



## THE COMING TO POWER OF THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL EFFECTS

With the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban, who progressed step by step, took the capital Kabul with an unexpected speed on August 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, without a war, once again shocked the whole world. There is a serious chaos in Afghanistan with the fall of the Afghan government and the Taliban's control almost over the country. Having regained power in Afghanistan after 20 years, the Taliban brings many questions. In this context, issues related to how the future of Afghanistan will be shaped and what will be its regional and global effects to be discussed.

So why did the US pull out of Afghanistan? First of all, it is possible to say that Washington has already decided to leave Afghanistan, even though the US seems to have pulled out of Afghanistan in a hurry. In fact, the US signing the Peace-Bringing Agreement to Afghanistan with the Taliban in February 2020 in Doha has shown that it has now decided to leave the future and fate of Afghanistan in the hands of Afghans. The US President Joe Biden, which further clarified Washington's stance, declared in his statement on April 14<sup>th</sup> 2021 that all U.S. soldiers would leave Afghanistan completely by September 11<sup>th</sup> 2021. As Biden already stated in his statement, Washington has adopted that it is meaningless to keep troops in Afghanistan 20 years later. Because Washington, which entered Afghanistan with the slogan of war on terrorism, has faced an increasing reaction both in Afghanistan and in the US in recent years. In addition, it would be costly for the US, which lost 2,352 lives and spent 2,313 trillion dollars in the 20-year Afghanistan war, to retain troops there.

As a matter of fact, the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan can be considered as a geostrategic step. It is obvious that the US, which withdraws from Afghanistan, will also withdraw from Iraq and Syria in the short term. Thus, it can be predicted that the US, which has reduced its military expenditures in the Middle East, will largely shift its power to the Indo-Pacific region. This could be associated with the fact that the US and its allies, which are disturbed by the increasing geopolitical and geoeconomic moves of the rising China in the Indo-Pacific region, have now started to focus on this region. Already under the shadow of the US-China Trade War, while the alliance of the US, Australia, Japan and India against China increased in the Indo-Pacific region, Germany and France also joined the alliance. In this

context, the Biden administration, which pursued a deeper strategy against China compared to the Trump administration, has started to strengthen its comprehensive political, commercial-economic and military cooperation with Taiwan and other countries in the region that have had conflicts with China over the islands for years, as well as further consolidating relations with the US allies. Considering that the US, which has withdrawn from Afghanistan and started to withdraw from Iraq and Syria, can "save" billions of dollars in military expenditures and it can be predicted that Washington will strengthen its military position in the Indo-Pacific region in order to reduce Beijing's influence in the region in the coming period. In this respect, the Indo-Pacific region, which has been the scene of a fierce rivalry between the US and China in recent years, may come to the fore in Washington's next geopolitical games.

It is possible to say that the US wants to leave Afghanistan, which has become more unstable after its withdrawal, to its rivals in the region, to Russia, China and Iran, with all its current and potential problems. The US already knew that in the event of a serious chaos after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, all possible threats that would arise would worry the countries of the region, especially Russia, China and Iran. It can be seen that Russia, China and Iran will focus more on Afghanistan in the coming period, which is concerned that Afghanistan, which has been captured by the Taliban, will become a difficult problem for neighboring countries. While these countries focus on Afghanistan, the US may seek to strengthen its position in other regions, especially in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, China approaches with great interest to Afghanistan, which the US left. In this context, on July 28<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Beijing administration hosted the high-level Taliban delegation led by Mullah Abdulgani Baradar and gave the message about its readiness to cooperate with the Taliban. It is possible to explain China's approach towards the Taliban for several reasons. First of all, China, which is concerned about the stability and security of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, has had various dialogues with the Taliban in the past. Therefore, the goal of ensuring the stability and security of the East Turkestan region is in the background of China's relations with the Taliban. According to Chinese data, while the bilateral trade volume between China

and Afghanistan amounted to 550 million dollars in 2020, China's foreign direct investment in Afghanistan reached 630 million dollars as of December 2020. However, it can be predicted that China will be more cautious about recognizing the Taliban administration.

It is the Afghan people who have once again lost in the Afghanistan war, the winner of which is uncertain. It is a big question whether the Taliban, who has won power in Afghanistan, will win the peace. The US came and went, but the ongoing political, social, economic, religious and ethnic problems in Afghanistan were left behind. It is not yet clear what kind of management approach the Taliban will adopt in the future, which is trying to display a moderate approach for now. It can be stated that these problems will deepen in Afghanistan, which is in chaos and uncertainty. The country is already at the doorstep of a bloody civil war. Even Afghan youth, born in 2001, when the Afghanistan War took place, are now 20 years old. On the one hand, there are young people whose families and relatives were oppressed by the Taliban in the past or who grew up witnessing bomb attacks, on the other hand, there are young people raised by the Taliban. In addition, considering the ethnic and religious differences in Afghanistan, it seems difficult to achieve peace in the country. Moreover, it cannot be ignored that interest groups inside and outside the country will fuel the political, social, economic, religious and ethnic problems in Afghanistan according to their own interests.

