARY

On 15 August 2021, the Afghan capital of Kabul fell to the Taliban. The country's president, Ashraf Ghani, has also departed for Tajikistan. The Taliban, who refer to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, are now in control of all major buildings in the city, except for the airport.

The capture has been largely peaceful. Similar to the fall of many of the provincial capitals, the Taliban have faced little resistance in their capture of the city. Indeed, Taliban soldiers have now taken control of the checkpoints and security posts that used to be manned by Afghan soldiers. Despite the relatively peaceful nature of the capitulation and takeover, there have been reports of Taliban forces searching for former government officials and ex-soldiers.

The capitulation has also resulted in Afghan troops surrendering at the airport in Kandahar, the Taliban's capital prior to 2001. A number of Afghan special forces had been holding out against the Taliban in the strategic and symbolic city's airport.

It is now almost a formality that the remaining territory in the country will fall under the control of the Taliban, or the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Foreign troops do remain in Kabul, mainly to ensure security at the airport. However, these troops are expected to depart by the end of the month.

Despite the almost smooth transition of power, fear has resulted in thousands attempting to flee the city. Many have attempted to storm Kabul's airport with widely shared video footage on social media showing individuals clinging on to an aircraft's landing gear as it took off. At least three people were killed as the C-17A transport plane departed the airport, with five others killed on the ground.

As a result of this breach of the airport perimeter, evacuation flights were grounded for a period of time on Monday 16 August. Flights have since recommenced with the US military also taking over the operation of air traffic control. It is possible that further breaches of the airport perimeter may occur in the coming days, delaying flights.

SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

The fall of Kabul and swift capture of most of the country by Taliban forces have taken all commentators by surprise. Even last week US analysts were predicting a 60-90-day timeframe. Given that it has taken just four days from when that estimate was made until the complete collapse of the Western-backed government shows how complete the capitulation of Afghan government troops has been.

The relative peacefulness of the takeover has, however, allowed a sense of calm to descend on Kabul. Taliban soldiers have taken over the running of checkpoints and policing in the city, giving a sort of continuation to operations.

Despite this, however, there are concerns going forward that the reinstalling of Taliban Islamic fundamentalist rule in the country will lead to repression and an undermining of all the positive changes that have occurred in the country. Already air force pilots have been killed in their homes, while a comedian was also executed in Kandahar.

For women too, there are fears that Taliban rule will undermine the advances in schooling and freedom. Though there have been reports of women walking in the street alone since the take over of Kabul, girls have already been turned away from schools in Herat.

The two main concerns for the country and the international community are now a refugee crisis and the risk of a full-scale civil war. It is expected that hundreds of thousands, potentially millions, will now attempt to flee the country. Given the already high levels of food and water insecurity in the region, a humanitarian disaster is a very real possibility. Much will rest on how willing the Taliban will be to open borders and allow aid in.

A large-scale civil war is not looking likely immediately, instead, the Taliban will likely consolidate their control. However, given the tribal nature of the country, and how quickly the situation has changed in the past weeks, an internal conflict in the coming months cannot be ruled out..

SOLACE GLOBAL ADVICE

- No travel to Afghanistan should be undertaken at this time.
 - Those still in the country should look to remain in a secure location until both airport and transport have been confirmed as secure.
 - While it remains unlikely that commercial options will be available in the next few weeks, if possible, those in country should look to leave immediately by any possible means.
 - Ensure that any movements are carried out with the support of travel tracking technology. Additionally, employ professional security support with armoured vehicles carrying Afghan license plates.
 - Expect short notice disruption to any evacuation plans.
- Adhere to all instructions issued by officials when in the airport area.
 - Additionally, where absolutely necessary, follow any directives issued by Taliban soldiers.
 - Keep abreast of the latest news and developments via local contacts, embassies and Solace Secure.
 - Ensure your details are registered with your local diplomatic mission.
 - Managers should ensure that all staff are accounted for.
 - Avoid taking any action unless all information is confirmed



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