**The Afghan government may collapse**

**[Adeela Naureen and Umar Waqar](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/adeela-naureen-and-umar-waqar)**

June 22, 2021

With the spectacular advance of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) across the countryside and reports of the Afghan National Army soldiers and officers joining ranks of IEA, the assessment of the Ghani government standing on its feet is becoming questionable. Even pro-government media outlets like Pajhwok News agency reported on June 21 that the Taliban have captured nine districts in six provinces in just three hours.

Meanwhile, Dr Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah are departing to the US on an invitation from the American administration. From north to south and east to west, there is a story of Afghan National Army troops surrendering to the Taliban; pictures of Afghan soldiers happily joining the ranks of IEA are being flashed on a daily basis.

The list of surrender is almost limitless; so far there has been collapse of districts and army garrisons in provinces which include Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Ghor, Helmand, Jowzjan, Kandahar, Kapisa, Khost, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, Samangan, Sar-e Pol, Takhar, Urozgan, Wardak and Zabul.

[At least 5 injured in Lahore blast](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/at-least-5-injured-in-lahore-blast)

As pointed out by the New York Times on June 21, the looming US withdrawal means Afghan troops will be left without the kind of combat support that has stopped such Taliban offensives in the past. Even with adjacent militia forces, government troops are low on morale and are frequently besieged in isolated outposts and bases that can only be resupplied by the Afghan air force. The small group of pilots and aircraft are facing their own array of issues as international forces and maintenance contractors leave the country. In a clear sign of the deteriorating security situation, the Afghan government appointed a new acting minister of defence, a minister of interior and an army chief.

We had argued in our article published in April 2019 in The Nation on the possible fall of the Ghani government, with the title ‘Ghani, Thieu & Saigon Syndrome’. Some of the arguments and conclusions have proven to be accurate—we consider it important to reproduce a gist of our observations to develop their link with the current situation.

[England beat Czech Republic to win Group D](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/england-beat-czech-republic-to-win-group-d)

3 million Vietnamese were killed in the Vietnam War; in Afghanistan the figures are unknown, however a conservative estimate puts it at about half a million. US losses in Vietnam were 58000 killed; in Afghanistan these may be less than 3000 but the psychological cost of the war may be more damaging than the Vietnam War—reportedly 185000 US soldiers are suffering from PTSD today. Economically, the Afghanistan war has cost more than a trillion dollars, definitely more than the Vietnam War which cost less than 200 billion dollars.

Afghanistan was never subjugated by the US military, right from the outset. As reported by TRT World on April 17, there are two Afghanistans in almost every district, the rural and the urban. While the minority elite in Kabul or Mazar-e-Sharif may be enjoying modern lifestyles benefiting from the presence of foreign troops and the military, 70 percent of Afghanistan has suffered tremendously in the past five years. Rural Afghanistan has actually borne the brunt of the ferocious war in Afghanistan, as they have become either contested areas or Taliban controlled.

[AC indicts Saleem Mandviwalla in Kidney Hills reference](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/ac-indicts-saleem-mandviwalla-in-kidney-hills-reference)

In Afghanistan, the contrast between the rural and urban areas has developed into a permanent faultline. Rural areas have suffered due to massive poverty and remaining out of focus for development, where urban areas have witnessed rampant corruption by the elite sitting in their cushy homes and their children enjoying the best of life; these factors have militated against the Western alliance and their supported NUG. The Taliban have played on this divide and no wonder they have almost de facto control over most of the rural areas, barring a few pockets.

Interestingly the famous Tet offensive launched by the North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong against the Saigon regime in 1968, led to the loss of rural Vietnam to the Ho Chi Minh regime and finally shaped public opinion against the US military occupation of South Vietnam. The Taliban Spring offensive this year is being seen in similar effects.

Another major destabilising factor in Afghanistan has been the elections and the power wrangling within various factions. A number of major power brokers have existed in Afghanistan and are exerting pressure for political space.

[Worsening situation in Amazon a ‘warning to humanity'](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/worsening-situation-in-amazon-a-warning-to-humanity)

All told, Dr Ashraf Ghani has reached the deadend of his carrier and is being sidelined by the US because he no more fits the new game and is to be discarded into the dustbin of history; that’s what happened to Nguyen Thieu of South Vietnam in 1975 and that’s what is happening to Ashraf Ghani.

What could be repercussions for Afghanistan and the region in the coming days and months? This is a critical question.

In our humble analysis, the collapse of the Ghani government is in the offing, it’s just a matter of time. Last time, Dr Najeebullah held onto Kabul as the Afghan Army, the elite in Kabul and major urban centres supported his regime; in the case of Dr Ashraf Ghani, he has lost political support amongst the masses. The defection of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to IEA ranks indicates that central control over the Army has almost collapsed and no one is listening to Ghani and his military commanders.

[Peruvians share videos of tremor as magnitude 6.0 earthquake strikes Lima](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jun-2021/peruvians-share-videos-of-tremor-as-magnitude-6-0-earthquake-strikes-lima)

The IEA has also followed an astute military strategy; instead of advancing head-on into Kabul, the Taliban forces have adopted a strategy of concentric circles. They have squeezed the spaces available to ANA along the 3,000-km ring road that winds around the mountains at Afghanistan’s centre and connects the urban centres of Afghanistan, including Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Herat. The IEA social media campaign has targeted the Achilles heel of ANA and cutting or controlling main supply routes, logistics, water reservoirs and electricity. This has cut off the main ANA garrisons from their bases and the Afghan Air force is unable to support them in any emergency.

The IEA has also played in the cognitive domain and has offered general amnesty to anyone who surrenders to its commanders, this has created a snowballing effect in the rank and file of ANA and is likely to accentuate the situation further.

Pakistan needs to analyse the possible collapse of Dr Ghani’s government; we could witness another exodus of refugees, especially from the elite in Kabul and other major urban centres. This, combined with the Covid pandemic, could become a major challenge for Pakistan in the coming days.

A major loser in the region will be India, already frustrated and trying to woo some Taliban ranks. Indian investment in Afghanistan seems to be waning and her dream of keeping the Durand Line on fire may get shattered soon.

Adeela Naureen and Umar Waqar

The authors are freelance journalists. They can be reached at adeelanaureen-

@gmail.com.