In summary, it seems unlikely that peace and stability will be achieved in Afghanistan, at least in the next few years. It is unclear how long the Taliban's power, which is trying to establish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, will last. Destabilizing Afghanistan is also facing major economic problems. From the point of view of the Central Asian countries neighboring Afghanistan, the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan can be considered as a big problem for these countries. Therefore, Central Asian countries should closely monitor the situation in Afghanistan and be prepared for all kinds of threats. Considering that the Taliban will try to consolidate its power and stabilize its power in Afghanistan in the next few years, it can be predicted that it will not enter into any conflicts with neighboring countries. Therefore, it is vital for Central Asian countries to cooperate more closely on Afghanistan.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev had a telephone conversation with the President of the European Council Charles Michel. The politicians discussed the current situation in Afghanistan. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev informed Charles Michel in detail of Kazakhstan's position on the issue and revealed that necessary assistance is provided to Afghani students in Kazakhstan. Charles Michel, in turn, said that he was looking forward to the meeting with President Tokayev during his upcoming visit to Brussels later this year (Kazinform, 26.08.2021).
- According to the Deputy Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Farkhod Arziyev, Uzbekistan would continue to help its international partners in the evacuation of citizens from Afghanistan. Arziyev added that none of those who enter Uzbekistan in transit would remain in the country and would definitely arrive at the specified destination. Uzbekistan is interested in reaching a national compromise on the creation of a new government of Afghanistan and its diplomatic missions in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif continue their activities (UzReport, 26.08.2021).
- President of Russia Vladimir Putin had a phone conversation with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. The leaders discussed bilateral cooperation between Russia and Pakistan, including the development of trade and economic ties and the implementation of joint projects. Moreover, they agreed to coordinate approaches of the two countries to the Afghan issue both bilaterally and multilaterally and using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's capabilities. The leaders mentioned the importance of maintaining peace and security in Afghanistan, preventing violence and establishing inter-Afghan dialogue (TASS, 26.08.2021).
- The President of Moldova, Maia Sandu, the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenski, made a joint press statement at the ceremony dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the independence of Moldova. The Presidents said that they would act towards Moldova's rapid accession to the European Union. The leaders declared their adherence to the "open door" policy in the EU and welcomed multifaceted cooperation with Moldova on its European path (Zdg.md, 27.09.2021).
- The Chief of the International Military Cooperation Department of the Belarusian Defense Ministry, Major-General Oleg Voinov met with a Pakistani military delegation led by Chief of the International Military Cooperation Office of the Armed Forces of Pakistan, Major-General Zahid Mahmood. The parties discussed the current state of bilateral military cooperation and expressed willingness to develop bilateral ties in the field of defense in the context of mutual interest. The Pakistani delegation visited the Military Academy of Belarus where they were made familiar with the process and stages of military personnel training (BelTA, 31.08.2021).
- 2021-2022 has been declared the Year of the Regions of Belarus and China. During the opening ceremony of the event organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, the sides agreed to upgrade the level of political cooperation. According to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Nikolai Borisevich, Belarus-China relations will soon get the status of "iron brotherhood, exemplary all-round strategic cooperation and all-weather partnership". The new level of bilateral relations will be formalized in a joint declaration that will be signed during the next high-level visit (BelTA, 31.08.2021).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- In 2020, the volume of traffic by all types of transport in Kazakhstan totaled almost 4 billion tons, decreasing by 6% compared to the results of 2019. The Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development of Kazakhstan reported that the railway traffic was stable with a growth of 4%. At the same time, the transit traffic demonstrated significant growth of 37% over seven months due to transit between the European countries and China (Qazaq TV, 31.08.2021).
- In 2021, bilateral trade between Kazakhstan and Russia amounted to almost \$11 billion increasing by 26.7% compared to the numbers of 2020. Kazakhstan exported to Russia a wide range of products including wheat, rice, cement, iron ores, natural-gas condensate, and fertilizers. Russia's investments to Kazakhstan also showed positive dynamics increasing by more than 10% and exceeding \$12 billion. Russia mainly invests in manufacturing, trade, financial and insurance fields (Qazaq TV, 31.08.2021).
- Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan Sardor Umurzakov had a meeting with the Minister of Economy of the United Arab Emirates, Abdullah bin Tuk al - Marri. The Ministers announced the implementation of 15 joint investment projects worth \$5 billion. Uzbekistan is interested in attracting Emirati investors to participate in its state privatization program. The officials mentioned successful activities of the Uzbek-Emirati Investment Company, which channeled over \$100 million towards the implementation of joint investment projects in Uzbekistan (Uz-Report, 26.08.2021).
- During the 6 months of 2021, the export of Belarusian computer services (IT) increased by 21.1% compared to the same period of 2020, reaching almost \$1.5 billion. The share of the computer services in Belarus' total services exports amounted to almost 30%. In the first half of 2021, the country's total services exports exceeded \$4.8 billion, increasing by 17.6%. Services imports amounted to \$2.7 billion, demonstrating 21% growth. As a result, trade surplus in services reached \$2.2 billion (BelTA, 31.08.2021).
- Bilateral trade between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan is increasing. During the first seven months of 2021, the value of Turkey's export of grain and legumes to Kyrgyzstan demonstrated a significant growth, increasing by almost 39% and reaching \$3.6 million. In general, Turkey's exports of grain and legumes increased by 18.3% compared to the same period last year and amounted to \$4.8 billion. From July 2020 to July 2021, Turkey's export of grain and legumes exceeded \$8 billion (Kabar, 25.08.2021).
- According to Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economy, the country has invested \$1.4 billion in the development of agricultural parks. The Entrepreneurship Development Fund of the Ministry of Economy has allocated \$690 million for the establishment and development of 50 agro-parks in total. Around 25 agro-parks have been granted \$19 million discounts to import machinery, technological equipment and other facilities. The country's private sector, in turn, invested \$710 million. The Ministry created 4,750 permanent and more than 4,800 seasonal jobs through agro-parks (AzerNews, 25.08.2021).

