



## Taliban Fighters Seize Control of Several Key Provinces in Afghanistan as the Group Continues Its Military Advances Across the Country

Taliban fighters have seized control of several key districts and provinces in Afghanistan as the group continues its military advances across the country. Overall, the Taliban has taken over around 150 districts in the last two months, and their recent attacks in the preceding weeks have resulted in hundreds of dead Afghan soldiers, hundreds more security forces surrendering, and the fleeing of many others. Worryingly, the Taliban has also captured major border crossings into neighboring countries such as Iran and Turkmenistan. In combination with the mineral rich lands acquired, the weapons and military supplies taken from surrendering troops, and control of the customs agency at the border, the group has dealt a significant blow to Afghan forces. Additionally, the Taliban has been targeting prisons to free its captives, and has been successful in some of its endeavors to do so. The disturbing and increasing level of violence used by the Taliban against them has also forced Afghan refugees and soldiers to flee across the country's border. These latest developments have escalated the urgency for much-needed peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, with ongoing efforts being made to revitalize them.

The conflict in Afghanistan has been taking place for over two decades. The original Taliban government was fostering Al-Qaeda and both groups were labeled as terrorist organizations in 1999 by the United Nations. Following 9/11, the United States began its war on terrorism in the region and its hunt for Osama Bin Laden, deploying American troops with the support of other NATO members. This led to the collapse of the Taliban regime and the creation of an interim government. Eventually, the government established a constitution but was accused on multiple occasions of fraud and corruption. The Taliban then started to resurge, and even though Osama Bin Laden had been assassinated, the international community remained to fight the remnants of the Taliban with the support of the Afghan government.

The decision to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan has split Americans on what they believe is the proper course of action. The first side, made up of the majority of Americans, believes that ending the "forever war" brings many benefits with limited drawbacks. President Biden defended his troop withdrawal plan by emphasizing that Afghan troops are better trained and equipped than the Taliban. Additionally, he expressed that the U.S. can continue to support the Afghan government without a direct military presence in the country. Furthermore, the idea behind this position is that Afghanistan should determine its own future, especially since no foreign armed involvement – no matter how large – will completely eradicate the Taliban. Lastly, there is a belief that prolonged U.S. engagement has an incendiary effect on the conflict.

Some people on the other side of the argument claim that withdrawing American forces will enable a Taliban takeover and create a power vacuum for terrorist organizations to fill. According to this school of thought, if the U.S. and other foreign troops leave the country, there will be no major barrier stopping the Taliban from re-establishing its foothold. However, most analysts point out that the benefits from a full American withdrawal outweigh the risks involved, particularly since the Afghan peace process is ultimately an internal matter that should be resolved by the actors within the country.