



The First Year of Taliban Rule

After 19 years and 9 months and at a cost of over \$2 trillion, the US backed regime in Afghanistan collapsed after the Taliban surrounded the capital, Kabul in August 2021. The collapse was swift and remarkable, sealing an embarrassing defeat for the US, the worst since the fall of Saigon. The world looked on as the Taliban were back in power after a two-decade hiatus. The claims began straight away that a strict, autocratic system of rule would strip the Afghan people of all rights and the brutal rule of the Taliban of the 1990s was back. The Taliban inherited a mess after America's two-decade occupation came to an end. But despite some achievements in their first year in power, the challenges in the mountainous country are rapidly increasing.

The Taliban were required, literally overnight, to convert from long-term insurgents to their new lives as government officials. The Taliban announced a new interim government on the 7th of September 2021 declaring the country an 'Islamic Emirate'. The Supreme Leader, 'Amir al Mumineen' (Commander of the faithful) Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, didn't take up an official role in the interim government but he remains the movement's ultimate authority over political and military affairs. The interim government consisted of an acting Prime Minister and two deputy Prime Ministers. Mohammad Hassan Akhund, who was close with the movement's founder, was announced as the acting Prime Minister. His two deputies were Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who headed the Taliban's political commission and Abdul Salam Hanafi who was a member of the Taliban's political commission that negotiated in the Qatar peace talks and the subsequent peace deal with the US. The Taliban's broader government included men who were on the US terrorist list and the UN's sanction list. Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of Jalaludeen Haqqani the former head of Haqqani network, became interior minister. The government structure in Afghanistan looks remarkably similar to the previous foreign backed regime. There has not been any explanation or outlining of the principles or philosophy of Islamic governance or how the Taliban plans to transition to Islamic rule.

As the Taliban settled into power, there were no sectarian or ethnic massacres as the West claimed. Predictions of mass killings from the West turned out to be wholly wrong. The Afghan Information Ministry confirmed the 'Islamic Emirate' announced a general amnesty for all its opponents, big or small. This includes those who took up arms, Daesh or members of the resistance front of Panjshir. The Taliban government invited everyone to a peaceful life under the shade of the 'Islamic system'. The ministry outlined how a large number of opponents surrendered and a commission for contact with Afghan personalities was established, on the invitation of which the important ministers and members of parliament of the previous regime are returning to their homeland by trusting the 'Islamic Emirate'. One year on, Afghanistan feels safer and less violent than it has been in decades. Graeme Smith, a senior consultant

for the International Crisis Group's Asia Program, noted that this round of Taliban rule “...probably ranks as the most peaceful six-month period that Afghanistan has enjoyed in four decades.”

The Taliban inherited an economy that was built upon a pack of cards that was waiting to collapse.

Prior to the Taliban's August 2021 takeover, a severe humanitarian crisis already existed in Afghanistan, due primarily to the two-decade conflict. The formal banking system that did exist left with the US withdrawal and this meant Afghan businesses and the government were unable to move funds. The freezing and then outright seizure of the Afghan central bank funds by the US further hurt the Afghan economy. The announcement that half of these funds would be used for lawsuits of 9/11 victims led the Taliban to claim that Western powers have betrayed the movement, walking back commitments made previously, and making more demands without offering anything substantial in return. The sense of betrayal appears to be strengthening arguments among Taliban leaders for adopting a hardened stance and going back on some of their own commitments.

The leadership of the Taliban has been at pains to spread a very different message to avoid the same tragedy that took place 20 years ago. They have scrambled to order their ground forces to operate with restraint and to persuade all Afghans of their good intentions. The Taliban leaders immediately declared a general amnesty for anyone who worked for the previous regime and also asked government officials and journalists, including women, to return to work, and even reached out to minority groups to assuage their concerns.

But the West is not convinced and its media and officials have gone into overdrive to paint the Taliban in negative terms. Promises the Taliban have made concerning the rights of Afghan citizens, ethno-religious minorities, women, and the educated middle classes in general have been ambiguous and often contradictory. There are clear divides within the Taliban movement between those who are opposed to making any concessions and those that want to gain international legitimacy. The Taliban after a year of rule face immense security, economic and social challenges. These all take place while the US and its allies continue pressurising the Taliban on these issues in the hope the Taliban make compromises and concessions to Western demands.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Adnan Khan**