**Tough Road Ahead for Taliban**

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October 14, 2021

The Taliban’s announced 33-member interim cabinet is exclusively Taliban, and almost all ministers are of Pashtun ethnicity. Women have no positions in this new setup. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs has been dissolved. And the sinister Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice has been re-established. This clearly illustrates that the Taliban will carry on with its medieval conservative interpretation of Islam. More than a dozen members of the new cabinet are on the UN Security Council’s sanctions list. Sirajuddin Haqqani, deputy leader of the Taliban, is now the interior minister of the country. He heads the Haqqani network and is responsible for some of the most gruesome attacks on Afghan civilians as well as government and military targets throughout the war. He is on the FBI’s most wanted men list with a $10 million bounty on his head. It tells that the Taliban is nothing more than an extremist group that has grabbed power. As the group tightens its hold on the country and power, the road ahead looks tough. So, let’s look at some major challenges that the Taliban has to face in the coming time.

Stretched too thin: Afghan government used to have security forces numbering around 300,000 to maintain law and order, to fight insurgency, and control borders. Now with almost all of Afghanistan under their control and with only around 80 to 90 thousand active fighters, the Taliban is stretched thin. The Taliban found it easy to seize a large number of districts and provincial capitals with this size of the force. But holding on to major cities is another proposition that requires significant manpower and resources, which the group doesn’t have.

Growing Resistance: As the Taliban failed to form an inclusive government, resentment among other ethnic groups is growing with each passing day. Former Vice President Amrullah Saleh and Ahmad Massoud, son of legendary Mujahideen commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, as of now is leading the resistance against the Taliban. But other leaders are also voicing their support for them. Most notably, Ismail Khan, a Tajik leader backed by Iran, announced his support for Ahmad Massod led National Resistance Front (NRF). As of now, the Taliban doesn’t have any considerable opposition, but there is an undercurrent that has a full-fledged potential of developing into a major threat.

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Governance: Efficiently and effectively governing the country of 38 million people will be a major challenge for the new regime. The Taliban has been good at one thing i.e. fighting. But governing such a diverse country with many ethnicities will be a mammoth task. Talibs have yet to demonstrate their capability to deliver good governance. They did not do so when they ruled Afghanistan for the first time during 1996-2001. At times, the Taliban has been given credit for being good at maintaining security through very heavy-handed means and providing efficient forms of traditional justice. But they have little to no technocratic and administrative understanding of how to perform other functions of government. The group is bound to struggle to deliver effective governance to the common people. It does not have sufficient funds to spend on public services like healthcare, sanitation, and drinking water.

“There are the issues of retaining enough manpower, bureaucracy, and civil servants to run the affairs of the government. With an exodus of people, one vulnerability could be an insufficient number of professionals and people in the technocratic cadres to run state institutions,” said Omar Samad, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Keeping Own House United: Taliban itself is engulfed with factionalism. Different factions in the Taliban are fighting among themselves for a greater share and say in the new power dynamics. The Taliban is currently divided into three main camps. The first one is the political wing that negotiated a peace deal with the United States, led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. The second group is the military wing led by Molavi Yakoob, son of Taliban founder, Mulla Omar. The last one is the Haqqani Network headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani. The Taliban’s success as an insurgent outfit rested on its ability to remain cohesive despite NATO pressure and efforts to fragment the group. But the group’s challenge of maintaining cohesiveness among its many different factions of varied ideological intensity and material interests is difficult now that it is in power.

Flattered Economy: Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, More than 20 per cent of its gross income comes from foreign aid. The US froze $9.5 billion of the Afghan central bank’s assets in the wake of the Taliban takeover, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended access to its funds.

In addition, more than five million Afghans are estimated to be internally displaced. The UN said nearly 400,000 people have been displaced this year alone as a result of ongoing violence. For rehabilitating these people urgent aid is required from humanitarian agencies. Even if these agencies agree to deliver the aid, the Taliban do not currently have institutional structures to receive the funds.

Diplomatic Isolation: Taliban’s first regime in 1996 was more or less a pariah globally. But this time, they appear keen on wide international acceptance, even as most nations have suspended or closed their diplomatic missions in Kabul. Also, none of the countries has recognised them yet, and the US has said any legitimacy “will have to be earned”. Hence for any kind of acceptance by the international community, the Taliban has to pass the tough scrutiny of their actions.

The Taliban has achieved a victory through military means and they have a firm grip over the power, but the path ahead is full of big challenges.

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