## Society and Culture

- The opening ceremony of the monument to a well-known hero of the Kyrgyz epic Manas took place on the main square of the Kecioren municipality of Ankara. The event was attended by representatives of the Administration of the President of Turkey, members of the Parliament, diplomats and heads of local administration. The President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Zhaparov made a video message conveying his congratulations on this occasion. The ceremony was timed to the 30th Anniversary of the Independence of the Kyrgyz Republic (Mfa.gov.kg, 31.08.2021).
- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) organized a Women's Summit entitled "The Power of Women: Growth Trends of Post-Pandemic and Beyond". The online event was attended by 100 women leaders, entrepreneurs, activists, women-led business associations, and relevant non-government organizations from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and India. The participants shared their views and success stories in tackling the challenges of the pandemic and highlighted the unique role of women in coping with the impact of the pandemic. The event was aimed at supporting gender gap reduction in the countries of the region (Usaid.gov, 24.08.2021).
- A granite memorial to the Kazakh soldiers who died during the Great Patriotic War was opened for the first time in 77 years in Moldova, at the height "Serpeni Bridgehead". The monument was made within the framework of the international patriotic project "Dear Glory", which is being implemented by the Eurasian Group (ERG) at the initiative of the Pavlodar search research group "Maidan Zholy". The implementation of the project coincided with several significant dates: the 77th anniversary of the liberation of Moldova from fascism and the 30th anniversary of the Independence of Kazakhstan (Kazinform, 24.08.2021).
- The natural population decline in Russia during January-July 2021 increased by 62% amounting to 512,500 people compared to 316,300 in 2020. The number of births over these seven months decreased by 1.1% - to 802,827 from 811,650 in January-July 2020. Sluggish demographic trends in Russia gained momentum in 2020 due to the spread of COVID-19. These patterns continue as demographic natural population change rates stay highly negative and immigration is insufficient to replenish a declining population (Interfax.ru, 27.09.2021).
- Kazakhstan celebrated its 30th anniversary since the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. The United States Department of State thanked the Government of Kazakhstan for continued partnership and congratulated the country on this occasion noting that the decision to close it demonstrated a clear commitment to nuclear safety and non-proliferation. Over 42 years of the existence of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, a total of 456 tests of all types of nuclear weapons were carried out on its territory, which led to the spread of radiation over large areas (Kazinform, 28.09.2021).
- The General Directorate of the Turkish Employment Service (İŞKUR) notes a significant increase in the number of trips by Turkish citizens to Uzbekistan for the purpose of employment. During January - July 2021 the number of Turkish citizens visiting Uzbekistan through the İŞKUR line increased by 213% compared to January-July 2020, reaching 411. Throughout this period, some 7,461 Turkish citizens traveled abroad via İŞKUR, which is 45.3% more than during the same period of 2020 (Trend.az, 26.08.2021).